

Introduction to Film Studies
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Lecture No. # 05
Plot in Cinema (contd...)
Conflict as a plot element

Good morning. So, we continue with our discussion of plot, and yesterday we had been talking about various levels of plot, we have also discussed a number of theoreticians related to the concept of plot. So, we will continue from there, and I would like to draw your attention to Rolla Bart, a very significant theorist, and his book. And Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives where and I quote Bart. Narrative may incorporate articulated languages is spoken or written, pictures, gestures; it is present in myth, legend, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, pantomime, painting cinema. The history of the narratives begins with the history of mankind.

Now, narrative may... This is what we have been talking from the beginning of this lecture on narrative and plot. Narrative could be verbal, written or visual. This is what Rolla Bart is trying to say pictures tell a story, gestures tell a story; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, short story - even clothes tell you a narrative. People research on those things as well, so there is no field where narrative is not present; everything tells a story. From there we will go on to seven kind of primary plots. What are?

So, we have already seen the theories of plot, definitions of plot, now let us look at various and we have also seen levels of plot. We have also seen what Gerard Genette talk about plot and time, order, frequency, duration; we have also seen the narrator, who is the narrator? The unreliable narrator, the reliable narrator, the homo-diegetic, hetro-diegetic and intra-diegetic, so three levels of narration and voice overs. Now, here we talk about seven primary plots, now you can look at these, some of the stills, we have Christopher Reeve, doing superman on us and the plot is not superman plot, but the kind of plot is Achilles. Now, why Achilles? Why superman also Achilles? The Achilles plot what here. He has a weak spot. And what speak what is weak spot is that?

(())

And in super man.

Krypton (()).

Krypton is a weak spot. So, all-powerful hero, indomitable, undefeatable , it also tells a story of overcoming all odds, but then protagonist has a weak spot. So, in Achilles it ends with the tragedy and in most super hero movies, you know we want to see them winning, so we do not have, but they do have a weak spot. Can you think of more examples from popular culture? The Achilles plot, can you think of more examples.

Perhaps, in spider-man how with Mary Jane Watson...

(())

He tries to stay away from her, because he feels that the super villains would use her against him, something (())...

That is the case even in batman, yeah perhaps, but not this yeah, here it is actually a physical weak point, so superman is a very good and very strong example.

Perhaps ironman, ironman could be seen as another good example. His heart is his weak point. We also have the Cinderella plot. You can think of the Julia Robert character in Pretty Woman and also Rocky Balboa, his narrative, so stories of transformation and transformation usually for the better; the underdog rises against all odds, just like Cinderella, this is called Cinderella plot. Again, these plots tell you rags to riches story and invariably have fairy tale ending. Can you give me more examples apart from Rocky and Pretty Woman, My Fair Lady; My Fair Lady is a Cinderella plot, anything else in recent times?

(())

My left foot by Daniel Day Lewis, an Irish film, for which he won the best Oscar award, again is the Cinderella story, rags to riches, the protagonist rising and making it big against all odds. We have the Jason plot, the Jason plot is about quest. See all these are classic narratives from which we take these names and apply to our film studies. So, our plots are readings of narratives. Jason plot means quest for a cause and this is something

that we have seen in Joseph Campbell's, the Hero with the Thousand Faces also. So, good examples would be Thelma and Lewy, all though it ends in a tragic way, both of them die at the end, but still it is a quest for something. So, they here they are on a quest for their identities.

Lord of the Rings, again a classic example. John waynes, The searchers, is another example where there is a quest. The hero is on a quest for something. It is a very ambiguous kind of a movie, whether he really wants what have been searching for or whether he wants to destroy it, but still there is the plot for, you know, a quest, there are plot tracing the hero quest and Robert Deniro in taxi driver, again tracing the or going back to Jason myth. So, I would suggest that you watch taxi driver, because this is the movie that we will be discussing quite frequently. What does he search for? Robert Deniro in taxi driver, what is he looking for? What is the quest in taxi driver? (())

A single man fighting or waging a war against the corrupt system, the immediate quest is to rescue a young girl caught in the web of prostitution played by Jodie Foster. The Faust myth, the Faustian plot, who was Faust? (()) Faust made, Doctor Fausters, a German legend; he made a plot with the devil in exchange for something, he will pledge his soul. After 24 years of so you have a complete control over my soul, you can do whatever you want to do with my soul and here we have example in Wall Street, where a young man all most pledges away his soul to... Watch this movie we will be talking about, so this is the story of temptation, a sinister kind of bargain and then protagonist faces are moral conflict; the Faustian plot.

In a lighter vein, The Devil wears Prada, is again you know, you give a one year of your life to me, which magazine is that? Run way magazine, Run way magazine and the editor as played by Meryl Streep, Ann Hathaway, the young rookie and you give me one year of your life almost like pledging away your soul and I will give you, you know the doors of heaven, doors of unlimited success would be open for you. Al Pacino, playing the actual devil in Devils Advocates to Keanu Reaves advocate, the lawyer. Rosemary's baby is another example of Faust myth.

Who is the director Srinath? Polanski, Watch the movie; it is a very ambiguous film, based on a novel by Ira Levin. So, you really are not sure that who is the Satan here? Who is the devil here? Whether it is the husband or the house, or may be husband

himself is one of the victims or representative of Satan, who knows, but a very strong example.

The Orpheus myth, now the myth of Orpheus myth tells us that Orpheus attempted to rescue his dead wife Eurydice, from the underworld. He took perilous journey to retrieve her and he gets her back, but on one condition that while on the way out, he should not look at her, but he cannot resist the temptation. He turns around, looks at her and loses her, forever. So, the Orpheus myth tells you about or the theme tells you about loss. Inception is the very good example of the Orpheus myth. Memento, again have elements of Orpheus myth. Watch Memento, we will be talking about the film quite often here.

Romeo and Juliet myth now need not necessarily end tragically, but boy meets girl, more here, is the very popular plot in many parts of the world, love is required. Therefore, we call it Romeo and Juliet, not because they end up tragically, but it is the story of the theme of requited love. It may or may not have a tragic or happy ending, I mean it could work both ways.

Sleepless in Seattle, boy meets girl and they end up together against all odds. So, that is happy ending. Titanic, of course, is the classic example of Romeo and Juliet plot. They take all the elements. From our own culture, I can think of Amir Khan's first film, Qayamat se Qayamat tak, it is a total, and they take the template of Romeo and Juliet and set it in contemporary times. Tristan and Isolde theme and that is also the title of a movie, I think, James Franco. Love defeated, the idea is the love is defeated and unrequited, usually ends in a tragic ending at least for one of the partners. So, you have James Caan misery where he plays a successful writer and is kept in captivity by an obsessed fan.

She would not let him go and is a horrifying tale and then Tristan and Isolde, theme in Fatal Attraction where Michael Douglas and Glen Close, dangerously attracted towards someone much married, Michael Douglas and then what happens; however, you must remember Romeo and Juliet depicts tragedy in pure and honest love, whereas the Irish legend delineates tragedy in guilty love. So, please do remember that these are two contrasting episodes and so these are the seven primary plots. Any questions you would like to or any observations here?

Does the movie Shakespeare in Love fall into this category? Which category? Tristan and Isolde because in the end... Love requited, but it is a tragic ending in the sense since she already has been pledged to marry of to other noble man. But already take in yes combines elements of Romeo and Juliet as well as Tristan and Isolde, not in out and out, but usually that is what is happening in contemporary times. They are not taking the classic template, but they are playing around with genre. So, one of these days, I am going to discuss film genres where the categories are very well maintained and then genre blending and genre bending. So, why is Shakespeare in love the way it is, because it is scripted by whom? Tom Stoppard, whose play Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoots' Hamlet, we have already discussed. Rosin Klent and Guildenstern are dead. So, Tom Stoppard is the dramatist who is very fond of playing around with Shakespeare, therefore, the kind of plot you get in Shakespeare love.

Well inception can be loosely categorized as the science fiction movie, do you not think so? It is a science fiction; it is the futuristic, dream within dream within dream. What is that? But then it can be categorized as myth you know the plot is also based on a draws on the Orpheus myth. So, you cannot just be dismissive of these plot categories, perhaps there is the blending of these categories, but they are there. So, the template is there, the screenwriter, the director, when they come, collaborate and what they do with the elements.

(()) Awards ghost, you remember Ghost, Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze, well I would call it requited love, lost love, Romeo and Juliet trajectory, so yes. Is Bildens Roman movies are Cinderella plot or story perceived? Which movie? Bildens Roman movies, are they all in Cinderella plot? Bildens Roman movies are all about coming of age.

So, Lord of their rings is the Jason myth; that is quest for something, the hero takes a physical journey, which is also his spiritual journey, ends of in learning certain life lessons. So, not, there you can say that this is a very good example of bildens Roma where hero actually learns about something and takes the journey, physical or spiritual to actually say that all these plot plots must fix buildings roma categories is stretching it too much. You tell me. I do not think it fits in any of these categories. In to any of these categories, well it could be a case of genre blending then.

The Jason plot, it can be the quest for something very intangible also, identity. Absolutely, then what I was thinking, therefore, we talked about Thelma and Louise. Thelma and Louise are not on a quest for some pot of gold or the mysterious ring, powerful potent symbol of any power or wealth. What are they on? What is their quest all about? Identity, one day they just feel they have had it enough with very weak men in their life. So, they do not want to put up with that anymore, so they take off.

(()) It could also be a spiritual.

So, we have to be very careful about it, the movie may not take you on a journey. So, it need not be a road movie, but it is the journey. Rain Man, what kind of a plot would be that? It is the road movie, it is a baddy movie, but is there are plot somewhere? Well you do not have a brother plot anywhere, but it could be perhaps the blending of certain genre. Rain Man, actually is the very good example of genre blending.

(()) It comes under that because how they go to Vegas and do all of that and that sort of, it is kind of underdog story as well, the Rain Man, if you want it to put it in one way.

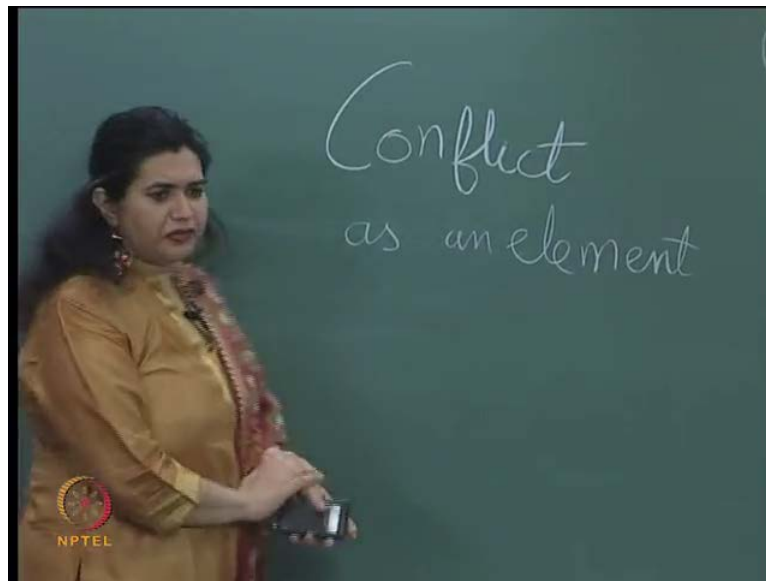
Rain Man, Yes, Jason Plot comes close to the plot of Rain Man.

Horror, Zombie and Survival does not come in to any other things. Horror and zombie... I gave you the example of Rosemary's baby which is the Faustian bargain. So, that is a very good example. Now, think of all these zombie movies. What is happening here? Is there a bargain? However understated, whether it is explicitly stated as in Rosemary's baby or implicitly there, perhaps it could be because all these horror movies, they take that template from legends of the Great Satan and then you think Satan, devil and Faust cannot be far away. So, perhaps it is goes back to.

(()) I said that there was the time in classic narrative could be understood along this term. So, these are the seven primary plots. Now, the trend is that that we defined the genre. So, when you start defined genre, unless you are looking at the very, out and out classically made movie, like Lord of the Rings, we do not have a classic plot. So, classic plot does not exist anymore, but what we are witnessing now is case of genre blending. Therefore, plots blend, the primary plots are also blending in some way and it has to whether we will have monotonous kinds of movie all around. (())

Well, seven is also loosely Jason plot, there is a quest. There is a quest for something, there are life lessons learned at the end about ourselves. What I would suggest is that you read narrative fiction by Rimmon Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, and Gerard Genette, we have been talking about Genette's *Narrative Discourse* from the beginning. So, those are the two classics that I would like to talk and I would like you to consider.

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From understanding various kinds of plots, now we move on to understanding conflict as an element of a plot; conflict as a plot element, conflict is defined as the element that really captures our interest. No conflict, no plot, no story. Every story needs to have some kind of a conflict, you can think about, because especially in our culture, Indian cinema, all narratives are full of conflict. Most of these conflicts are external conflict. We will think of or we will come to that.

So, conflict heightens the intensity of our experience, arouses emotions and challenges our minds. If there is no conflict there is no story. We will be looking at certain plot elements. Conflict is one element and characterization is another element, which we will be discussing in the next class.

Today, we will continue our plot discussion with reference to conflict. Conflict leads to complexity in plot. Even in a story, like in a fairytale, like Cinderella, you have an understated conflict between Cinderella and here step mother and sisters. To make a

narrative interesting, forces of conflict should be equal in strength and therefore, in all super hero movies, you find that the villain is as powerful, if not more as the villain. I mean Terminator is the very good example; Schwarzenegger's terminator, second terminator, the judgment day, is the very good example where the adversary is much stronger than the protector, the robot hero.

Conflicts can be physical, for example, in the western genre, gangster, and action movies. Conflict can also be psychological, for example, films of Ingmar Bergman where characters discuss larger issues and not just immediate conflicts, not just defeating their immediate adversaries. So, there are larger issues like what is life? What is death? What is the meaning of several existentialist issues? So, that is an internal conflict that is very European in concept, cinema of Fellini's eight and a half, if you have watched. How many of you have watched eight and half? Wonderful movie, yes Fellini's eight and a half is all about directors block.

You know you must have heard of writers' block, a writer one day he just realizes that he cannot write any more. In eight and half, our director, Fellini auto biographical shade, he just discovers that he cannot direct any more. He has no ideas. What to do? That is eight and half and that eight and half has been remade as the musical called Nine, Daniel Day Lewis is in this. It is a Rob Marshall movie, which we will be discussing in the class soon. So, I would suggest that you watch eight and half as well as nine, and then we will talk about remaking cinema.

Conflict, psychological and physical there can also be combination of the two as in John Wayne, The Searchers, then the conflict is as much physical as psychological. Seven is also very good example of both kinds of conflicts happening at the same time. What conflict is this? This is a still from The God Father, Brando and Al Pacino, and I am more interested in Al Pacino conflict Michael Corleone, for the most part of the film. What do you think? Is it psychological or physical? Psychological, his torn between his loyalties towards himself, towards what he actually is and towards his family, what they want him to become, therefore, the great performance.

Taxi driver, again Martin Scorsesse's Robert Deniro starring taxi driver has both kinds of conflicts or combination of both kinds of conflicts. (()) He is war veteran and he is unable to come to terms with the world around him. He is already on the verge of a break

down. It is not like the, the external factors just act as a catalyst in taxi driver, Travis Bickels.

There is a scene where he is looking at himself in the mirror, he has a long monolog. So, he is talking to himself. Internal conflict, it is not of very physical conflict with (()). He is the man, frustrated about so many things, and he feels almost impotent that he cannot tackle the issue head-on. He has to do something, so he goes on a killing rampage. He has several issues. If you watch the movie and I would suggest that you watch the movie at the earliest and then you will find how racist and sexist Travis Bickels character is.

There is a scene where he has the passenger in the back seat and the passenger rage and rants about his wife who has been unfaithful to him and that roll is played, a two minute cameo played by Martin Scorsese himself and you will find that how sexist in tone is that, the dialog, that exchange.

Even in the opening scene where he looks at the city and it is you know is the very expressionistic scene, green lights, green gases; that mean noxiousness, poison everything is there around, but do we find the green lights and green gases all around, not necessarily. Martin Scorsese is telling us that his mind is already vitiated. There is already something, something really rotten inside his mind and that forms expression in the form of those green lights. We have done expressionism at some point, in one of earlier classes. Expressionism is nothing but giving a physical color or physical setting to whatever is happening inside. It is inner turmoil is manifested in the external surroundings.

So, we watch those poison gases and green lights through Travis Bickels eyes, point of view shot, an extreme close up of Robert Deniros eyes at the beginning of the film. So, watch the film again and ask yourself why the movie begins with an extreme close up of Deniro eyes. Why? It is Scorsese telling us that he is taking you inside the mind of the man. Therefore, very important to understand, otherwise you want such shorts in franchise like Die Hard, extreme close up of Bruce Willis beautiful eyes. You will never find that happening why? The conflict is largely physical and external. So, you do not have to understand is mind at all, but here you have to understand that this is already a troubled man.

So, external conflict, where we have two equally strong opposing forces coming together like Batman and Bane, Dr Oc and Spider man. Let us assume that the hero is all powerful pitted against the weak villain. Do you think that the intensity of the conflict would remain the same? Give me some example from our own cinema where you have two equal, two equally strong forces coming together.

We need a strong villain, so that the hero can be projected appropriately. (()) very good example, whatever you may think of the movie, the quality of the film, Agneepath has a very strong villain, especially in the recent remake played by Sanjay Dutt in Kancha China Role. So, as physically a powerful or as in fact, he is like Bane. He reminds you of Bane, an utterly evil character. So, the hero has to muster all his energies, including his spiritual energy to fight, it is not just a physical conflict anymore.

External conflict can also happen again forces of authority. So, hero may not be physically very powerful, but he has that moral strength, like All the Presidents Men, Woodward and Bernstein, so they were not bashing of anyone. They can be against corrupt and oppressive regimes of work or conditions. (())

(())

But the hero has to match up; the hero has to match up to the adversary who may be physically stronger. For example, in Rocky movie, he has to train himself to such as extent and he goes to great lengths, I mean we remember Eyes of the Tiger. So, you know that he has to come and that is his story. Four hundred blows by Truffaut, Les quatre cents coups, where he tells you a story of juvenile adolescent and mostly his internal conflict. So, therefore, you find the child hero at the end, when he is send to a rehab, he looks at the world through this barbed wire, almost like a little animal captured behind these things. So, that is an internal conflict again, there is no external conflict in the movie.

On the water front is a combination of both external as well as internal, Elia Kazans, Marlin Brando. So, watch this movie if possible and then we will be discussing the film. Beyond the professional, is it not extremely professional, a combination, yes. One flew over the cuckoo's nest, the conflict is against the corrupt, the stifling system. Actually when the book was written, it was written as the response to be oppressive regime. So,

the hospital becomes a representative of particular system where people, where everyone is forced to conform and one hero comes along and rebels against the system.

All the president's men, external conflict largely against the corrupt regime, Robert Redford's 3 days of the condor, is the another example of one man pitted against forces of corruption, directed by Sydney Pollock. We have a film like Brave Heart, conflict is internal of course, psychological of course, but largely external, largely physical. In Gladiator, the hero has been pushed to the limit and then he rises and again I think it response to your question, physically he is no match for against his adversaries, I mean, we know what he goes through the entire course of the movie, but then still at the end he manages to salvage his honor.

So, it is the quest to salvage once honor. He has no desire to go on living happily ever after. All he wants is, those are the famous lines, father to dead son, husband to a murdered wife, and that is how he sees himself. External and physical conflict can apart from corrupt forces and corrupt regimes, can also be against forces of nature. One man against nature, so Cast Away, Tom Hanks, playing a modern day's Robinson Cruise, having conversation with Wilson, the foot ball. So, he does not have a man (()), he has the foot ball.

Conflict against forces of nature, The Curious Case of Benjamin Burton, he cannot fight, this is the malady his suffers from and he has to live with it. Again, Amithab Bachan's Paa is a example of conflict with the forces of nature. There are no villains there. Any comment, any observation at this point, can you think of more examples of conflict against nature?

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(()) Why do think that is? What happens there? He is trapped in a situation, (()). You get the answer in 127 hours. Maam, this is like more about internal conflict. No, he his trapped in a situation, which is you know a man is pitted against forces of nature, conflict is internal, because he has to make up very tuff decision, chopping of his hand in order to live on. That is the conflict, but then largely the conflict is again (()). He does not come to this situation having internal conflict, the internal conflict is the product of his conflict with the need, the forces of nature and extremely mighty forces of nature.

(()) Absolutely disaster movies, the other day, I was telling my son about a movie called, is the very unsuccessful movie and not really well known, movie of the 1980s, a Hindi film call The Burning Train. The Burning Train is a disaster movie where there is train, a super fast train built by our hero and the villain because he is so jealous plants a bomb in the train. So, happens that the breaks of the train fail and the train is just going on and on. It has all kinds of passengers, a priest, a prostitute, bunch of children, a variety you know to complete microcosm of universe. It is extremely melodramatic movie. Now, it is a very good example of disaster film, but that disaster is brought on by a man.

What about natural disasters like Independence Day or something like that? Independence Day is sci-fi. Contagion is a good example, the movie with Tommy Lee Jones, what was it called? Volcano, I think there was the movie called Volcano, forces of nature, yes, the day after tomorrow also.

Jurassic park also forces of nature, but then it is also Sci-fi. So, disaster brought on by civilization upon itself. In Hindi movie, Hindi cinema, we do not have so many great examples of disaster films. We have great examples of internal-external conflict, but if you look at cinemas, movies like Cast Away like and all, I cannot think of any example just like that. You can think of something in regional languages perhaps, other examples of disaster movies in from regional cinema. It is not a popular genre in our country.

(()) Is it an Indian movie? (()) Now we are talking about interior and psychological conflict, the characters are caught between two size of their personality. Again think of Robert Deniro in taxi driver. Conflict can also be about how the protagonist exorcises the demons within, and not just outside. Sometimes inner conflicts are resolved and sometimes it is stays unresolved. So, that is the problem with depicting psychological conflict.

(()) He sees only shoes, the state of the face is pretty bad, but what balance, against what force he has to make a decision? I mean he just sees one problem and he has to take up or he has to perhaps go in. The movie begins, the hero talking to himself and you hear it in a homodiegetic voice over narration, where he says that I am sick of this world. Now, taxi driver is written by, the screen play was written by Paul Schrader. Paul Schrader, who has been a constant collaborator with Martin Scorsese, he tells us that he derived the

plot of taxi driver from Dostoevsky's notes from underground, which also begins with the famous line, I am a very sick man.

The malady is not cancer or something more fatal, but the sickness of the mind. I hate human kind, I hate mankind, that is the idea and that is what you find in taxi driver, even at the opening of the film, he is already, because he has seen so much of destruction, so many disasters during the war, he is the war veteran, remember. It is also response to the Vietnam War; see all this new age Hollywood film makers, who are the three foremost filmmakers the new wave Hollywood? Coppola who made Apocalypse Now and The God Father, of course, you have Martin Scorsese who started his carrier not with Taxi Driver or even with Means Street, but goes back to who is that knocking at my door.

That was the new kind of films, cinema, we will talk about when we talk about some great selected directors. Then also Woody Allen; Woody Allen movies are also largely dealing with internal and psychological conflict. I mean, where is the conflict in Annie Hall if you have watched the movie? Nice people, both of them, meant to live together forever. In a romantic comedy, things would have ended up very differently for them, but here it ends very... And they have to part ways, because here the man cannot come to terms with his own inner eccentricities. So, in taxi driver also, there are plenty of inner eccentricities. Godard's existentialist hero, Jean-Paul Belmondo, playing his hero in Breathless, abudh the shuffle, morally ambiguous character, extremely existentialist in his the world view, Eternal Sun Shine of the Spotless Mind, conflict is largely internal or psychological.

I think of the Deer Hunter, which is the very good combination of both kinds of conflicts internal as well as external. How many of you have watch Deer Hunter? Please watch it, make it a point, use one of these days, sit down and watch couple of movie like Annie Hall, Apocalypse Now, The God Father, if you have not done so. Taxi driver, watch it again and deer hunter. These are the films we will be talking about very frequently in this course. Conflict, internal as well as external, do we agree? That is the situation in the dark night, that dark night rises and also batman begin. So, trilogy is more about internal as well as external conflict. I would say most of the time, especially in the dark night rises, the conflict is within himself, yeah with himself; however, you must remember Romeo and Juliet depicts tragedy in pure and honest love, where is the Irish legend

delineates tragedy in guilty love. So, please do remember that these are two contrasting episodes. So, thank you very much we will be meeting tomorrow. Thank you. .

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