Echolocation, figuration and tellings: rhetorical strategies in *Romeo and Juliet*

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Abstract

*Romeo and Juliet* has often been considered one of Shakespeare's most self-conscious explorations into language and how it signifies. This article explores what three specific rhetorical strategies imply about how language communicates. First, it looks at the logical power of figuration and how it breaks down language into ambivalence, ambiguity and double-meaning. Second, it introduces the term 'echolocation' to allow for a study of the way patterns of repetition of identical or similar sounds and words within different figures can convey argument, and follows the indications of crisis, balance and stasis in the language of the text, and third it examines tellings, retellings and foretellings, as they expose language attempting to determine and simultaneously destabilize significance. While the focus of the study is on the action of language, some consideration is made of the way that identity and language are open to analogous patterns of construction and limitation, and how the reader, audience and theatre practitioner may use those patterns in building a sense of character-part.

Keywords: character-part; communication; echolocation; figuration; foretelling; identity; narrative; retelling; rhetoric; 16th-century

This article engages with readings of the language of *Romeo and Juliet*, looking first at rhetorical figures, second at the process of echolocation, and then at how these contribute to the techniques of retelling and foretelling, to explore the rhetorical strategies and guidelines embedded in the text, and suggest what they imply about how language communicates.1 For the early modern period in England, education in grammar and rhetoric was essential for anyone who was to take part in public society (Grafton and Jardine, 1986; Hunter, 1999; Murphy, 1981). If grammar lays down a set of guidelines for how language makes sense, rhetoric takes language out into the social world and treats every communication in language as a negotiation or persuasion between two or more people. In tune with much language theory today, but not with the mainstream attempts from the late 17th century to the 20th to fix relations between words and things, renaissance rhetoric understood that communication is social: the same words will have different significance in different places at different times (Lever, 1573).

On the other hand, there were clearly kinds of communication that most people recognized as having particular, even if not fixed, meaning. For example, genre: in rhetoric, genres are large-scale ways of announcing a specific set of meanings that you want your audience to pick up on without too much explanation (Hunter, 1989). In contrast, the much smaller structures of the figures of rhetoric...
Rememb’ring how I love thy company’ (2.2.172–3), the prisoner at liberty (2.2.179–81), to kill ‘with much cherishing’ (2.2.183), and a ‘parting’ that is ‘such sweet sorrow’ (2.2.184). The rhetorical figure she is using is a synecocosis which brings together and unites different things. Synecocosis is close to but distinct from oxymoron, which juxtaposes disparate elements and foregrounds their difference through their proximity. As I suggest immediately below, Romeo’s dialogue in the early scenes of the play is replete with examples of oxymorons such as ‘Feather of lead’ (1.1.178) that bring a sense of crisis and paradoxical stasis to the work of building character-parts. In contrast, Juliet’s synecocosis is a figure of healing or welding that succeeds in bringing elements together in appropriate contexts. Synecocosis does not let the significance of a word determine how it can be used in a figure, but changes the significance of words by bringing them together.

1.2 The missing term: oxymoron and paradox, or solvable and irresolvable contradiction

The opening discussion between Montague Father and Benvolio introduces Romeo as someone who ‘is to himself, I will not say how true./ But to himself so secret and so close...’. As is the bud bit with an envious worm’ (1.1.146–9) and Romeo’s conversation with Benvolio is constructed by figures that underline this observation. Figures of rhetoric, as Jeanne Fahnestock argues, have enormous persuasive power because they play on social and cultural assumptions and expectations about what makes a valid argument. Oxymorons are an extreme case of the antithesis in which contested words are placed in parallel or balanced positions, and which reinforce or shift or oppose the cultural assumptions about those positions. In 16th-century rhetoric they are closely associated with the condition of ‘being in love’ (I.B. 1616: 84). When Romeo speaks of ‘brawling love’ or ‘loving hate’ he brings together words which today, and possibly in the 16th-century, are irreconcilably different. Yet these are followed by pairs of words such as ‘bright smoke’, ‘cold fire’, ‘sick health’ (1.1.178) which, while contrasting can be read through the theory of the honours, as medical descriptions of illness and imbalance. Each combination, though, implies an unseen, unspoken link or hinge: a missing term that would locate and dissolve the paradox constructed by linking such disparate pairs. Even when Romeo unfurls these antitheses into another rhetorical device, the antitrochabole, there is still a sense of the missing term, a missing rationale or logic for why the disparate words are linked together in the first place. He appears to recognize this in the lines that follow his display: ‘Tut I have lost my self, I am not here./ This is not Romeo, he’s some other where’ (1.1.195–6).

Antitrochabole, and the lesser structure of chiasmus, reverse the positions of a pair of words so that one position changes the significance of the other. The reversal often makes causal claims, explanatory moves such as Capulet Father’s ‘Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she./ She’s the hopeful lady of my earth’ (1.2. 14–15), so that ‘she’, or Juliet, goes from being his last surviving child to being the symbol of his hope because she is his surviving child. However, in the first scene, Romeo’s development of his oxymorons into chiasmus is enigmatic – ‘heavy lightness’ (1.1.176) and ‘Feather of lead’ (1.1.178) become an oppressive stand-off between his own ‘grief’ and Benvolio’s ‘love’ for him (1.1.180–3); ‘bright smoke, cold fire’ (1.1.178) becomes the simultaneous possibility of ‘sparkling eyes and ‘loving tears’ (1.1.189–90) – all of which collapse again into the antithesis ‘A choking gall and a preserving sweet’ (1.1.192). Unlike the unifying effect of Juliet’s devices, which convey a confidence in her ability to control her world, Romeo’s speech is shot through by the crisis of the enigmatic missing term.

Another figure that dominates this early part of the play is retained well into the later scenes is the repetition of the same word, or the same sound within a word. Repetition of the same word, or place, can have the persuasive power of reinforcing similar elements, but it can also point to differences. Henry Peacham (1577) called the former traductio and the latter diaphora, and other poetic and rhetorical handbooks of the period have many other names. Peacham was probably thinking of the former when he called place ‘an apt ornament for meditation’ (Sonnino, 1968: 64). Today we tend to group most of the latter, which focus on difference, under the term ‘pun’. Friar Lawrence’s verse is marked by the use of traductio, emphasising sameness, from ‘Many for many’ (2.3.9), ‘with that part, cheers each part’ (2.3.21), and ‘Riddling confession finds but riddling shift’ (2.3.52), to the elaborate constructions in his healing counsel that persuades Romeo not to commit suicide. There he uses place around repetitions of ‘birth’, ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ (3.3.119–20), ‘thy shape, thy love, thy wit’ (3.3.122, 125, 130), and ‘There art thou happy’ (3.3.137, 138, 140).

But Romeo’s use of place is far removed from the certainty suggested by Friar Lawrence’s use of the figure. He and his friends repeat words only to unite them from one meaning and release them into another: for example, the initial exchange between Benvolio and Romeo that plays with the word ‘hit’ (1.1.205–6), shifting it from passive verb to noun, to a contradictory ‘she’ll not be hit’ controlling the passive verb. All the young men communicate through various elaborate puns (diaphora or antanaclasis) in 1.4 playing with ‘soul / sole’ (1.4.13), ‘bound (tied) / bound (leap)’ (1.4.18–19), ‘pricks (scratches) / pricks (has intercourse with)’ (1.4.24–6), ‘done (finished) / [dunning] (a beating) / dun (brown)’ (1.4.37–9); and in 2.4 elaborating this play into a ‘wild goose chase’ of sexual innuendo (2.4.70–5) (Hunter and Lichtenfels, 2005). They release the constraints of their lives, their foreboding dreams, by releasing words and sounds from singular meanings, as if they are playing away paradox through pun, constructing their own society and controlling their lives by keeping them in flux.
(Vickers, 1988) are concerned with the way the meanings of sounds and words can shift. They include tropes such as metaphor and simile that depend on conventional associations between word and thing that they disrupt, and figures of thought such as paradox and apostrophe that adopt a gesture or stance. The figures of speech, or schemes, are far more context-dependent, and are concerned with the ways the order of sounds or words changes the meaning. They include, for example, repetition of words at the start of each line, and the repetition of ideas in inverted order. If genres have large-scale social meanings, figures have recognized logical power. For example, a much used scheme in Romeo and Juliet is ‘place’, one word repeated in a number of different contexts. The effect, as I shall argue below, is to imply that all the different contexts in which it occurs are linked in some way (Fahnestock, 1999), but because the figures are much more contained and manipulable, operating on a much smaller scale, and with subtler effects, they are potentially more radical than genre in changing conventional communication.

‘Echolocation’ is a term I introduce here to delineate the way that the patterns of repetition of identical or similar sounds and words within different figures can convey argument. If figures have logical power, echolocation has argumentative power that provides a spine for the significance of retelling, foretelling and embedded narrations with which Romeo and Juliet is replete. Many texts use this kind of internal repetition, but in Romeo and Juliet they are part of a larger textual strategy that is also located in the foretellings and retellings of the plot implicit in the dialogue, and the explicit forenarrations and renarrations of the story (Hunter and Lichtenfels, 2005). Critical readers have focused on the larger structures of narration and renarration, but these acquire their power partly because of the layers of retelling, echolocation and figuration in which they are embedded. This article moves through the text from detailed study of figuration, echolocation and telling to investigate just one embedded narration in the play, that of religion, to explore the ways in which figures and echlocations make possible particular readings that may otherwise elude us.

1 Figuration

1.1 Insisting on the situated: synoeciosis, or bringing together and uniting different things

There are a number of rhetorical devices that the text introduces to guide the 16th-century actor, audience and reader to ways of working with the text. One of its primary commentaries is on the flexibility and limitations of how people can make language mean (Belsey, 1993; Derrida, 1992), and Juliet’s radical confidence in language is displayed in her use of synoeciosis, which welds together apparently disparate words. Before she knows he is present below her window, Juliet’s call to an unseen Romeo early in the play questions the relation between the person and the name. She says, in Q2:

‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What’s Montague? It is not hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O be some other name! What’s in a name? 

Romeo, doff thy name
And for thy name, which is no part of thee, Take all myself. (2.2.38–49)

Fundamentally undermining the social agreements we make in order to recognize the connection between object and word, and those between the physical body and the subjectivities that constrain the way we represent ourselves in the larger social world. Given the power of the father, as head of the family, to define and mediate the requirements of society, it is significant that she also says ‘Deny thy father and refuse thy name’ (2.2.34), for Romeo will again ‘deny’ the stars that attempt to control his fate at 5.1.24. At this juncture, Romeo replies ‘Henceforth I never will be Romeo’ (2.2.51), and proceeds to reject this name, even in its written form (2.2.57).

The following 78 lines (2.2.58–135) are in effect a negotiation over different kinds of identity, with Romeo asking Juliet to define a position for him as if he would realize one of her fantasies, and Juliet trying to insist that identity can exist outside of social convention but only if it is reciprocal to someone else. It is this ‘part’ of Romeo, the part that is not an isolated subject, the part not caught into the feud defined by the social aggression of their families, but also the part not allowing itself to simply regurgitate the platitudes of Petrarchan love and classical references (2.2.107–8) that delineate conventional interpersonal relationships (wooing), which Juliet’s speeches address. A number of critics have noted that Juliet’s dialogue in this scene, especially in these 78 lines, is practical, down to earth, and in stark contrast to Romeo’s platitudes (Bamber, 1982; Whittier, 1989: 33). What it also demonstrates is her confidence in working with words, particularly her confidence in making words mean what she wants them to mean. The use of the word ‘part’ underlines the linguistic play, since ‘parting’ connotes ‘parsing’, and is used elsewhere in the play to make comments on the effectiveness (or not) of certain speeches (see 1.1.113 where Benvolio appears to sarcastically refer to the way the Prince tried to control the street brawl with his speech, ‘parting either part’). Later in the scene, thinking herself once more on her own (2.2.58–63), the character-part6 of Juliet is given verse that reads like lyric. At this period in history, at the moment of emergence of the modern subject as an isolated individual, lyric is not the essentialist self-confirming/doubting genre it was to become, but an experimental mode investigating the parameters and limits of self-perception. Juliet’s verse is particularly filled with poetic devices that invite seemingly disparate elements: ‘I shall forget to have thee still stand there/
1.3 Losing and finding the missing term: paradox, lyric and the enthymeme, or saying things that have not been said before

Once Juliet and Romeo are married, Romeo’s character stabilizes. At 3.1.64 Romeo says to Tybalt ‘I see thou knowest me not’ with a confidence that may first be noted in his self-witnessing statement to the Nurse ‘I protest unto thee’ (2.4.161–2), ‘protest’ here claiming the significance of ‘declare’, ‘swear’ or ‘vow’ which only attains effective power if the person ‘protesting’ has a sense of self. This stabilization could be linked to his entrance into subjectivity through marriage, that ultimate sign of heterosexual patriarchy. On the other hand, it could also be linked to his recognition of the reciprocal self that is negotiated out of his heteroerotic relationship with Juliet. Once upon a time literary critics would have called these ‘public selves’ and ‘true selves’ in an unembarrassed terminology, but today, recognizing the social pressures and historical constraints on the way people interact, one might want to distinguish between ideologically determined and discursively oppositional concepts of identity. I would want to go further and suggest that in the notion of reciprocity, which is radically extended by the sexual ambiguity of the way the character-parts are written, the relationship between Juliet and Romeo may be cast as excluded not only by ideology but also by discourse, and existing only as it is materialized in a situated location. The stability affects Romeo from the moment he is married. Even during his despair at being banished Romeo knows he can no longer simply reject his ‘name’ as he earlier tries to do (2.4.117–20), and he accuses it of killing Juliet just as ‘that name’s cursed hand / Murdered her kinsman’ (3.3.104–5), and it is worth noting that after the consummation of the marriage in 3.5, Romeo rarely uses the figures of paradox and contradiction. His responses to Juliet as he gets ready to leave are playful but with ironic negatives (3.5.19–25), and irony counts not on missing terms but on recognized common grounds. Romeo’s parting words match Juliet’s in 2.2 for pragmatism, although he never achieves her confident use of synecocosis.

A similar kind of progress to stability occurs in the characterization of Juliet, but only after a radical dissociation of self that occurs when she is told, as she thinks, that Romeo is dead. The prothalamium at 3.2.1–31 matches the language of the young men for controlled wordplay and paradox, but once she fears Romeo may be dead, her punning dissolves into a reckless and increasingly arbitrary set of links among ‘I’, ‘Ay’ and ‘eye’ (3.2.46–51) revolving around the phrase ‘I am not I’ (3.2.49). In poetic terms this iteration, repeating a sound but with homophonically play, is a skill demonstrated by Juliet on the point of marriage when she says, ‘I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth’ (2.6.34). But in 3.2 the sounds disperse through I–ey–eye, ‘I’ being the typographic letter that was used for the ‘J’ in Juliet during the 16th-century printings of the text, into a confusion that also underlines the complete disintegration of the neoplatonic dependence on the ‘eye’ that infuses this text. The basic figure operating in this passage is the iteration of a sound that drives through the passage, moving us on and on. After

three repetitions we do not know where the sound will end, nor whether there will be an ending, or if some kind of crisis will force an ending. The repetition can be semantically boring, but the fact that the sound signifies three different meanings, ‘I’, ‘Ay’ and ‘eye’, brings other kinds of rhetorical figures into play.

The balance of ‘I’ and ‘I’ at the start and the end of line 49 (epanalepsis) can render the rhythm enclosing, as if finding the same sound at the end of the line as at the start signifies some kind of completion, but the fact that it is also a pun (antanaclasis) destabilizes the sense of an ending. The tendency may be to close off the line, but if we realize that the device is both closing and explosive it can release us into the next line. The passage moves from ‘Ay’ to ‘I’ to ‘eye’, and then into repetitions of each: ‘I am not I’, ‘eyes’ and lines 49–50 both ending in ‘ay’. A reader or actor may well conventionally stick with the punning on different words that sound the same impelling us on through the speech. But being alert to the structure of ‘I am not I’ (chiasmus) changes the rhythm and inverts the impelling energy back on itself, so that even sounds that mean the same thing in effect are not the same. In turn the potentially deadening end-rhyme of ‘ay’ in lines 49–50 (epitrope) is inflected by the crisis of the ‘I am not I’ reversal and we get alerted to the different significance of each ‘ay’, the first being abstract and the second material, which gives them a different kind of semantic weight.

The fact that ‘eyes’ are difficult to include in this crisis of similarity and difference could eliminate them from the final ‘ay’ in line 51, which semantically locates ‘I’ and ‘ay’ and does not seem to refer to ‘eye’ (see also McDonald, 2001: 116–17). The intensely constructed assonance in this speech produces the aural effect of keening: ‘ay ay ay ay ay’, as if the significance here is not semantic but coming from sounds the body makes in the absence of meaning. Following this speech (3.2.44–52), Juliet discovers that Romeo is not dead, but that he has killed her cousin Tybalt, and her language becomes filled with figures of paradox. She unites the link between prison and liberty (3.2.59), undoes her father’s hopeful earth (3.2.60) and slips into antithesis and oxymoron (3.2.74–86), coalescing into the absurdity of ‘dove-feathered raven, wolvish-ravining lamb’ (3.2.77), from which emerges a series of antitheses in crisis ending with, ‘O that deceit should dwell/ In such a gorgeous palace’ (3.2.85–6), completely reversing the earlier paean to ‘the mansion of a love’ (3.2.26) that she has bought and looks forward to possessing.

If Romeo’s ‘I have lost my self, I am not here’ (1.1.195) is transformed through his relationship with Juliet into greater self-awareness, Juliet’s trajectory is quite different. Possibly because of his age or possibly because he is a man, Romeo’s early confusion has resulted from his disaffection with the society around him and what it is requiring of him, but Juliet does not enter ‘society’ until after she is married to Romeo, when the fact of that marriage transforms her socially into an adult woman and wife. Once Romeo has found his ‘self’, his response to the subsequent events is to isolate it, both his attempt at suicide (3.3) and his later introspective logic being signs of an anarchic excess. Juliet, on the
other hand, is reduced to ‘I am not I’, a figure that defines her own subsequent development, as she proceeds to build the double worlds of a split personality whose defining image is her dead but alive body.

During the few lines in which Juliet makes up her mind to support Romeo (3.2.91–127), she once again wrests language into control but no longer with the ease of synecdoche. Her speech is a catalogue of devices that shift emphasis and significance. The first move uses the technique of polyptoton, in which the stem of a word moves through various grammatical and/or morphological forms, to reverse the Nurse’s curse ‘Shame come to Romeo’ (3.2.91), with ‘He was not born to shame [verb or noun] / Upon his brow shame [noun] is ashamed [modulated verb] to sit’ (3.2.92–3). Repetitions of various kinds control the significance of all that follows: the chiasmus ‘wherefore villain didst thou kill my cousin? / That villain cousin would have killed my husband’ (3.2.101–2) substitutes ‘husband’ for ‘villain’ and displaces ‘villain’ onto ‘villain cousin’. The rearrangement of the words retrieves justification for Romeo, just as the lines ‘My husband lives that Tybalt would have slain / And Tybalt’s dead that would have slain my husband’ (3.2.106–7) sound like an antimetabole, or at least a chiasmus, but are in fact a tautology arguing for the inevitable justice of Tybalt’s death. The speech proceeds by setting up ‘death’ and ‘banishment’ as equivalent terms, reinforcing this equivalence through repetition not only of the two terms but also of the inflected ending ‘ed’ rhyming internally with ‘dead’. Her logic then uses the equivalence to demonstrate the syllogism, ‘If death equals banishment, then banishment equals the death, of “father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet” (3.2.124)’. The figuration heralds Juliet’s turn to ambivalence, ambiguity and double-meaning.

1.4 Ambiguity, ambivalence and apparent paradox

During the dawn farewell scene between Juliet and Romeo, after the consummation of their marriage (3.5), Juliet’s nervous self-reference ‘I know it, I’ (3.5.12) and sudden switch from pleading with Romeo to stay (3.5.12–16) to imploring him to go (3.5.26–35) contrast with his calm almost self-mocking tone (3.5.17–25), but while they are together the verse is predominantly lyric. Once they are separated their rhetoric again takes separate paths: Juliet’s verse moves through double-meaning into paradox and, curiously, Romeo’s moves toward literalizing linguistic paradoxes from earlier in the play.

When Juliet’s mother enters her room and asks how she is (3.5.68), Juliet replies ‘Madam, I am not well’ (3.5.68), implying that she grieves for Tybalt but, as the audience and reader know, also meaning that she is distraught that Romeo has left. Lines 74–7 repeat the words ‘feel’, ‘loss’, ‘weep’ and ‘friend’, with Capulet Mother initially trying to draw Juliet out by using her vocabulary in ‘So shall you feel the loss but not the friend/ Which you weep for’ (3.5.75–6), and Juliet replying with the same semantic field, yet significantly reversing the order of the second pair with ‘Feeling so the loss/ I cannot choose but ever weep the friend’ (3.5.76–7), as if flexing her linguistic muscles for the double-speaking to come. Juliet moves away from metaphor which actively invites ambiguity about a conventional connection between word and thing, to syntactic and grammatical structures, or rhetorical schemes and figures of thought which need context to understand their ambiguity. For example, Juliet’s rearrangement of the words in 3.5.76–7 could be straightforwardly about Tybalt if the hearer lacks knowledge of her marriage to Romeo, but with that knowledge they produce a dramatic irony.

The syntax of Juliet’s speech illustrates her dilemma. Her responses to her mother are structured as continuously modified statements:

Capulet Mother: ... then I hope thou wilt be satisfied.
Juliet: Indeed I never shall be satisfied
With Romeo, till I behold him - dead -
Is my poor heart so for a kinsman vexed. (3.5.92–5)

The force of ‘shall’ in contrast to ‘wilt’ (3.5.92) could nearly give away Juliet’s ‘hidden’ meaning that she will ‘never get enough of Romeo’ and must be modified with ‘till I behold him’. This too could betray her, and is immediately followed by ‘dead’, which would satisfy Capulet Mother. Yet Juliet goes on without pause as if to cancel out the image of Romeo dead, into a line (3.5.95) of balanced ambivalence. The doubleness of meaning nearly, but not quite, gets out of control. The response ends with a sentence continuously extended as it wavers between the mother’s reading and Juliet’s:

... O how my heart aghors
To hear him named and cannot come to him
To wreak the love I bore my cousin Tybalt
Upon his body that has slaughtered him. (3.5.99–102)

Hence, the reader and audience hear both ‘O... named’ (Capulet Mother’s perspective) and ‘and... him’ (Juliet’s), both ‘To... cousin’ (Capulet Mother’s) and ‘Upon... body’ (Juliet’s), concluding in the fact common to both that Romeo has killed Tybalt but using Capulet Mother’s term ‘slaughtered’.

Juliet’s paradoxes are all easily resolved if the audience or reader takes her point of view or if they recall the story told in the opening prologue. When she says ‘Proud can I never be of what I hate/ But thankful even for hate that is meant love’ (3.5.147–8) her father calls it ‘chopped logic’, but the reader and audience have enough background to be able to understand that Juliet is allegorizing her position, using what renaissance poetics called a ‘dark allegory’ or enthymeme, based on a missing or impossible-to-articulate term. When her parents leave she restates her situation as a paradox even to herself: ‘My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven: / How shall that faith return again to earth /
Unless that husband send it me from heaven / By leaving earth? (3.5.206–9). The pattern of a syllogism is complete, but is made enigmatic by transferring the terms ‘faith’ and ‘husband’ between ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’. Yet this time it is the audience/reader alone that is aware from being told in the opening Chorus that the resolution to this paradox will occur in the ensuing narrative. The double-speaking exchange with Paris (4.1) when he attempts to woo her is a sequence of apparent paradox, which the audience, along with Juliet, can resolve. Everything she says is correct in terms of her (and our) knowledge, but signifies different and at times opposite meanings to Paris. For example, balancing Paris’ opening statement ‘Happily met, my lady and my wife’ (4.1.18), Juliet says ‘That may be sir, when I may be a wife’ (4.1.19) ostensibly meaning ‘I will be happily met because I am to be your wife’, but also intending ‘I would be happily met if I were to be your wife’ knowing that she cannot be; also embedded in the ambivalence is ‘I would be happily met if he were to recognize that I was already a wife’, and hence that he could not marry her. She even at one point tells him she is deceiving him. When she says ‘what I spake, I spake it to my face’ (4.1.34), she intends ‘I said it directly, openly, honestly to myself’ but also that she deceived him because she is not speaking directly to him but to herself.

The apparent paradox enacted in her speech of gothic fear (4.3.24–57), that Romeo is both her saviour and redeemer, as well as the cause of Tybalt’s death and possibly the cause of hers (by creating the situation in which she finds herself drinking a potion that might be poison), is immediately resolvable by an audience that knows from the Prologue to the play that she will indeed die along with Romeo. But it is the visual paradox of Juliet dead-but-alive that governs the argument of the latter part of the play. None of the other characters except the Friar knows that Juliet’s body is a paradox. Yet while the audience knows the paradox is resolvable, the fact that the audience knows that the characters are not seeing what the body is (drugged asleep, not dead) presents the paradox that representation is never adequate to material reality, and that death may not be as final as it looks.

It is Romeo’s inability to understand this that precipitates his suicide. In the latter part of the play he moves far from his earlier punning wordplay and flexibility, toward a persistent literalism. When he meets the Apothecary in Mantua, for example, he literalizes the Friar’s earlier antithetabole that makes poison into medicine (2.3.20) by turning the Apothecary’s poison to ‘cordial’ (5.1.85). Later, by literalizing the chiasmus by which the Friar makes parallel ‘tomb’ and ‘womb’ (2.3.5–6) in his address to the tomb as the “womb of death” (5.3.45), Romeo rids the states described of their implied balance and resolution which is the Christian God. This sense that Romeo has lost his ability to recognize the rhetorical use of words signifies that something has gone seriously wrong with his judgement, and his inability to read the returning colour in Juliet’s lips and face as a sign of her return to life, rather than a sign of her purity in death, is what tips him over to killing himself.

2 Echolocation: crisis, balance and stasis

Many of the words that control antithesis, antimetabole, oxymoron and paradox, and their breakdown into ambiguity, ambivalence and doublemeaning, iterate through the play in a process of ‘echolocation’: a series of reverberating sounds that both the reader and audience recognize like musical nodes that hold the text together yet construct resonance because the echoes are neither predictable nor exactly the same (Blake, 2002). Echolocation is a term introduced to rhetorical study in this article to provide a name for a strategy that both readers and theatre practitioners recognize: the way that sounds and clusters of sounds reverberate through a text producing patterns in which we often attempt to find significance or argument. Sometimes these sounds are whole words in themselves, such as ‘Ay’, or ‘ill/ well’, sometimes they are parts of words, such as the ‘o’ in ‘woe’, and sometimes they begin as words or parts of words but associate themselves by frequent proximity to other different words such as ‘move/ stand’ and ‘move/ grant’. Echolocation cuts across different types of language in a more general rhetorical strategy, but is related to the figures explored above by its tendency in this play to construct crisis, balance and stasis, not through thematics alone, but more emphatically through the complex patterns into which the sounds are arranged (Culpeper, 2001: 188ff., 199ff.).

The resonance of the repetition constructs the possibility for interpretation and argument. For example, the antithesis of ‘ill/ well’ is set up by Juliet to describe the contradiction of her feelings about Romeo as both murderer and husband (3.2.97–8). It is then reiterated by the Friar over her deathbed in an antithesis (4.5.75–6) that is resolved by one significance of the words: that ‘she is well’ is a phrase conventionally used for the dead (Dent, 1981: H 347). The words are echoed with a slight difference in sound, ‘ill’/‘will’, in the Friar’s concluding lines to the grieving family (4.5.94–7), and are repeated exactly at 5.1.16 by Romeo, ‘nothing can be ill if she be well’. This latter repetition, resonating with the double significance of the phrase ‘she be well’, constructs the paradox that this is both an antithesis and a literal description: Juliet may be well (in good health) or well (dead), inadvertently describing exactly her dead-but-alive condition but also becoming a premonition of her actual death. Just as, for example, the repetition of ‘Ay/ I/ eye’ that resonates through the play calling our attention to issues of lamentation and identity, and of ‘O’ that clusters in scenes to do with love and death emphasizing its links, and the repetition of ‘flower’ for Paris (1.3.79–90), Mercutio (2.4.57), Romeo (2.5.42) and Juliet (4.5.28 and 37) that reminds the audience of their common potential and of the loss marked by their deaths, these echolocations foreground both an invitation to interpretation and the sense of patterned inevitability the play announces by telling its entire story in the opening lines of the first Chorus.

The predominant echolocation, apart from ‘O’ and ‘Ay/ I/ eye’, is the dyad ‘come/ go’, and a few related dyads such as ‘move/ stand’ or ‘move/ stir’. The dyads work in different ways. Many are generated from the multiple meanings of
a word: hence ‘move’ and its connotations both of movement and of the ability to affect, to call forth emotion, are set into play in the opening scene by Gregory and Sampson’s hunter around ‘move/stand’ and ‘move/stir’ as antitheses. When the antithesis is opened up in wordplay it frequently shifts from unbalanced opposition to an antimetabole that implies change and possible action: when ‘move/stir’ is repeated in ‘He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not’ (2.1.15), it is already more than just an opposition. It has become an ambivalent comment on Romeo’s wavering sexuality that raises a series of questions about his relationship with Mercutio, with Rosaline and (as the reader and audience know) with Juliet. When ‘move’ or ‘stand’ acquire other dyads such as ‘move’/‘grant’ (1.5.104), ‘move’/‘moody’ (3.1.12–13), and ‘stand’/‘call back’ (2.2.170–1), ‘stand’/‘haste’ (2.3.89), ‘stand’/‘rise’ (3.3.90), they carry this developed potential for change rather than balance with them. Many other repeated words carry this semantic capacity for balance and/ or action: ‘wait’ (3.1.102–4) = to serve at table, to stay in one place; ‘measure’ (1.4.7–8) = quantity, movement in a dance, the action of measuring; ‘still’ (5.3.106) = ongoing, without movement; ‘attend’ (3.1.197) = to listen to, to be in the presence of; ‘spent’ (3.1.78) = spending or giving, (3.2.10) = finished, (3.2.131) = exhausted, and a near-homophone with ‘sped’ (3.1.92) = speed.

In contrast the dyad ‘come’/‘go’ resists resolution through semantics and frequently turns into oxymoron or carries larger paradoxical structures. Echoing Sampson’s move to both ‘stand’ and ‘stir’, Montague Father is ‘come’ but wants to ‘go’ when faced with the street brawl (1.1.75), possibly signifying frustration or indecision, but neither way a stasis rather than a balance. The dyad is repeated when Capulet Father invites Paris to his supper, an invitation that concludes ‘Come go with me’ (1.2.34) a shortening of ‘come along and go with me’ but in effect a bringing together of ‘come’, which although an imperative also conveys a request, and ‘go’, which conveys a command, the juxtaposition alerting the audience reader to Capulet Father’s ambivalent social status with regard to Paris, the Prince’s kinsman. Mercutio and Benvolio display a similar indecision about whether to wait for Romeo after the supper with Benvolio finally exhorting Mercutio to ‘Come’ (2.1.30), to which Mercutio ambivalently replies ‘Come, shall we go?’, which is resolved by Benvolio’s balancing ‘Go then’ in this shared penultimate line of the scene. In her prothalamium, Juliet six times invokes Night or Romeo to come, as if certain of where she herself is going. However, at the end of the scene she uses the same word when she states her desire to die if she cannot be with Romeo, saying ‘Come cords, come, Nurse I’ll to my wedding bed’ with an implied ‘go’ (3.2.137). Her resolution is then disrupted by the Nurse with another implied ‘go’ in ‘I’ll to him’ (3.2.142), offering the hope of a meeting.

The sense of confusion is attached to similar ecolocating pairs such as the Nurse’s description of Juliet’s accident and the sexual joke it occasions in ‘fall backward’/‘comest to’ (1.3.58), the Prince’s commands to Montague Father and Capulet Father to ‘go along’/‘come’ (1.1.97–8), the Officer’s command to

Benvolio after Romeo has killed Tybalt to ‘[come] up’/‘go’ (3.1.140), and Capulet Father’s confused ‘go’/‘come’ (4.5.125–7) when faced with a disobedient Juliet. The movement of ‘come/go’ is also elaborated into attempts to halt or overstay time, especially in the developing relationship between Juliet and Romeo. When hidden in the orchard Romeo wonders whether to ‘go forward’ or ‘turn back’, and the parting of the two young people is governed by their desire to delay in ‘stay’/‘come’ (2.2.138), ‘toward’/‘from’ (tied to together parted) (2.2.156–7), and ‘call back’/‘stand’ (2.2.170–1). More specifically, when they part in 3.5 Juliet says ‘stay yet, thou need’st not to be gone’ (3.5.16) to which Romeo replies, inverting the more usual order of ‘come/go’, ‘I have more care to stay than will to go./Come death and welcome!’ Juliet wills it so’ (3.5.23–4). At 3.1.120–1, just before his murder of Tybalt, the rhyming couplet ‘This day’s black fate on me doth doth depend: This but begins the woes of the world’ draws attention to a simultaneous beginning and ending of different elements in Romeo’s life. At the same time, it presents fate as never having a point of origin but always being situated within the ‘moe days’ of history. The stasis of fate and the movement of history shift the ‘come/go’ paradox into philosophical issues of time and determinism so the present hangs over the future, as it does earlier at 1.4.105–12 with ‘Some consequence yet hanging in the stars’ (105).

Yet it is the Friar whose use of the words provides ecolocations among the figural changes that are the most indicative of the argumentative and interpretive potential for balance and stasis, for action and crisis. When he asks or orders Romeo to ‘come go with me’ (2.3.85) he brings the opposing words together in a sense of balance indicating that his following actions may initially move in one direction but will end by returning, just as poison and medicine, virtue and vice, achieve a healing balance in his just-concluded soliloquy. In contrast, when he is about to marry the two he says ‘Come, come’ in a more straightforward signification of action (2.6.35), repeated later by Mercutio when he tries to taunt Benvolio into action (3.1.11). The Friar enforces the balance of ‘come/go’ with rather more effort in his narration of the plan to send Romeo to Mantua before he ‘called thee back’ (3.3.152), with more joy than he ‘went forth’ (3.3.154), concluding ‘Romeo is coming’ (3.3.158). Depending upon perspective, whether one believes Juliet is alive (Friar, audience/reader) or thinks her dead (other characters on stage), the Friar’s pronouncement over her dead-but-alive body ‘Come, is the bride ready to go to church?’ (4.5.33) is either a balance or a crisis. But there is no doubt about his frantic repetition of ‘come’ (5.3.151, 154, 156) in the final scene as he urges Juliet to leave the tomb. By this point, however, ‘come’ recalls ‘go’, and the audience or reader recognizes the Friar’s desperate attempt to sever the two words, to undo the balance-become-stasis, which his final ‘Come go, good Juliet’ (5.3.159) recognizes as impossible. Her response is simply to reinforce the recognition with ‘Go get thee hence’ (5.3.160).

Embedded in the crisis that ‘come/go’ becomes in the final act are Romeo’s echoes of the words. When he leaves the Apothecary, he says ‘Come cordial and not poison, go with me’ (5.1.85) in a possibly cruel and mocking reference to the
Friar’s balanced use of the opposition or possibly simply a tautology that maintains Romeo’s self-made world, and his invocation ‘Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide’ (5.3.116) not only resonates with Juliet’s invocation first to Night and then to Death (3.2, see above), but provides aecholocation of resonance and memory for the Friar’s urgent pleading with Juliet that is about to occur. Opposition may be resolved into antithesis (balance) or antimeatabole (action or change) but if it remains in oxymoronic stand-off it is either static or acquires the crisis of paradox. Similarly, if an established opposition loses one of its terms, the one left on its own, as for example ‘stand’ (5.3.225), appears in a crisis of stasis. In this context the statues that the fathers promise to erect to Juliet and Romeo acquire particular relevance, argue perhaps more than anything else, for stasis rather than change (Traub, 1995).

Echolocations, touched on only in part here and including words such as ‘care’, ‘cure’, ‘despair’, and ‘hope’, establish patterns of expectation that can become significant memories for everyone involved in the text – reader, audience, theatre practitioner – and generate a range of different responses. Although clustered around anti-thetical terms, they need not have anything to do with antithesis or opposing words. Many in the play are there to alert us to the ambiguity and multivallency of language and rhetoric. When we recognize or register the differences and similarities between echoed occurrences of a word or phrase, we are inevitably lured into interpretation and argument specific to our own contexts. Why, for example, does Juliet repeat the Nurse’s word ‘honest’ (2.5.54 and 77) when she is finally given Romeo’s message? Why does the Friar echo Romeo’s ‘chide’ (2.3.81) when he awaits Juliet’s arrival for her wedding (2.6.2), in turn echoed by Romeo (3.3.162) and once again the Friar (4.1.74)? Why do the sounds of ‘villain’ saturate the fight scene (3.1.60, 63, 72, 95, 102, 126) and echo through Act 3 (3.2.80, 3.5.79–80)? What effect have the topical fields to do with the sun/ moon/ stars, with light and dark, with the sea/ adventure/ merchandise/ pilot/ bark, with animals/ spiders/ crickets/ gnats/ flies/ dogs/ cats/ serpents/ bears/ tigers, that resonate through the text? Literary critics are trained to think about thematic significance when faced with these questions. Echolocation alerts one to the somatic/semantic interaction and logical structure that are generated by the relationships between sound, repetition and memory.

3 Telling: determining and destabilizing

Echolocation also provides a set of argumentative structures that feed into the larger narrative tellings, foretelling and retellings that figure prominently in the play. Take for example the question: why does the text cross-reference so extensively between Romeo and Paris (2.4.109 and 3.5.46, 2.6.16, 4.1.16, 4.5.6 and 5.3.110) with near-exact parallels between Paris and the Page and Romeo and Balthazar in 5.3? At 5.3.1 and 26 each servant stands ‘aloof’; at 10–11 and 43–4 they each, respectively, have asides about their reluctance to leave the scene. Paris comes with flowers and sweet water, Romeo with mattock and wrenching iron; Paris will ‘strew’ the former (11 SD Q1), Romeo will ‘strew’ Balthazar’s limbs (5.3.36): thematically, Paris is Petrarchan, Romeo is gothic. The resonance of echolocation working through the scene can construct a sense of extremities in contradiction that are crying out for resolution. Two disparate generic positions are oxymoronically yoked together in a crisis that the reader and audience know from previous examples will resolve only through death, and in the short space of their meeting (5.3.56–73) Paris performs or tells Romeo’s narrative: he refuses the mercy of banishment, turns to die, and will lie with Juliet in death.

But retelling is also a way of reclaiming some of these words and phrases, either overtly or as a subtle undercurrent. The opening of 2.2 when Romeo speaks alone while looking up at Juliet’s window repeats many elements from Mercutio’s dialogue in 2.1, but within the context of an erotic, as if undoing Mercutio’s mockery of heterosexuality. Romeo begins by ‘conjuring’ Juliet (2.2.4–9) just as Mercutio had attempted to conjure him (2.1.7–16), but Romeo uses a negative sentence structure with ‘be not’ (2.2.7) and a language that overturns convention: ‘cast it off’ (2.2.9). Unlike Mercutio, Romeo is successful and Juliet appears. Romeo’s ‘O that she knew she were’ (2.2.11) directly repeats Mercutio’s ‘O [. . . ] that she were, O that she were’ (2.1.37); as does his ‘Ay me’ (2.2.25, 2.1.10), and his use of the classical references to Cupid and Venus (2.2.11–13) reclaims these images of love from Mercutio’s scorn (2.1.9–11). If Romeo may overtly attempt to recover a sincere attitude to the conventions of love he has overheard being mocked, Juliet’s line ‘If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully’ (2.2.94), echoes Mercutio’s ‘Cry but “Ay me”, pronounce but love and die’ (2.1.10) in a more subtle retelling. Just so, the Nurse a little later in the play, having returned from giving Romeo the message from Juliet and having suffered abuse from the young men, offers Juliet a blazon of Romeo’s body (2.5.39–40) that retells Mercutio’s blazon of Rosaline (2.1.17–20), reworking in a gentle manner his verbal violence. Her use in the same speech of ‘curtesy’ (2.5.40) recalls Mercutio’s and Romeo’s play on ‘curtesy’ (2.4.50ff.), linking her anxieties about Romeo with the intensity of his homosocial world.

Less overt retellings and foretelling, recognized by repetition of larger units of grammar, syntax, topic and genre, abound throughout the play. For example, when Romeo recounts his meeting with Juliet to the Friar he says ‘I have been feasting with mine enemy/ Where on a sudden one hath wounded me / That’s by me wounded’ (2.3.45–7). The lines are partly an elaboration of the image of Cupid shooting his bow into both Juliet and Romeo, but also retell the meeting in the more general context of the Capulet family as ‘mine enemy’. A Capulet has wounded him (Juliet wounding with love), but another Capulet is wounded by him (Tybalt, in anger that Romeo is there). This is not only a retelling but a foretelling of 3.1 in which Romeo tries to placate Tybalt. There he is wounded (insulted) by Tybalt who has been wounded by him (for he has married Juliet), and he will soon be wounded by Tybalt’s killing of Mercutio, and wound and kill
him in return. A similar foretelling occurs when Mercutio, describing people easy to anger, says ‘an there were two such, we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other’ (3.1.15–16), which neatly describes his fight with Tybalt, although the actual killing is a mistake or accident.

There are many more practical foretellings, such as the references to poison and knives, the instruments of the suicides (3.3.44, 4.1.62–3), and more intricate, for example the play on ‘ro’ in ‘Romeo’, ‘roe’, ‘Rosaline’ (2.4.36–7) that the Nurse coalesces with ‘rosemary’ (2.4.196), the emblem of marriage and of death (4.5.79, 4.5.91), and more subtle references such as the Nurse’s wish to see Juliet ‘married once’ (1.3.63) when she will later urge her to marry twice (3.5.223), and the more haunting statements that Juliet is ‘for earth too dear’ (1.5.46), that if Romeo ‘be married / My grave is like to be my wedding bed’ (1.5.133–4), that Juliet will ‘kill thee with much cherishing’ (2.2.183), among many others.

4 Narrative and the contexts for interpretation

4.1 Identity and religion

A number of elements in this rhetoric of crisis, balance, change and stasis, especially the possible resolutions for paradox, are embedded in a religious context familiar to the 16th century. The bible, and elements of Christianity, are interwoven into narrative throughout the text through the resonance of the figures, echolocations and tellings. The rhetoric of the Prince’s three appearances representing the law cast him first as an old testament God delivering judgement (1.1), then as a religious patriarch (3.1), and finally as the Good Shepherd (3.3.216–20). His speeches retell his position to form an argument about justice. Just so, Romeo and Juliet each develop the idea of sainthood from their somn-meeting (1.5.92–105) into the cluster of ‘baptism’ (2.2.50), satisfaction or atonement (2.2.125) and the passion of Christ (2.2.102–4).

Juliet’s lines at 3.2.74–86 focus on the snake, the temptation and the fall from Paradise, and in the next scene Romeo’s parallel and resonating speech (3.3.29–33) inverts Genesis 1:24–31 in which God makes man to ‘have dominon’ over every ‘creeping thing’, an inversion because Romeo is here cast out of Paradise leaving the women and animals behind. Romeo explicitly compares his banishment to being cast out from paradise (3.3.17–18), then strategically draws back from the divine (3.3.19–20) making Verona a parallel to the world and Juliet’s ‘mortal paradise’ (3.2.83). The paradox that the world’s exile is both exile from the body and of the body is resolvable only in death (Belsey, 1999: 77). The allegorical significance of Romeo’s fall to the ground (3.3.69) from which he later ‘rises’ (3.3.91) enacts the resurrection which saves human beings from damnation (Potter, 1993), and makes Romeo’s experience a human version of the divine. Similarly, Juliet’s paradox about ‘faith’ and ‘husband’ (3.5.206–9) is resolvable for her only in the idea of the resurrection:

that when Christ returns to earth human beings will be saved and may go to heaven. The structure of the terms here reinforces the association that casts Romeo as Christ. Romeo is not only her passion but her redeemer (4.3.32). If he causes her death, it will be to release it into life after death.

The Friar uses the consolation of life after death when he speaks to the mourning Capulet household (4.5.66–78). The logic of the section treats Juliet as if she has gone to heaven, literalizing the paradox she makes at 3.5.206–9, that she will have Romeo only if she dies. It also takes up another possibility and places her metaphorically in the position of someone who will be resurrected, like Christ, and in that resurrection be able to redeem the families’ strife, becoming a foretelling of what will happen in the play. Once more the audience knows that this will be literally, and not metaphorically as the Friar thinks, the case and in this sense the foretelling is a retelling. The question of belief in life after death is a central Christian reading for this play. Twice the tomb is referred to as a ‘sepulchre’, by the Friar (5.3.141) and Capulet Mother (5.3.206), the word used for Christ’s tomb in the Bishop’s Bible and probably with echolation resonance for an Elizabethan audience if not a modern-day audience still using the King James version. But in the Bible, when the tomb is opened, the body has gone. Here the bodies remain, leaving resurrection as uncertain as human spirituality.

Juliet’s return on her deathbed to the unity and completion of synoeiosis demonstrates a confidence in such resurrection when she tries to poison herself, saying ‘To make me die with a restorative’ (5.3.166). However, Romeo’s speech before he kills himself is far less confident. For Romeo, Death is a hellmouth gorging on the bodies of human beings (5.3.45–8), ‘the lean abhorred monster’ (104) forcing sexual attentions on the ‘paramour’ (5.3.105), a capitalist or financial monopoliser ‘engrossing’ or leaching one of substance (5.3.115).

Romeo’s ‘everlasting rest’ will be with Juliet among the ‘worms that are thy chambermaids’ (5.3.109). Having been cast as the bringer of death through the figure of ploe (1.5.131 death = bridegroom) (2.6.7 death = love devouring) (3.2.137–8), Romeo is named as Death by Capulet Father’s statement that ‘Death is my son-in-law’ (4.5.38), and names himself as a ‘dead man’ when he places Paris in the tomb (3.5.87). His very name contains the embedded ‘eo mor[s]’ or ‘I am death’ (among others, see Rotschild, 1997: chs 8–9), and the text resonates with the echolocation of ‘amour/mors’ in sycamour, gossamour, paramour (Parker, n.d.).

Yes, he must die in order to be with Juliet, but there is little hint of heaven or resurrection. Her faith in it and his disbelief could have made the play irrevocably tragic to a 16th-century audience, and it is only partly saved by Romeo’s dream that Juliet came and ‘found me dead – / (Strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think)’ (5.1.6–7) and breathed life into him so that he ‘revived and was an emperor’ (5.1.9) – both a retelling of Juliet’s state and a possible foretelling of a mutual resurrection. They temporarily claim paradise, but are then cast out, Romeo into literal exile and Juliet into her double world.
Aply, Juliet is the one with knowledge (3.2.106–8), and she grasps at the apple of death, or ‘a thing like death’ (4.1.74), which Romeo follows her into, thinking she is dead. Yet on his return to ‘paradise’ it has become a monster, a ‘mouth of outrage’ (5.3.216) that consumes them both. If ent hymene has a missing enigmatic term, here its aporia is death.

4.2 Discussion

The religious narrative into which both the paradox of language and its resolution are embedded acquires a good deal of its power from the kinds of figuration that are employed throughout the text. The paradox developed by the language of Juliet’s part can signify a radical ambiguity in her relations with the rest of society, yet her final synecdoche indicates a faith in language to heal rifts. In contrast, Romeo’s struggle to control language through oxymoron and antithesis points toward violent contradiction-in-tension that eventually gives way to extreme literalism. The logic of the figures constitutes a text whose language breaks down into ambivalence, ambiguity and double-meaning. Just so, the echolocation of ‘mors’ and the insistent place of ‘death’ that dogs the characterpart through the play coalesce possible significance around the religious narrative. They build an argument about balance, crisis and stasis, that calls not only on the religious elements but on sounds and words and phrases from the entire play and from socially important texts such as the Bible, and topics such as the figure of Christ, and the retellings and foretellings work by appearing to determine the text at the same time as destabilizing its significance by never being quite ‘what happens’, always providing slippage between the word and the world and the possibilities and improbabilities of resurrection.

It is as if Juliet’s apparent death takes playing with representation too far. The ‘false mourning’ scene at 4.5 is constructed to involve the audience in grief simultaneous with its knowledge that she is alive, and the ‘reality’ of that first death causes a breakdown in language’s flexibility and turns the part of Romeo to the literal. During his contemplation of her ‘dead’ body Romeo turns also to completely objectifying his own body. If the character-part began with an ambivalent sense of who Romeo was, which stabilized on meeting and marrying Juliet, the text allows us to understand that her death distances him from his body, reducing it to appendages that exist outside of him (5.3.99–100 and 117–18). But her death also stresses the need for meaning to be social, and significance to be negotiated. Crucially, Romeo did not receive the written message explaining what Juliet’s ‘dead’ body meant; and just as crucially he takes significance on himself, not paying attention to what her body and its rising colour tell him.

The text makes it possible for the reader/audience/theatre practitioner to understand that she and he have forgotten – or more likely because of their youth never knew – that not only significance but also identity are negotiated and social. Juliet’s attempt to construct her own separate world in the end destroys her, and by isolating himself completely Romeo destroys himself. If her dead body presents the paradox that representation is never adequate to material reality, it also suggests the resolution of that paradox: that we should never expect language to be ‘adequate’ to reality. The languages we use are human communication strategies that are as appropriate or limited as our use makes them. We have to work with them and through them and the moment we give up on that work, expect them to communicate without our participation, they necessarily fail.

Notes

1. For guides to rhetorical terms see Sommio (1968) and Wales (2000, 2001).
2. All line references are taken from Hunter and Lichtenfeld (2005).
3. ‘Character-part’ is a term introduced in the Arden 3 edition of Romeo and Juliet (2005) to distinguish between reductive approaches to character as type and the work that is done with the text by reader, audience and theatre practitioner in building an understanding of how characters work as parts in the whole of the play.
4. See for example Henry Woudhuysen’s list of repeated words at the back of his edition of Love’s Labours Lost (London: Thomson Publications, 1998), which is included because the editor has noted a series of sounds that imply significance and he wishes to make them available to readers as possible ways of thinking about significance.
5. For a particularly challenging reading of the interconnections between these words and the root ‘mór’, I would like to thank Patricia Parker for her unpublished article (n.d.) on ‘Mulberries’.

References

A cognitive rhetoric of poetry and Emily Dickinson

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Abstract

In this article, I examine three poems by Emily Dickinson. The poems are F372, ‘After great pain, a formal feeling comes’, F598, ‘The Brain — is wider than the Sky’, and F1381, ‘The Heart is the Capital of the Mind,’ from the Franklin edition. In particular, I study the figurative language in these poems, but rather than simply identify figures, I attempt to explain how they function persuasively in cognitive terms. This approach is meant to move rhetorical criticism beyond an exercise in figure identification and towards an exercise in the explanation of the persuasive function of figures. The emphasis on figures owes something to the prominence they play not only in Dickinson’s poetry but in all poetry. One implication of cognitive linguistic theories of figures is that they point towards what I envisage as a cognitive rhetoric of poetry. A cognitive rhetoric of poetry ought to be grounded in classical theories of rhetoric and poetics on the one hand, and in cognitive linguistic theories of figures on the other. Such scope would reveal continuity between the concerns of current critics and the concerns of classical rhetoricians. It would also place equal emphasis on the poet’s production of figurative language and the reader’s comprehensive processing of it. What Dickinson’s poems are meant to reveal, ultimately, is poetry’s profoundly rhetorical nature.

Keywords: analogies; blends; cognitive rhetoric; Dickinson, Emily; figures; similes

I Introduction

Although this special issue of Language and Literature may imply that criticism can move ‘beyond rhetoric’, that may be misleading, for critical and literary texts are themselves rhetorical. For example, while Phelan has recently discussed the importance of ‘approaching narrative as rhetoric’ (2004: 341; my italics), Lodge states in his preface to The Art of Fiction: ‘An alternative title for this book, if Wayne Booth hadn’t used it already, would be The Rhetoric of Fiction’ (1993: x). To explain why, Lodge admits he ‘always regarded fiction as an essentially rhetorical art’ (1993: x; my italics). The fact that The Rhetoric of Fiction (Booth, 1961) remains well known over four decades after its publication suggests that it is invaluable to think of literature as rhetoric. And yet, if it is invaluable, then why hasn’t someone followed in Booth’s footsteps by writing The Rhetoric of Poetry? Some may counter that Aristotle already wrote The Rhetoric of Poetry when he wrote his Poetics, yet Aristotle’s Rhetoric and the Poetics are often reprinted today as two distinct and apparently unrelated texts. This might be a signal to students that rhetoric and poetics should be kept apart, or that ‘the contrast’ of poetics to rhetoric (Altieri, 2004: 473) cannot be escaped.