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Romeo before Romeo: Notes on Shakespeare Source Study

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Palimpsests

After decades of critical suspicion about source studies, most famously triggered by Greenblatt's trenchant label ("the elephant's graveyard of literary history"[1]), new attention has increasingly been devoted to 'what a source is'[2] and to the circulation, transmission, transformation and function of Shakespeare's sources. Dennis Austin Britton and Melissa Walter have very recently argued in favour of "new models for bringing together what might be considered an 'old source study' and more

[1] Stephen Greenblatt, "Shakespeare and the Exorcists", in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, eds Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, New York-London, Methuen, 1985, pp. 163-86: 163.

[2] See Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, "What Is a Source? Or, How Shakespeare Read His Marlowe", *Shakespeare Survey*, 68 (2015), pp. 15-31. See also Laurie Maguire, ed., *How to Do Things with Shakespeare: New Approaches, New Essays*, Malden-Oxford-Victoria, Blackwell, 2008, especially Part I: "How to Do Things with Sources".

contemporary approaches to textual and cultural analysis"[3]. Acknowledging a variety of different perspectives that transcend linear transmission, the authors of this new collection include audience response and oral culture as crucial factors in the exploration of the transformative processes and transactions, eventually advocating a non-positivist stance with regard to "sources for which there is no evidence of textual transmission"[4].

All this calls into question the idea of intertextuality which appears, at least in its narrow meaning, insufficient to explain complex processes, often difficult to pin down. Not coincidentally, already in the early 1980s, Cesare Segre felt the need to distinguish that notion from both earlier ideas of source studies, by stressing its intrinsic dynamism, and what he called "interdiscursivity", i.e. the relation between a written or oral text and all the cultural discourses ordered ideologically as well as by register and textual level[5]. More recently, Robert S. Miola has acknowledged this distinction and offered a broad understanding of the concept by drawing seven categories divided into three typologies, including "the degree to which the trace of an earlier text is tagged by verbal echo", "audience recognition", and "the degree to which the appropriation is eristic"[6]. In turn, Janet Clare, among others, has stressed the need to locate more Shakespeare's writing within theatrical culture, "focussing on the exchange of theatrical energy"[7]. What the overall discussion suggests is a need to re-

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[3] Dennis Austin Britton and Melissa Walter, eds, *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study: Audiences, Authors, and Digital Technologies*, New York-London, Routledge, 2018, p. 1.

[4] Britton and Walter, p. 6. For a critical reappraisal, see John Drakakis, "Afterword", in the same volume.

[5] Cesare Segre, *Teatro e romanzo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1984, p. ix. See also chapter 7: "Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia", pp. 102-18, already published in Costanzo Di Girolamo and Ivano Paccagnella, eds, *La parola ritrovata. Fonti e analisi letteraria*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1982, pp. 15-28. Alessandro Serpieri *et al.*, *Nel laboratorio di Shakespeare: dalle fonti ai drammi*, Parma, Pratiche Editrice, 1988, 4 vols, remains an invaluable contribution to the analysis of linear transmission and transformation; see especially vol. I: *Il quadro teorico*.

[6] Robert S. Miola, "Seven Types of Intertextuality", in *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 13-25: 13.

[7] Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 1.

establish source study as relevant while questioning older assumptions. Problematizing linear criteria means viewing relations and knowledge of sources more dynamically[8], without leaving them "inert in the process of interpretation, dead bones uncovered in the living text but with few implications for its final shape"[9]; it also means considering, as Drakakis does, "the dilemma of Shakespeare's own 'reading' and our reading Shakespeare", that is, the question of whether "Shakespeare *read* in the way that we read"[10].

My concern in the following pages is not to assess this point with regard to Shakespeare, but to raise questions on how reading may affect linear transmission in its various stages of reception and reinterpretation of the Romeo and Juliet story before Shakespeare, and how, in turn, we read those stages. I will consider linearity as an inevitable paradigm in this case, rooted in the peculiar line of translations and adaptations of the story behind the play, and will regard it in terms of a dynamic and complex process embedded in the larger cultural context in which translation is grounded. Each stage will be viewed as a palimpsest of readings, stratified with successive processes of selection and inclusion of material derived from each immediate source, but also from other contemporary cultural models and influences, as well as interdiscursive material. While not entirely adhering to an idea of "amorphous" and "boundless heterogenous intertextuality", suggesting, as Drakakis notes, an "apparently free circulation of texts [that] resembles Greenblatt's circulation of social energy"[11], I agree with Lynch that

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8 See Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 30.

9 Catherine Belsey, "The Elephant's Graveyards Revisited: Shakespeare at Work in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*", *Shakespeare Survey*, 68 (2015), pp. 62-72: 64.

10 Drakakis, p. 322. In this respect, practices of *aemulatio*, or competitive imitation, should also be taken into account: see Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1982; Mariangela Tempera, "Shakespearean Outdoings: *Titus Andronicus* and Italian Renaissance Tragedy", in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theory: Anglo-Italian Transactions*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 75-88.

11 Drakakis, p. 322. My resistance to this idea is to the possibility it opens of indiscriminate and endless suggestions very much arguable on subjective and variable intuitions.

"the sources themselves can be reexamined as products of intertextuality – endlessly complex, mutilayered fields of interpretation that Shakespeare refashioned and reconfigured into alternative fields of interpretations"[12]. If, as Lynch remarks, this poses a contradiction, it is to reconcile authorial intentionality with the idea of "forces beyond authorial control"[13], a fact that may be true, in various degrees, for Shakespeare and for the authors of his more immediate sources alike.

According to Bullough, the main or perhaps the one source that Shakespeare followed, while also knowing William Painter's twenty-fifth novella in the second book of his *Palace of Pleasure* (1567), was Arthur Brooke's long poem in poulter's measure *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562)[14]. Kenneth Muir and Stuart Gillespie agree with him, although Muir suggests that "there are some slight indications that Shakespeare may have read besides Brooke, Painter, Da Porto, and Groto"[15]. And yet, the two evidences Muir brings about Groto are so tenuous that he himself dismisses them. Then he claims that "Romeo goes in disguise to the Cappelletti house in the hope of seeing a woman who has scorned him"[16], but in fact what Da Porto says is that Romeo goes to the feast to follow his woman – not a scornful one. Bullough also affirms that "Romeo goes, disguised as a nymph, to a Carnival ball at his enemies house in hope of seeing a lady who has scorned his love", and that "he soon abandons pursuit of his cruel fair one" – a

[12] Stephen Lynch, *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Select Sources and Plays*, Westport-London, Greenwood Press, 1998, p. 1.

[13] "Shakespeare certainly made deliberate and intentional choices: to begin with, he chose (or accepted) particular texts to rewrite and refashion the stage. Yet virtually all of Shakespeare's revisionary strategies were shaped and influenced by multiple forces beyond authorial control – not only the historical, political, and religious contexts of early modern England, but also the more particular forces that would bear upon a professional playwright, such as contemporary stage practices, generic decorum, audience expectations, the number and qualities of available actors, state censorship, and even the geographical locus and marginal cultural status of the theater itself" (Lynch, p. 2).

[14] Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, 8 vols, vol. I, p. 274.

[15] Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, London-New York, Routledge, 1977, p. 38.

[16] Muir, p. 38. For the discussion of Groto, see Muir, pp. 38-39.

detail which is never mentioned in Da Porto[17]. Is perhaps Da Porto being read through Shakespeare? In turn, Muir argues that "Shakespeare agrees with Boaistuau, and not with Bandello, Painter and Brooke, in making Romeo go to the Capulet's ball in the hope of meeting his cruel mistress"[18]. If the Da Porto detail mentioned above were correct, Shakespeare would also agree with him, or, better, only with him, since no other novella in the transmission of the story has Romeo follow his cruel mistress to the feast, Boaistuau's included. Except that his woman is not cruel, Da Porto's is the only case in which Romeo goes to the ball to follow her. It may also be recalled that Bullough further claims that "some of [Boaistuau's] variants are noteworthy since they were passed on to Shakespeare. Thus, whereas Bandello's hero went to the ball with the idea of distracting his mind from his cruel lady by taking part in social gaieties, the French Romeo goes in hope of seeing her"[19]. The French writer, however, follows Bandello closely here and has Romeo attend all the feasts in town "pensant par ce moyen esteindre les estincelles de ses anciennes flammes"[20]. In turn, Gillespie remarks that proof that Brooke would be Shakespeare's immediate source is that "some very specific incidents in the play (such as Juliet's asking the name of the masquers, with Romeo's coming last, I.v.126-36) are found exclusively in Brooke"[21]. But as a matter of fact, in both Bandello and Boaistuau, too, Romeo's name is the last to be revealed, a detail introduced precisely by Bandello, as, in Da Porto, Juliet already knows Romeo and, at the feast, calls him by his name. Apart from these plot details, there are also interpretative questions which bring more prominently to the table the problem of how we read what those writers read – and rewrote. Gillespie's agrees with Muir's interpretation of Brooke's Romeo as being engaged in "the sexual pursuit of a virtuous maid" before falling in love with Juliet; thus, Shakespeare's making it "the typical

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17 Bullough, p. 270.

18 Muir, p. 39.

19 Bullough, p. 273.

20 Pierre Boaistuau, "Histoire troisiesme, De deux amans, dont l'un mourut de venin, l'autre de tristesse", in *Histoires Tragiques*, ed. Richard A. Carr, Paris, Champion, 1977, pp. 63-119: 67.

21 Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sources*, London-New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 67.

romantic love of the sonneteers for a cruel beauty" produces "a more effective contrast with Romeo's love for Juliet"[22]. And yet, as will be seen, Brooke follows Boaistuau, who, in turn, follows Bandello, in depicting Romeo's despondency in ways clearly remindful of the disconsolate male lover of lyrical poetry, or, as Perocco notices, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, 5.9 ("Federigo degli Alberighi ama e non è amato e in cortesia spendendo si consuma"). Here is Bandello:

> Si trovava Romeo alora fieramente innamorato d'una gentildonna a la quale passavano circa dui anni che s'era dato in preda, ed ancor che tutto il dì ove ella a chiese od altrove andava, sempre la seguitasse, nondimeno ella d'un solo sguardo mai non gli era stata cortese. Avevale più e più volte scritto lettere, ed ambasciate mandato, ma troppa era la rigida durezza de la donna che non sofferiva di far un buon viso a l'appassionato giovine. Il che a lui era tanto grave e molesto a poter comportare che per l'estremo dolore che ne pativa, dopo l'essersi infinite volte lamentato, deliberò da Verona partirsi, e star fuori uno o dui anni, e con varii viaggi per l'Italia macerar questo suo sfrenato appetito. Vinto poi dal fervente amore che le portava, biasimava se stesso che in così folle pensiero fosse caduto e a modo veruno partirsi non sapeva. Tal hora tra sé diceva: "Non sia già vero che io costei più ami, poi che chiaramente a mille effetti conosco la servitù mia non l'esser cara. A che seguirla ovunque va, se il vagheggiarla nulla mi giova? Egli mi conviene non andar né a chiesa né a luogo ov'ella si sia, che forse non la veggendo, questo mio fuoco che dai suoi begli occhi l'esca e l'alimento prende, si scemerà à poco à poco". Ma che! tutti i suoi pensieri riuscivano vani, perciò che pareva, quanto più ella ritrosa si mostrava, e che ei meno di speranza aveva, che tanto più l'amor verso lei crescesse, e che quel dì che non la vedeva non potesse aver bene.[23]

Shakespeare accentuates this aspect, but the model is already there.

This short list of 'misreadings' is meant to introduce the topic of the present article, which will be concerned with some examples of

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[22] Gillespie, p. 68; Muir, p. 42.

[23] Matteo Bandello, "La sfortunata morte di dui infelicissimi amanti che l'uno di veleno e l'altro di dolore morirono. Con varii accidenti", in Daria Perocco, ed., *La prima Giulietta: Edizione critica e commentata delle novelle* Giulietta e Romeo *di Luigi Da Porto e di Matteo Maria Bandello*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017, pp. 83-125; pp. 87-88. On Boccaccio, see Bandello, p. 88, n. 37.

the processes of transformation of Romeo's masculinity in the novella tradition. A discussion of what Shakespeare made of it would constitute a chapter apart in the analysis of sources. Here it can only be recalled that one question criticism has often lingered on, at least since Coppélia Kahn's study of what coming of age meant in Verona[24], is the role gender has in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is perhaps not coincidental that, before contemporary critical attention to this issue increasingly underlined the construction – and subversion – of male and female identities in this play[25], difficulties in casting Romeo on stage were long lamented, inevitably raising a gender case. All the greatest English nineteenth-century actors apparently failed to offer convincing interpretations. Both Edmund Kean and, later, his son Charles were notorious examples of glaring flops, and, apparently, Macready, Phelps and Irving did not have better success, all of them being suited to less youthful tragic parts. In brief, "Romeo became a role actors sought to avoid"[26]. But while nearly all major male actors failed as Romeo, women proved to fit the part. One famous case is Ellen Tree, who, in 1829, at Covent Garden, played opposite Fanny Kemble, who described the play as the "only occasion on which I ever acted Juliet to a Romeo who looked the part"[27]. An even more famous instance is American actress Charlotte Cushman, who, on her 1845 tour, was an enormously successful Romeo opposite her sister Susan as Juliet in a performance which was perceived as passionately lesbian. Loehlin reports a few telling comments: "Miss

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24 Coppélia Kahn, "Coming of Age in Verona", *Modern Language Studies*, 8:1 (1977-1978), pp. 5-22.

25 On the complication of male sexual identity and homosocial bonds, with particular, yet not exclusive, regard to Mercutio, see Joseph A. Porter, *Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Dram*a, Chapel Hill-London, University of North Carolina Press, 1988; Jonathan Goldberg, "Romeo and Juliet Open Rs", in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg, Durham-London, Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 218-35; Robert Appelbaum, "'Standing to the Wall': The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48:3 (1997), pp. 251-72. On gender boundaries and their representation in early modern English theatre and culture, see Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

26 James N. Loehlin, "Introduction", in William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. James N. Loehlin, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 1-85: 22.

27 Loehlin, p. 27.

Cushman has suddenly placed a living, breathing, burning Italian upon boards where we have hitherto had an unfortunate and somewhat energetic Englishman" (one review); "Miss Cushman took the part of Romeo, and no one would ever have imagined she was a woman, her figure and her voice being so masculine, but her face was very plain" (Queen Victoria); "just *man* enough to be a *boy*!" (one witness)[28]. The case was made unequivocal in an article in *Britannia*: "It is open to question whether Romeo may not best be impersonated by a woman, for it is thus only that in actual representation can we view the passionate love of this play made real and palpable"[29].

Victorian ideas of masculinity aside, allusions to Romeo's own ambiguous manliness are frequent in the play, most clearly in III.i, when he blames Juliet's beauty for having made him "effeminate":

> This gentleman, the Prince's near ally,
> My very friend, hath got this mortal hurt
> In my behalf; my reputation stained
> With Tybalt's slander – Tybalt, that an hour
> Hath been my cousin. O sweet Juliet,
> Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
> And in my temper softened valour's steel! (III.i.111-17)[30]

As Bruce R. Smith remarks in his study of masculinity in Shakespeare, "To love a woman was, or so it could feel, to *become* a woman"[31], a point Romeo proves to be very anxious about, re-establishing male friendship and masculine vengeful aggressiveness as essential qualifiers of his own male identity. But when soon afterwards he bursts into tears and threatens to commit suicide because of the ban, that same virile identity vacillates and it is to the Friar to sanction his weakness as beastly womanish:

> Hold thy desperate hand!

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[28] Loehlin, pp. 29-31.

[29] Loehlin, p. 31.

[30] All quotations from the play refer to the third edition of the Arden series: William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weiss, London, Bloomsbury, 2012.

[31] Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 107.

> Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.
> Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote
> The unreasonable fury of a beast.
> Unseemly woman in a seeming man,
> And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both.
> Thou hast amazed me. (III.iii.107-13)

As Lynch remarks with regard to *As You Like It*, "Shakespeare does not merely undermine the Petrarchan and pastoral traditions of the romance, but also undermines and refutes the implicit gender structures of the source texts"[32]. My concern here is not to demonstrate the same with regard to *Romeo and Juliet*, but to offer textual comparison of selected passages of the novella tradition to lay the basis for further inquiry into a broader intertextual field and finally allow a new approach to Shakespeare. This can be done once the processes of transformation of that particular aspect in the novellas have been clarified as to how that transmission took place, whether variation was by regular focal shifts or by abrupt and radical innovation or unexpected restoration of previous variants, and what those options possibly imply. This will also clarify which gender structures informed the various novellas and how they were mutually related; in short, how Romeo appeared before 'Romeo' and what this may have suggested to Shakespeare.

As beautiful or more beautiful?

When we first hear Romeo speak at Capulet's feast in Shakespeare's play, we hear lines on Juliet. In a famous cascade of five couplets, he praises her splendour that "doth teach the torches to burn bright" (I.v.43) and describes her unique beauty as the precious ornament of the night, or as an incomparable snowy dove within a flock of crows, before voicing his wish to touch her hand. All we hear about him is that he is "a portly gentleman" (l. 65) and "a virtuous and well-governed youth" (l. 67): Capulet wants to restrain the aggressiveness of bilious Tybalt and gives him valid reasons, which the audience also hear. This is not the first time we encounter Romeo: he has already made his entrance in I.i and we

[32] Lynch, p. 2.

have seen him pose as the melancholy lover of the Petrarchan tradition. Now he is masked and Tybalt recognizes him by his voice, which tells us nothing about his appearance, except it underlines that he is wearing a visor.

Being narratives, it is no surprise that the novellas provide more information about his aspect and his general demeanour. Interestingly, the first novella in the narrative chain raises textual questions that have an effect upon Romeo's characterisation. Da Porto's text was first published in 1530, then reprinted in 1535 and finally published in 1539 in an edition generally considered spurious. Recently, two later manuscripts have also been discussed, but they follow the print editions[33]. The 1530 one contains a curious editorial variant, which was expunged from the 1539 one and apparently not replicated in the later manuscripts. In this passage, which describes Romeo's physical looks, his beauty is said to be like that of the women at the feast, but, before printing the word "agguagliava" (was like), the edition incongruously also prints the word "avanzava" (surpassed):

> Era costui *giovane e molto bellissimo*, *grande della persona*, *leggiadro e accostumato assai*: perché trattasi la maschera, come ogni altro facea, et in *habito di ninfa* trovandosi, non fu occhio che a rimirarlo non volgesse, sì per *la sua bellezza*, *che quella d'ogni donna {avanzava} che ivi fosse agguagliava*, come per meraviglia ch'in quella massimamente la notte fosse venuto, ma con più efficacia.[34]

Is Romeo as beautiful as the women or more beautiful? In her recent edition, Perocco chooses the variant "agguagliava", but, in a note, she adds this comment: "it is Carnival and Romeo is donning a whole costume (which also makes him change sex) and therefore

[33] One contained in a sixteenth-century in-quarto codex (but Perocco suggests seventeenth-century handwriting) kept in the Biblioteca Governativa dei Gerolamini (Napoli) and the other one in an in-folio codex kept in the Biblioteca Universitaria Estense (Modena), possibly donated to the library in the late eighteenth century. See Perocco, "Nota al testo", in *La prima Giulietta*, pp. 37-38.

[34] Luigi Da Porto, "Historia novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti, con la loro pietosa morte intervenuta già nella città di Verona nel tempo del Signor Bartolomeo della Scala", in Perocco, pp. 47-75: 50-51, my emphasis. My use of curly brackets reflects Perocco's choice to expunge "avanzava". The 1539 edition has "donna" in place of "ninfa".

he becomes more beautiful than all the women at the feast"[35]. If this remark is correct, as I believe, the obvious lexical choice would be "avanzava", not "agguagliava", even if this would contradict both the 1539 edition and the two later manuscripts. That this is likely the correct choice is suggested by the immediate follow-up of the story, when Giulietta finally addresses Romeo by expressing her amazement at his incomparable beauty, surpassing that of all women at the feast[36]:

> La donna doppo un breve sorriso schifando d'essere con lui veduta, o udita ragionare, ancora gli disse: "Io vi giuro, Romeo, per mia fé, che *non è qui donna, la quale come voi siete, agli occhi miei bella paia*". Alla quale il giovane già tutto di lei acceso rispose: "Qual io mi sia sarò alla vostra beltade, s'a quella non spiacerà, fedel servo".[37]

Bandello places the story within a different time-frame, which antedates the feast to sometime after Christmas. Accordingly, Romeo does not wear a female costume but a mask with no implication of cross-dressing and femaleness. Here Romeo is "di venti in ventun anni" and "forse il più bello e cortese di tutta la gioventù di Verona"[38]. Likewise, in Boaistuau, he is "aagé de vingt à vingt et un ans, le plus beau et mieux accomply gentilhomme qui fust en toute la jeunesse de Veronne"[39]; when he goes to the feast, the narrator qualifies him as a "jeune adolescent" endowed with a "naïfve beauté"[40]. Brooke introduces "Romeus" as one

> who was of race a Montague,
> Upon whose tender chin, as yet, no manlike beard there grew,

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35 Perocco, p. 50, n. 19, my translation.

36 Robert Henke confirms this reading while not pursuing the topic further: "the women are overcome by his dazzling, hermaphroditic beauty, said to surpass that of any other woman in attendance (a thought later seconded by Giulietta when she first encounters him)" (Robert Henke, "Public and Private Spheres and 'the Civic' Turn in Da Porto, Bandello, and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*", in *Shakespeare,* Romeo and Juliet*, and Civic Life: The Boundaries of Civic Space*, eds Silvia Bigliazzi and Lisanna Calvi, London-New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 66-81: 70).

37 Da Porto, p. 52, my emphasis.

38 Bandello, p. 87.

39 Boaistuau, p. 64.

40 Boaistuau, p. 68.

Whose beauty and whose shape so far the rest did stain,
That from the chief of Verona youth he greatest fame did gain.
(ll. 53-56)

Painter chimes in: being "of the age of. xx. or. xxi. yeres", he is "the fairest and best conditioned Gentleman that was amongs the Veronian youth"[41]. All novellas underline his beauty and youthful age (albeit already in his early twenties) without suggesting femininity as Da Porto does. Only Brooke mentions his lack of physical signs of manliness (such as a beard), with a vague hint of androgyny within a context pervaded by complimentary comments on his excellence reminiscent of the language of contemporary amorous poetry (his beauty 'eclipses' that of all other youths: 'stain', *OED*, 1.b).

All novellas also underline that all women marvel at his being there once they see his face unmasked, amazed at his audacity for being in the house of his enemy; if reference to masculine attraction is meant, it is only implied[42]. Boaistuau and Painter clarify that the women were 'also' astounded by his looks, with a shift in the order of the causes that refocuses the attention on his courage[43]. Brooke recuperates Da Porto's order foregrounding their wonderment at his beauty before his audacity:

But of the women chief, their gazing eyes that threw,
To wonder at his sightly shape and beauty's spotless hue,
With which the heavens him had and nature so bedecked,
That ladies thought the fairest dames were foul in his respect.
And in their head beside, another wonder rose,
How he durst put himself in throng among so many foes.
(ll. 177-80; my emphasis)

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41 William Painter, "The goodly Historie of the true and constant Loue betwene Rhomeo and Ivlietta, the one of whom died of poison, and the other of sorrow and heuiness", in *The second tome of the Palace of pleasure*, imprinted at London, by Henry Bynneman, for Nicholas England, 1567, pp. 218v-247r: 219v.

42 "Ciascuno guardava Romeo e massimamente le donne, e tutti si meravigliavano ch'egli sì liberamente in quella casa dimorasse" (Bandello, p. 89).

43 "car outre la naïfve beauté de laquelle nature l'avoit doué, encores s'esmerveilloient-elles d'avantage de son asseurance" (Boaistuau, p. 68); "for bisides his natiue beautie wherewith nature had adorned him, they maruelled at his audacitie" (Painter, p. 221r).

Is it a coincidence that not only the order of the narrator's comments but also the qualification of Romeo's beauty as surpassing that of women is present in Da Porto and Brooke only? For the time being, it can be noticed that physical effeminateness is a trait shared, in different degrees and ways, by both the most distant and the closest sources of Shakespeare's play, as Bandello was the first to downplay feminine traits and refocalize the praise on Romeo's moral qualities (his being well-mannered, amiable and courteous), initiating a line that was then followed by Boaistuau and Painter.

Da Porto's and Brooke's convergence, however, stops here, as the tale of Romeo's falling in love with Juliet aligns Brooke more with the Bandello-Boaistuau tradition. In all the post-Da Porto novellas, Romeo is transfixed by Juliet's beauty at first sight, and, in Boaistuau, Brooke and Painter, he soon feels as if in a "new tempest tossed"[44] ("agité de ceste nouvelle tempeste"[45]; "tossed with this new tempest"[46]). Da Porto shifts the focus on Juliet's own apprehension of his beauty and shapes Romeo's own getting inflamed with her as a response to her expression of passionate amazement at his sight:

> Era dall'altro canto di lei un nobile giovane, Marcuccio Guercio nominato; il quale per natura così il luglio come il genaio, le mani sempre freddissime havea. Perché, giunto Romeo Montechi, che così era il giovane chiamato, al manco lato della donna, e come in tal ballo s'usa la bella sua mano in mano presa, disse a lui quasi subito la giovane forse vaga d'udirlo favellare: "Benedetta sia la vostra venuta qui presso me, messer Romeo", alla quale il giovane, che già *del suo mirare* accorto s'era, maravigliato del parlar di costei, disse: "Come, madonna[47], benedetta la mia venuta?" Et ella rispose: "Sì, benedetto il vostro venire qui appo me; percioché voi almeno questa stanca mano calda mi terrete, onde Marcuccio la destra mi agghiaccia". Costui preso alquanto d'ardire seguì: "Se io a voi con la mia mano la vostra riscaldo, *voi co' begli occhi il mio core accendete*".[48]

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[44] Arthur Brooke, "The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet", l. 210, in Bullough, p. 291.

[45] Boaistuau, p. 68.

[46] Painter, p. 221v.

[47] "madonna" in the 1539 edition.

[48] Da Porto, pp. 51-52, my emphasis.

Juliet already knows who Romeo is, and her insistent gaze, not her beauty, makes him aware of her presence. Her daring address to him with a blessing for his coming is reminiscent of the "Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini. Osanna" addressed to Jesus by the crowd on his entrance in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21.9, Marc 11.11, Luke 19.38, John 12.13), a line incorporated in the Roman Liturgy after the Sanctus hymn. Not coincidentally, this is also the angels' address to Beatrice in *Purgatory*, 30.19: "Tutti dicean: *Benedictus qui venis*!"[49]. Romeo is taken aback and prompted to enquire why his arrival should be so blessed. What follows is a courteous exchange in which he praises her eyes for kindling his heart with passion. But what is it that makes him burn with desire so suddenly, after her long gazing had only attracted his attention, not provoked erotic longing? Bullough is correct when he notices that "Giulietta falls in love with him at first sight and is sad to see him holding himself aloof"[50], but he does not push the argument any further, nor asks why or what this may imply. What does he see in those eyes? Is it not her own desire for him? One wonders whether Da Porto chooses to reiterate an amorous topos or instead wishes to hint at a peculiar erotic dynamic, triggered by narcissistic desire and, as such, functional to the construction of Romeo's character. For one, John Donne was to operate a subtle distinction between the lovers' mutual reflection in each other's eyes and/or interchange of their "ocular rays" or "eye-beams", leading to their unity[51], on the one hand, and, on the other, the woman's fundamentally solipsistic love for her own image borne in the poet's heart, like a King enamoured of the coin bearing

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[49] Other echoes may also be heard, such as the "benedicta tu in mulieribus" pronounced by Elizabeth when Mary goes to her house (Luke 1.42-3). It also refers to the greeting of the Angel Gabriel in Luke 1.28 and is contained in the Hail Mary.

[50] Bullough, p. 270.

[51] As famously in *The Good Morrow* ("My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares, / And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest", ll. 15-16) and in *The Extasie* ("Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread / Our eyes upon one double string; / So to'intergraft our hands, as yet / Was all the means to make us one, / And pictures in our eyes to get / Was all our propagation", ll. 7-12). All quotations are from John Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985.

his own imprint[52]. The unfolding of Da Porto's narrative does not develop this point any further, but, albeit embryonic, the ambiguity of Romeo's love remains peculiar to this novella. The following narratives, too, have Juliet bless Romeo's arrival and his final praise of her eyes, but only after their long mutual gaze and after Romeo proves to be the first to fall in love with her beauty. This line, initiated by Bandello[53], clearly swerves from Da Porto. It was passed down to Brooke and Painter before being done away with by Shakespeare, whose Romeo is the one who falls in love with Juliet at first sight and is not the object of her stare, apparently remaining masked to the end of the feast.

Masculine ambiguities

But what of Romeo's masculinity? Da Porto's first hint is right at the beginning, when, before Romeo appears cross-dressed as a nymph, he depicts him as young, handsome, big, graceful, and well-mannered ("Era costui giovane molto e bellissimo, grande della persona, leggiadro e accostumato assai"[54]). His physical massiveness prepares the narrator's final mention of his physical potency when, with great vigour ("nerbo"), he opens the tomb by himself ("come huomo di gran nerbo ch'egli era, per forza il coperchio levatogli"[55]). Less keen on his corporeal strength, Bandello foregrounds his sexual energy instead ("Et essendo Romeo giovine di forte nerbo e molto innamorato, più e più volte à diletto con la sua bella sposa si ridusse"[56]), a topic which Da Porto

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52 "Image of her whom I love, more then she, / Whose faire impression in my faithfull heart, / Makes mee her *Medall*, and makes her love mee, / As Kings do coynes, to which their stamps impart / The value: goe, and take my heart from hence, / Which now is growne too great and good for me" (*Elegie* X, ll. 1-6).

53 "Tutto il suo studio era in vagheggiar la bella giovanetta e quella ad altro non metteva il pensiero che a mirar lui; e di tal maniera si guardavano che riscontrandosi talora gli occhi loro ed insieme mescolandosi i focosi raggi de la vista de l'uno e de l'altra, di leggero s'avvidero che amorosamente si miravano, perciò che ogni volta che le viste si scontravano, tutti dui empivano l'aria d'amorosi sospiri, e pareva che per alora altro non desiderassero che di poter, insieme parlando, il loro nuovo fuoco scoprire" (Bandello, p. 91).

54 Da Porto, p. 50.

55 Da Porto, p. 68.

56 Bandello, p. 99.

mentions only to emphasize the mutual enjoyment of the two lovers ("più notti del loro amore felicemente goderono"[57]). Elaborating on Bandello's image of manly love-making, Boaistuau casts Romeo as the amorous fighter who "rompant les saincts liens de virginité, print possession de la place, laquelle n'avoit encores esté assiegée"[58] – a metaphor maintained by both Brooke and Painter[59]. Once again, Da Porto seems to be on a slightly different track.

A more interesting detail connected with Shakespeare's own questioning of gender roles is Romeo's emotional reaction to the news of his ban. Not surprisingly, his self-accusation of effeminacy in III.i is absent from all the novellas, as it is strictly intertwined with Romeo's relation with Mercutio, a character who, in the sources, only appears at Capulet's feast and is then completely forgotten. Thus, the brawl leading to Romeo's banishment has Romeo fight and kill Tybalt in response to his attacks after his own repeated attempts to assuage him. In all the novellas but one (Da Porto's), his reaction to Tybalt is not motivated by his sense of guilt for the death of a friend he feels his own 'feminacy' responsible for – as in Shakespeare; it is, in different degrees, an expression of 'virile' aggressiveness and self-defence. Da Porto's is a case apart, as Romeo is no peace-maker and he kills Tybalt with no excuse but straight out of wrath at seeing many of his household wounded[60];

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57 Da Porto, p. 56.

58 Boaistuau, pp. 81-82.

59 "And now the virgin's fort hath warlike Romeus got, / In which as yet no breach was made by force of cannon shot, / And now in ease he doth possess the hopéd place" (Brooke, ll. 921-23). "Rhomeo vnloosing the holy lines of virginity, tooke possession of the place, which was not yet besieged" (Painter, p. 227v).

60 "in modo che le cose sottosopra andando, né Montecchi a Cappelletti, né Cappelletti a Montecchi ceder volendo, nella via del Corso se attaccarono una volta insieme; ove combattendo Romeo, et alla sua donna rispetto havendo, di percuotere alcuno della sua casa si guardava; pur alla fine sendo molti di suoi feriti, e quasi tutti della strada cacciati, vinto dall'ira sopra Thebaldo Capelletti corso, che 'l più fiero de' suoi nemici pareva, d'un solo colpo in terra morto lo distese; e gli altri che già per la morte di costui erano smariti, in grandissima fuga rivolse" (Da Porto, p. 57). Curiously, mention of a fight sparked off by a contention over ceding the way in the street, a topic mentioned by Sampson and Gregory in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, I.i.10-17, occurs only in this novella at this point, where all the narratives following Bandello talk about the Capulets' assault on a group of Montagues near "Porta dei Borsari" towards "Castelvecchio": "molti di quelli de i Capelletti incontrarono alcuni de i Montecchi e con l'arme fieramente gli assalirono" (Bandello, p. 100).

this is the only version which has Romeo kill Tybalt for revenge rather than self-defence as in Shakespeare.

Alongside signs of physical strength, sexual energy, and manly aggressiveness, these novellas contain hints of Romeo's emotional weakness which put his 'masculinity' into perspective. In all of them, Romeo meets Juliet before leaving Verona (at the Friar's cell in Da Porto[61], in her garden in Bandello[62]), and the two lovers cry bitterly over their parting. Romeo is as desperate as Juliet, yet resolute in opposing her plan to follow him disguised as a servant. He claims that he is confident that the ban will shortly be cancelled and he will be able to be back soon. When in Mantua, Romeo is informed (by Pietro in Da Porto and via the Friar in Bandello) about the arranged marriage of Juliet with Paris, and he writes back to her recommending that she should not worry, as he will soon return and take her away from her father's house. Not surprisingly, in both Da Porto and Bandello, the news of her death plunges him into despair and self-accusation, as he holds his own indolence responsible for it[63]. Why did he not hurry back to Verona to free her

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[61] "al giovane per lei sola abbandonare il partirsi dalla sua patria dolea, né volendosene per cosa alcuna partire senza torre da lei lagrimevole comiato, et in casa sua andare non potendo, al frate ricorse […] Et andati amendue nel confessore assai la loro sciagura insieme piansero" (Da Porto, p. 57).

[62] Where they commingle despair with the enjoyment of love-making: "Entrato nel giardino fu da Giulietta con infinite lagrime raccolto. Stettero buona pezza tutti dui senza poter formar parola, bevendo, insieme basciandosi, l'un de l'altro le stillanti lagrime che in abbondanza grandissima distillavano. Poi condolendosi che sì tosto divider si devessero, altro non sapevano fare che lagrimare e lamentarsi de la contraria fortuna ai lor amori, ed abbracciandosi e basciandosi insieme, più volte amorosamente insieme presero piacere" (Bandello, p. 102). In Boaistuau, Brooke and Painter, they meet in her chamber.

[63] As usual, Bandello enlarges Da Porto's more succinct version ("io solo sono stato della tua morte cagione, perché, come scrissi, a levarti dal padre non venni", Da Porto, p. 67): "Ahi traditor Romeo, disleale, perfido e di tutti gli ingrati ingratissimo! Non è il dolore che abbia la tua donna morta, che non si muor di doglia; ma tu, crudele, sei stato il manigoldo, sei stato il micidiale. Tu quello sei che morta l'hai. Ella ti scriveva pure che prima voleva morire che lasciarsi da nessun altro sposare e che tu andassi per ogni modo a levarla de la casa del padre. E tu sconoscente, tu pigro, tu poco amorevole, tu can mastino, le davi parole che ben anderesti, che faresti, e che stesse di buona voglia, e andavi indugiando di dì in dì, non ti sapendo risolvere a quanto ella voleva" (Bandello, p. 117).

from home? Was he really indolent or not passionate enough or, perhaps, not 'man' enough?

No such explanation is offered in those two novellas, but an indirect comment may be evinced in Boaistuau's getting rid of the whole episode, perhaps sensing ambiguity or inconsistency or narrative inefficacy. The result is that Romeo remains unaware of the marriage plan with Paris, he does not promise to return to Verona soon to free her from home, and, at the news of her death, he does not accuse himself but despairs and plans his own death:

> Au son de ce triste message, Rhomeo commença à mener tel dueil qu'il sembloit que ses esprits, ennuyez du martyre de sa passion, deussent à l'instant abandonner son corps. Mais forte amour, qui ne le peut permettre faillir jusques à l'extremité, luy meist en sa fantasie que s'il pouvoit mourir aupres d'elle, sa mort seroit plus glorieuse, et elle (ce luy sembloit) mieux satisfaicte.[64]

Both Brooke and Painter followed his lead, the former expanding this passage to cover nine lines (2545-54) and both sticking to a line of action in which Romeo never communicates with Juliet while in Mantua. But whereas Painter never swerves from this line, mentioning Romeo's recovery to the Friar's cell after the brawl and following step by step Boaistuau's narrative stages to the end, Brooke makes one interesting change, providing the model for the Friar's rebuke of Romeo in Shakespeare's play (III.iii):

> "Art thou," quoth he, "a man? Thy shape saith, so thou art;
> Thy crying, and thy weeping eyes denote a woman's heart.
> For manly reason is quite from off thy mind outchased,
> And in her stead affections lewd and fancies highly placed:
> So that I stood in doubt, this hour, at the least,
> If thou a man or woman wert, or else a brutish beast". (ll. 1353-58)

In Boaistuau, as later in Painter[65], all we are told about Romeo after he kills Tybalt is that he "voyant son desastre, s'en va

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[64] Boaistuau, p. 108.

[65] "Rhomeo, who séeing yl fortune at hand, in secrete wise conueyed him self to Frier Laurence, at the Friers Franciscanes. And the Frier vnderstanding of his facte, kept him in a cetaine secrete place of his Couent, vntil Fortune did otherwise prouide for his safe going abrode" (Painter, p. 229r).

secrettement vers frere Laurens à sainct François"[66]; we do not know what happens there. Why did Brooke feel the need to add a long section where Romeo first learns from the Friar that the Prince banished him from Verona and plunges into the depths of despair (ll. 1285-96), then he threatens to kill himself (ll. 1297-353) and eventually is reprimanded (ll. 1354-480), convinced to desist and reassured by the Friar (ll. 1481-96), before he is given instruction on how to leave Verona and gain the favour of the Mantuan Prince in order to appease Escalus (ll. 1497-506), and is finally told to pay a last visit to his wife (ll. 1507-10)? Overall, it is a 225-line long passage. Expansions are not unusual in Brooke, but this one is an entirely new extensive interpolation. What prompted Brooke to raise gender issues at this point by playing on Romeo's beastly female weakness after showing him like a furious animal, a boar or a lion, combating against Tybalt some two hundred lines earlier?

> It was but lent to him that could repay again,
> And give him death for interest, a well forborne gain.
> Right as a forest boar, that lodgéd in the thick,
> Pinchéd with dog, or else with spear y-prickéd to the quick,
> His bristles stiff upright upon his back doth set,
> And in his foamy mouth his sharp and crooked tusks doth whet;
> Or as a lion wild that rampeth in his rage,
> His whelps bereft, whose fury can no weaker beast assuage;
> Such seeméd Romeus in every other's sight,
> When he him shope, of wrong received t'avenge himself by fight.
> Even as two thunderbolts thrown down out of the sky,
> That through the air, the massy earth, and seas, have power to fly;
> So met these two, and while they change a blow or twain,
> Our Romeus thrust him through the throat, and so is Tybalt slain.
> (ll. 1021-34)

(Dis)Continuities

The pamphlet entitled *HAEC-VIR Or The Womanish-Man,* which Lynch appropriately recalls in his discussion of *As You Like It*[67], tells

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[66] Boaistuau, p. 84.
[67] Lynch, pp. 6, 15, 29-31.

us something about how genders were qualified by dress codes and behavioural conventions, and how their subversion was perceived as the cause of monstrous disorder. The pamphlet dates from 1620, but, although following *Romeo and Juliet*, it recapitulates decades-old debates. After *Haec-Vir*, the Womanish-Man, and *Hic-Mulier*, the Man-Woman, defend their right to be subversive genderwise, the latter advocating freedom for women and labelling "Custome" an "Idiot"[68], both eventually relapse into an orthodox view summarized as follows. *Haec-Vir*, who will finally change his name into *Hic-Vir*, and all other men will be "men in shape, men in shew, men in words, men in actions, men in counsell, men in example". In turn, *Hic-Mulier*, henceforth to be called *Haec-Mulier*, and all other women will "loue and serue [men] then will […] heare and obey [them]; then will like rich Iewels hang at [men's] eares to take [their] Instructions, like true friends follow [men] through all dangers, and like carefull leeches powere oyle into [men's] wonds"[69]. Roles will thus be restored, gender differences re-established, and, while men will return to be armed once again "with Fortitude and Resolution", all women will "be all [men's] most excellent thoughts can desire", and finally "deformitie shall packe to Hell"[70]. The language of the conclusive part of the pamphlet resonates with the Friar's images of monstrous male-female disorder in Brooke and Shakespeare, while the characters of *Haec-Vir* suggests ideas of androgyny more famously, and subtly, ingrained in the Master-Mistress fair youth of *Sonnet 20*.

Pinpointing the relevance of this topic, the play foregrounds vigorous manliness from the initial scene preparing the first brawl, with Gregor and Sampson's tribal bawdiness against women and pumped-up virility prompting violence against men for the sake of violence. Within such a context based on clear-cut hierarchies of gender and power roles, Romeo makes his first appearance as an outstandingly delicate boy, all "for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in" (II.iv.38-39), strongly contrasting with Sampson's and

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[68] Anon., *HAEC-VIR Or The Womanish-Man. Being an Answere to a late Booke intituled Hic-Mulier***.** Exprest in a briefe Dialogue between *Haec-Vir* the Womanish-Man, and *Hic-Mulier* the Man-Woman, London, printed for I.T. and are to be sold at Christ Church gate, 1620, B2.

[69] Anon., C3v.

[70] Anon., C3v-C4r.

Gregory's flaunted obscene 'civility' directed at the Montague maids, including punning on violation of their maidenhood (I.i.21-22). In fact, Romeo and Juliet stand apart as unusual specimens of subversive youths within deeply gendered Verona[71]. When Romeo becomes aware of his own 'otherness', he accuses Juliet of making him effeminate and realigns himself with the code of masculinity prevalent in town, heating himself up into blind fury against Tybalt, before relapsing into crying and despairing 'like a woman' and being rebuked by the Friar. Juliet is outspoken against female custom with Romeo and obdurate with her father in ways that make her the opposite of woman as the Biblical "weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7) insolently evoked by Sampson in I.i.4-15. She remains duntless 'like a man' to the end, promising not to be gripped by "womanish fear" when she takes the potion (IV.i.120), and finally commits suicide 'manly' with a sword.

The story as passed down to Shakespeare is not entirely linear nor fully consistent in the treatment of Romeo's and Juliet's gender-transgression. The Friar's invocation that Juliet demonstrate unflinching temper in the potion plot acquires glaring gender-oriented connotations from Boaistuau onward[72]. In this respect, the Italian narratives are less explicit, as they either use indirections and/or allude to the possibly weaker temper of a young girl[73]. Coherently, Boaistuau replaces Juliet's dying by breath-holding (in

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[71] See Silvia Bigliazzi, "Defiance and Denial: Paradigms of Civic Transgression in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Bigliazzi and Calvi, eds, pp. 115-46.

[72] Boaistuau has the Friar recommend that Juliet should "despouille ceste affection feminine, et prends un courage viril" (p. 100). Brooke translates the passage as follows: "Cast off from thee at once the weed of womanish dread, / With manly courage arm thyself from heel unto the head" (ll. 2145-46). And here is Painter: "and put of all feminine affection by taking vpon you a manly stomake" (p. 237r.).

[73] "'Ma dimmi, non temerai del corpo di Thebaldo tuo cugino, che poco è che ivi entro fue seppellito?' La giovane già già tutta lieta disse: "Padre, se per tal via pervenir dovessi a Romeo, senza tema ardirei di passare per l'inferno'" (Da Porto, p. 63). "Egli che assai difficilmente poteva credere ch'una fanciulla fosse sì sicura e tanto audace che in un avello tra morti si lasciasse chiudere, le disse: 'Dimmi, figliuola, non averai tu paura di tuo cugino Tebaldo, che è così poco tempo che fu ucciso, e ne l'arca, ove posta sarai, giace, e deve fieramente putire?' 'Padre mio,' rispose l'animosa giovane 'di questo non vi caglia, che se per passar per mezzo le penaci pene de l'inferno io credessi trovar Romeo, io nulla temerei quel fuoco eternale'" (Bandello, p. 111).

both Da Porto and Bandello) with self-stabbing, a change which remains untouched in Brooke and Painter, as well as in Shakespeare. But if, with regard to these specific aspects, the novella tradition swerves towards more pronounced 'virile' connotations of Juliet in concomitance with the French version, followed by the English ones, that same tradition appears less linear in the case of Romeo.

As we have seen, Da Porto's Romeo is a big, handsome and gentle youth whose first appearance is, incongruously, in the costume of a nymph. He is presented as the angel-like 'female' beauty celebrated in amorous poetry, making his extraordinary appearance at the feast in ways that strike Juliet with sudden love, pushing her to express her amazement in a language reminiscent of the 'Benedictus' of evangelical tradition. As in all the following novellas, in this one, too, Romeo loves an unnamed woman other than Juliet, but here no pining after her is mentioned and he goes to the feast in order to follow her, not to find another beauty[74]. His portrait as a melancholy lover of the sonnet tradition is first drawn by Bandello and then retained in all the subsequent versions of the story. Thus, Da Porto does not expatiate upon Romeo's feelings nor does he show him as the first of the two youths to fall in love. In the first part of this novella, Romeo makes his entrance crossed-dressed, looking very much self-centred and intrigued by Juliet's gaze upon him. But in the second part, his 'manliness' bursts out at the brawl, where he is no peace-maker and kills Tybalt out of sheer vengeful fury, finally showing resoluteness in preventing Juliet from following him in his exile, disguised as a page, because the only way he wants to have her at his side is as his wife[75]. But then he goes to Mantua as a 'dead man' ("come morto divenuto"[76]), hardly suggesting manly 'fortitude', and nothing is said about his permanence there. All we know is that he does not hurry back to Verona to rescue Juliet when he is informed about the marriage

[74] "(come è degli amanti costume, che le lor donne, siccome col cuore, così anco col corpo, pur che possano, ovunque vanno, seguono) uno giovane delli Montechi la sua donna seguendo, si condusse" (Da Porto, p. 50).

[75] "'Non piaccia a Dio, anima mia cara, che quando meco venire doveste, in altra guisa che in luogo di mia signora vi menassi' disse a lei Romeo" (Da Porto, p. 57).

[76] Da Porto, p. 58.

plan with Paris[77] and later accuses himself of indolence. Compared to this narrative, which, genderwise, shows incompatible traits referable to both codes of femininity and masculinity, Bandello defeminizes Romeo by avoiding ambiguous cross-dressing and elaborates on his first love, on which Da Porto is silent, by creating a figure of pining lover after the chaste and distant mistress, cognate to images of love melancholy in contemporary lyrical poetry. Thus, the overtly conventional frame reinscribes him within a diffused paradigm of masculinity alternative to that dominant in the Veronese families, from the start presented as bloodily inimical and mutually mortal. Whatever its value here, be it an example of the "'recuperative narratives' in which perverse positions of failure or defeat are routinely turned around and re-interpreted as elements within a larger articulation of power", or instead an instance of what Bates calls "perverse *masculinities*"[78], the reinscription of Romeo within a familiar picture of plangent and despondent male passivity guarantees his recognizability. To circumvent Da Porto's ambiguities further, Bandello makes Romeo fall instantly in love with Juliet, later emphasising his sexual potency to an unexpected degree. Romeo's self-accusation of being responsible for Juliet's (apparent) death is retained, and in fact expanded, but as a remain of Da Porto's version, where his irresoluteness sounds more naturally tinged with shades of unmanliness. If Da Porto says nothing about Romeo's permanence in Mantua, Bandello remarks that he has an allowance by his own father, and there remains honourably and well accompanied[79], with no apparent overbearing feelings of sadness – a trait that instead Boaistuau calls attention to[80], laying the ground for Brooke's further expansion (ll. 1741-61) and Painter's more closely derivative

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77 "egli [havea] alla Giulietta scritto, che per cosa niuna al suo maritare non consentisse, e meno il loro amore facesse aperto, che senza alcun dubbio fra otto o dieci giorni egli prenderia modo di levarla di casa del padre" (Da Porto, p. 61).

78 Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 6, 9.

79 "Quivi, presa una casa, non gli lasciando suo padre mancar danari, onoratamente e ben accompagnato se ne stava" (Bandello, p. 103).

80 "où il loua maison et, vivant en compaignie honorable, s'essaya pour quelques moys à decevoir l'ennuy qui le tourmentoit" (Boaistuau, p. 92).

rendition[81]. Boaistuau's erasure of Romeo's self-accusation at the news of Juliet's death also dispels doubts about his weak hesitancy. But if the main narrative turns towards disambiguation are marked by Bandello, first, and later by Boaistuau, gradually reinforcing, if by single touches, Romeo's masculine identity, Brooke goes in the opposite direction, interrupting the linear, albeit slightly meandering, transmission of an increasingly 'virilized' figure of young lover. No one says – as Brooke does – that Romeo is beardless, suggesting ephebic connotations; save Da Porto, no one underlines – as Brooke does – that he is more beautiful than the women at the feast; no one calls him – as Brooke does – an "unseemly woman in a seeming man" (III.iii.111). This qualification derives from behavioural inadequacy to male standards of 'fortitude'. And yet, the immediate parallel is the likewise 'grotesque' big, handsome man in the guise of a nymph we find in Da Porto – a Veronese *Haec-Vir* – except that this image suggests gender-hybridization untinted by moral monstrosity and strengthened by narcissistically angel-like behavioural features. As said above, the farthest and the closest sources of Shakespeare's play converge towards this point, but with a difference, whose relevance is suggested by Bandello's excising intervention.

Turning points

What may be gathered from this overview is Bandello's hand in toning down masculine ambiguity. A Dominican friar and Bishop of Agen, Bandello contains the transgressive potential of Da Porto's portrait of an angel-like violent yet hesitant young man and translates it into conventional male paradigms which guarantee manliness while offering an alternative to the vigorous and red-blooded figure of Tybalt, "primo cugino di Giulietta, giovine molto prode de la persona"[82]. If Brooke did not see Da Porto's novella, as lack of documentary evidence seems to suggest, Boaistuau retained Bandello's model of a lyricized Romeo, that belittled the potential for 'bigenderedeness' perceivable in Da Porto, and compounded it

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81 "where he tooke a house: and liuing in honorable company, assayed certaine months to put away the griefe which so tomented" (Painter, p. 233r).

82 Bandello, p. 100.

with hints of Juliet's courageous manliness, indirectly adding to ideas of male fortitude, resoluteness, and constancy. Interestingly, the Friar's accusation of Romeo's monstrous 'bigenderedness' because of lack of those qualities, as presented in Brooke, emphasizes a critique of Romeo's desperate self-victimization voiced earlier on in the narrative. Before encountering Juliet, Bandello tells about some friends being worried that he consumed himself with unrequited love like "snow against the sun" (a metaphor present in all the following novellas). One friend in particular gives him advice on how to forget that girl, saying that it is extreme madness ("estrema pazzia") to desire what one cannot have, it is a mistake ("errore"), and he should lift from his eyes the veil that blinds him ("il velo che gli acceca") by attending feasts and looking out for other women in order to eventually free himself from his unruly desire ("che affrenerà questo tuo poco regolato appetito, e ti metterà in libertà")[83]. Boaistuau calls the advice a bitter rebuke ("un sien compaignon, plus meur d'aage et de conseil que luy, commença à le reprendre aigrement") and qualifies Romeo's pining as vicious ("ainsi precipité en cest abisme de vices"), erroneous ("l'erreur"), leading him astray from the right route ("Oste ce voile amoureux qui te bande les yeux et qui t'empesche de suyvre le droict sentier")[84]. Brooke follows him closely[85], like Painter[86].

Bandello marks a turning point in many respects and in a very subtle way. He first dispels suspicions of hermaphroditism perceivable in Da Porto and then applies to Romeo the model of dejected and doting masculinity as a recognizable alternative to vigorous manliness, justifiably censured by Romeo's friend with accusations of moral deviance. In this sense, Brooke did not need to read Da Porto to restore the ambiguity excised by Bandello; at least

[83] Bandello, p. 89.

[84] Boaistuau, p. 66.

[85] "plungéd deep in vice" (l. 123), "error" (l. 128), "ill employéd youth" (l. 126), "henceforth begin / To know and fly the error which too long thou livedst in. / Remove the veil of love, that keeps thine eyes so blind, / That thou ne canst the ready path of thy forefathers find" (ll. 127-30).

[86] "so drowned in this dongeon of vice", "error", "doe away that amorous vaile or couerture which blindeth thine eyes and letteth thée to folow the right path" (p. 220v).

on a moral plane, that ambiguity was latent in the model of abject and broken masculinity of lyrical poetry Bandello introduced as an antidote to Da Porto's more potentially transgressive figure. Thus, Brooke had only to revive that censorious voice, which he did by interpolating 225 lines on Romeo's monstrous wailing and the Friar's reprimand, in fact suggesting yet another turning point, although potentially embedded in the story as he received it. The question is why he did so if not prompted by linear transmission, but cultural debate on gender deformity might have had a part in the process. This was Brooke's specific legacy to Shakespeare. It was then up to Shakespeare to revise, elaborate on or refute it.

Loci of significance: towards Romeo after Romeo

An analysis conducted on these selected textual passages tells us more than one might expect about discontinuous phenomena and their meaning, inviting further reflection. Without considering the paratexts, which normally contain the ideological programme, and their relation to actual narratives (which they sometimes contradict, as in Brooke[87]), comparison between passages from the different versions along the line of their transmission at the same time shows the relevance of lexical or phrasal borrowings and the need to go beyond them. The convergence of Da Porto and Brooke towards similar forms of masculine ambiguity discloses the permanence, albeit in altered shape, of one and same semantic potential that may take different emphasis and connotation depending on the narrative perspective and the context; it may be shaded, channelled in different forms and blended with different models, it may be kept dormant or activated, perhaps with new overtones and intentions. This nucleus of potential significance may induce us to invoke ideas of architextuality[88], if not a more amorphous field of

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[87] "Brooke is more heavily moral in his Address to the Reader, accusing the lovers of lust and disobedience […]. In the poem itself, however, the translator's sympathy is with the lovers. Brooke stresses Juliet's modesty and Rome's integrity; the Friar is not 'superstitious' but a real sage, of famed virtue, respected by both houses and the Prince" (Bullough, pp. 276-77).

[88] Or the relation between texts that share common features such as genres or subgenres, see Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1992.

intertextuality, to resist postulating direct knowledge between distant texts in the absence of documentary evidence. But internal echoes, such as the praise of the beauty of Romeo surpassing that of women in these two texts only, prompts more extensive research in this genetic direction, too. At all events, the model of masculinity embedded in the tradition of amorous lyrical poetry, compounded with other interdiscursive and cultural material, is there and suggests a complex dynamic relation between different types of texts. This invites to reflect about the relevance of loci of significance with different degrees of latency in different texts that may be activated when or if the occasion requires. Evidently, the occasion demanded that Da Porto and Brooke, perhaps independently, suggested masculine ambiguity, yet significantly with diverse implications – clearly less openly censorious, and more intriguing, in the case of Da Porto. Further comparative research into the dynamics of these sources will be able to confirm whether this is the right course. Further research is also needed to map out textual concordances and verify when and if sources other than Brooke agree with Shakespeare where Brooke does not[89]. Studies in that direction will provide us with a better understanding of how Shakespeare's Romeo after these Romeos was part of this process and how he related to it. As Belsey says, "comparison with the sources is where we catch Shakespeare at work. It's what he changes that throws into relief what makes him Shakespeare"[90].

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89 One example is the lack of reference to Romeo's listening "to Giulietta's voice before revealing himself or being discovered" at night, as in Shakespeare's II.i (Henke, p. 71). This detail is missing in the Boaistuau-Brooke-Painter line while being present in both Da Porto (p. 53) and Bandello (p. 94). See also Romeo's above-mentioned killing of Tybalt out of vengeance and note 60 above.

90 Belsey, p. 63.