“A Body Past Compare”: Romeo and Juliet and the Language of Appearance

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Introduction

William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet has been performed all over the world for over 450 years, and yet it has never been easier for the audience to imagine the scenes of the play. The Porter (1964) lamented that the three thousand years between language referring to appearance and the theatrical context of the play led to the theatre not being able to adequately portray the language of the play. After examining previous research, the researcher determined the different themes of the language, discovering the dominant themes of Appearance, Deception, Beauty Ideals, and the Hidden or Transformative Body. The researcher then examined the literature on the role of the language of appearance in the play and the representation of beauty. An advancement from previous research is that the researcher and advisor discussed and identified three subordinate themes, namely Destruction, Beauty Ideals, and the Disappearing Body. Beauty Ideals focused on the beauty of Juliet, and the Disappearing Body focused on the transformation of the characters. This research was funded in part by the Stewart Research Award and the Iowa State University Foundation.

Methods and Procedures

This research was supported by the Iowa State University Foundation.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to:

- Evaluate use of appearance-based language in Romeo and Juliet
- Draw conclusions from the narrative analysis that reflect the themes of the play
- Design and construct costumes for the primary characters of Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio to visually interpret appearance themes

Background

William Shakespeare was a playwright who lived in England from approximately 1564-1616 (Ackroyd, 2005). Little is known about his childhood, though it is assumed that he went to grammar school and learned Latin and composition (Davies, 1972). He is best known for his plays and sonnets, which many scholars believe were written by him. He is also known for his contributions to the English language, with many of his words and phrases being adopted into the English language. Shakespeare’s plays have been performed all over the world and continue to be studied and performed today.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This research topic was supported by New Criticalism and the third wave feminism. The researcher and advisor concluded that the plays of Romeo and Juliet provided an astounding amount of data. Study of the plays produced costumes for the primary characters of Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio. The researcher and advisor determined the different themes of the language, discovering the dominant themes of Appearance, Deception, Beauty Ideals, and the Hidden or Transformative Body. With 649 agreements and 84 disagreements, the reliability coefficient was 87%, acceptable according to Saldana (2015). Using two persons to extract appearance references increased the trustworthiness of the research project, opened the auditing process up to more discussion, and allowed more insight into the text.

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Findings

Romeo’s Costume

Romeo is the romantic hero of the play, and his costume is designed to convey his romantic nature. His doublet is flat patterned and lined with ivory polyester, with a red lining. His doublet is adorned with eyelets. The fabric of the doublet is smooth and flat, and it is designed to be simple and elegant. Romeo’s costume is a reflection of his personality, and it helps to convey his romantic nature.

Juliet’s Costume

Juliet is the young woman in the play, and her costume is designed to convey her youthful beauty. Her costume is made of a light fabric, which is designed to be delicate and feminine. Juliet’s costume is a reflection of her youth, and it helps to convey her romantic nature.

Mercutio’s Costume

Mercutio is a complex character, and his costume is designed to convey his personality. His costume is made of a darker fabric, which is designed to be more serious and dramatic. Mercutio’s costume is a reflection of his personality, and it helps to convey his complex nature.

The research has used the standard set by Hillestad’s “The Underlying Structure of Appearance,” which defines appearance as being composed of the specific parts of body and dress. In the context of this model, the body includes body, body surfaces, body motions, and elements of body expression; while dress includes articles of clothing, articles of adornment, and articles of dress.

Step 1: Content Analysis

Wearing independently, data extraction of all appearance-related language was performed by the researcher and advisor, on expert in appearance art and design theory. Further references to appearance, as well as references to appearance that fit along Sparkline lines, were added to the appearance references. After content analysis, discussion, and inter-rater reliability coefficients were calculated on the basis of references agreed upon by both the researcher and the advisor. The formulas for calculating the reliability coefficient was:

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\text{reliability coefficient} = \frac{\text{agreements} \times \text{disagreements} \times \text{total}}{\text{agreements} \times \text{total}}
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Step 2: Literature and Narrativistic Analysis

After auditing and the calculation of reliability, the researcher and advisor met frequently to discuss the dominant themes that emerged from the coding process. The reliability analysis revealed three subordinate themes, namely destruction, beauty ideals, and the disappearing body. The researcher and advisor defined and developed the concept of the disappearing body, Beauty Ideals, and the Disappearing Body. Beauty Ideals focused on the beauty of Juliet, and the Disappearing Body focused on the transformation of the characters. The researcher chose to use digitally printed motifs of a plume of ink in black and white, and the Disappearing Body evoked the theme of montage.

Step 3: Comparative Analysis

Having audited the text and discussed thematic content, the researcher examined costume design for previous productions of Romeo and Juliet through a framework of the three subordinate themes. The researcher developed and designed costumes to fit each of these themes: Destruction, Beauty Ideals, and the Disappearing Body. The researcher then designed costumes for each of the primary characters, focusing on the specific parts of body and dress. The researcher then designed costumes for each of the secondary characters, focusing on the specific parts of body and dress.

Step 4: Costume Design Illustration

The researcher created costume designs for each of the primary characters, focusing on the specific parts of body and dress. The researcher then designed costumes for each of the secondary characters, focusing on the specific parts of body and dress.

Step 5: Costume Construction

Upon the completion of the initial sketches, the researcher and advisor collaborated with Mercutio and Romeo and Juliet for the presentation of Romeo and Juliet, experimenting with hand sewn apparel construction techniques and employing the technology of digital printing. To construct Romeo’s costume, the researcher created a sketch of the design, which was then translated into a pattern, with details printed using a Mimaki TX2-1600 digital printer.

References

References to appearance in Romeo and Juliet are abundant and diverse, providing an astounding amount of data for analysis. The researcher and advisor determined the different themes of the language, discovering the dominant themes of Appearance, Deception, Beauty Ideals, and the Hidden or Transformative Body. The researcher then examined the literature on the role of the language of appearance in the play and the representation of beauty. An advancement from previous research is that the researcher and advisor discussed and identified three subordinate themes, namely Destruction, Beauty Ideals, and the Disappearing Body. Beauty Ideals focused on the beauty of Juliet, and the Disappearing Body focused on the transformation of the characters. This research was funded in part by the Stewart Research Award and the Iowa State University Foundation.

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