Boaistuau's "Histoire troisième de deux amans, dont l'un mourut de venin, l'autre de tristesse" became known in England chiefly through the metrical adaptation of Arthur Brooke,¹ and the prose translation by William Painter (1566).² Painter's version was faithful to the original, aside from errors due to ignorance of the French language. Brooke, in his 3020 lines, embroidered upon the text of Boaistuau and even added entire scenes which seem to be largely of his own invention. While Shakespeare was probably familiar with the work of Painter, he seems to have utilized rather the poem of Brooke, which has properly been called the basis of the tragedy.³ Consequently, for the remainder of this chapter, it will be advisable to neglect Painter's "Rhomeo and Julietta" and to concentrate attention upon Brooke's Romeus and Juliet.

It is barely possible that Brooke may have been influenced somewhat by a play which he had recently witnessed on the subject of Romeo and Juliet. The text of his reference to this unidentified play is here reproduced:

Though I saw the same argument lately set foorth on stage with more commendation, then I can looke for: (being there much better set forth then I haue or can dooe) yet the same matter penned as it is, may serue to lyke good effect, if the readers do brynge with them lyke good myndes, to consider it. which hath the more incouraged me to publishe it, suche as it is.⁴

¹ Imprinted at London in
Flete strect within Temble barre, at
the signe of the hand and starre, by
Richard Tottill the xix day of
Novemver, An. do. 1562.
—Brooke, Arthur. Romeus and Juliet.
P. A. Daniel, éd., New Shakespeare Society,
Series III, No. 1, London: N. Trübner and
Co., 1875, p. 90.

² Printed in Painter's Palace of Pleasure. Ibid., p. xix.
⁴ Daniel, éd., op. cit., p. 4.
According to J. J. Munro who here closely follows P. A. Daniel, Brooke departed from his original in significant fashion: he practically created the character of the Nurse; it is in his version first that the names of Capulet's guests are written; he made the apothecary; he developed Romeus' ravings at the cell,—though such a scene, as it occurs in Struijs, must have been in the earlier English source,—and he pictured his sorrow in exile; he introduced the scenes between Romeus and the Nurse, and between the Nurse and Juliet in connexion with arranging the marriage, and created the incident of Romeus giving the money to the Nurse.¹

Let us now examine in order these allegedly original features of Brooke's poem.

Brooke's chief contribution, we shall find, was his characterization of the Nurse. Boaistuau had represented her as a loyal soul, thoroughly amenable to Iuliette's logic, and not requiring financial arguments on the part of Romeo. The more mercenary Nurse described by Brooke receives the gold of Romeus, bending her crooked knees lower than she had done for fourteen years, and then vows to devote the best of her craft to furthering the wedding plans of the lovers. When she returns to her mistress, she relates fully the results of her interview with young Montague, but is reticent only about the gold which she has accepted as compensation for her services.²

For all her mercenary disposition, the Nurse of The Tragicall history of Romeus and Iuliet seems to feel a genuine affection for her mistress. She revels in the recollection of the beauty of the infant Iuliet, and of her pretty prating "with it tong." She boasts that she gave to the babe "suckle in youth." Indeed, her staunch loyalty to Iuliet, combined with her avarice, and her readiness to sacrifice principle for the sake of expediency, render her character very inconsistent, and very human. She is never more herself than when she advises Iuliet to marry County Paris, in order to avoid the rage of the senior Capilet, and also because Romeus may

¹ Munro, J. J. Brooke's 'Romeus and Juliet.' London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Duffield and Co., 1908, pp. lvi-lviii.
never return. Even if he does so, she explains, Juliet will be better off. “For one she shall have twayne,” with ample opportunity to avail herself both of husband and of paramour. 

Although the independent Nurse who replaces Boaistuau’s colorless *confidante* may fairly be called Brooke’s creation, it will be necessary to make decided reservations regarding the other allegedly original features listed by J. J. Munro. While Boaistuau mentions no guest list issued by Antoine Capellet, he says that this gentleman invited all the nobility of Verona. The transition to the written list of names described by Brooke would appear to be a very simple matter. Moreover, the statement that Brooke “made the apothecary” is misleading. As already observed, H. Hauvette demonstrated that the apothecary was the invention of A. Sevin. Boaistuau developed the character somewhat, and Brooke’s additions seem of little value. Thus, where Boaistuau is content with the statement that the apothecary is taken, tortured, and hanged, Brooke adds that as compensation for professional services rendered the executioner receives the condemned man’s coat. The poison sold by Boaistuau’s apothecary requires a full hour to kill the most robust man in the world. Brooke’s more efficient apothecary furnishes a poison that will “kill the strongest man alive” in less than half an hour.

Let us pass now to the consideration of the allegedly original scene where Romeus, in despair after the killing of Tybalt, conceals himself in the friar’s cell. Hoarse from sobs and plaints, with faltering tongue, and “with tender handes ywrong,” he laments his fate, hurling reproaches against nature, “the author of his lyfe,” which had meant for him “ioyes” that were “so scant,” “the time and place of byrth,” and “the starres aboue: Th e fatal sisters three.” For good measure, he curses also his nurse, and “the hand that gaue him pappe,” as well as the midwife “with tender grype that held him in her lappe.” For this episode, Brooke could have found in Boaistuau only the suggestion that the friar was acquainted with Rhomeo’s movements after the

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death of Thibault. On the other hand, Brooke here deserves little credit for originality, for the Job-like passage in question is quite similar to one found in Sevin's conte. There Halquadrich is described as being desperate because of the supposed death of Burgliph. Much like Romeus, Halquadrich curses not only the Stars, the Sky, Sun, Moon and Elements, but also complains that life for him has meant only tears and groans, from the day of his birth. The resemblances here noted seem evidence not that Brooke knew Sevin, but that both authors were following a conventional pattern.

The noteworthy innovations attributable to Brooke are thus reduced to one: his characterization of the Nurse. However, Brooke makes certain minor changes which may merit brief mention. He invents the name of "Frier Iohn" for the monk who in Boaistuau's Histoire troisième is called "Frere Anselme." Somewhat more important is an alteration which Brooke makes in two balcony scenes. In the first, Boaistuau's Iuliette, from her window, perceives Romeo standing in the moonlight. At a later visit Romeo, inspired by love, scales the walls with great agility and reaches the window from which dangles the piece of cord that Iuliette keeps in readiness. Brooke, who combines these two scenes, describes the approach of Romeus who waxes so light that without difficulty he leaps over the wall. Promptly he espies Iuliet, who watches from her window where she has carefully installed a "ladder made of corde" in anticipation of his visit. Boaistuau's Iuliette tearfully whispers to her "Seigneur Romeo" that he seems too prodigal of his life in exposing himself to the attacks of those who have little cause to love him. Brooke's heroine complains in more vigorous language that Romeus is

12 "Et à fin que nous soyons plus assurées en quel estât il est, si me voulez promettre de ne vous plus contrister ainsi, je sauray cejourd'hui de frère Laurens où il est reüi, ce que Juliette lui accorda. Et ceste bonne dame alors print le droit chemin à saint François où elle trouua frère Laurens qui l'aduertit que ce soir Romeo ne faudrait à l'heure accoustumée visiter Iuliette, ensemble luy faire entendre quelle estoit sa delibération."—Ibid., fo. 55v.
14 Daniel, éd., op. cit., vv. 2955-56.
“too laus sure” regarding his life, surrounded as he is by his “dedly foes, my kynsmen.”

In a few instances, Brooke evinces a certain power of metaphor, as when he says that Romeus “swalloweth downe loues sweete empoysonde baite.” Perhaps Boaistuau approaches this expression closest when, in a somewhat mixed metaphor, he makes Iuliette declare that Rhomeo seeks to dishonor her “under the veil of honeyed words.”

Nevertheless, many of the details which apparently have been credited to Brooke by such critics as Malone, Daniel and others, represent no essential deviation from the text of Boaistuau. Thus, Brooke’s Lady Capilet gives to her daughter a glowing description of the youth, fair features, grace, and bearing of the County Paris. In almost identical language, Boaistuau makes her praise Paris for handsome looks, grace, virtues, wealth, and position. Brooke’s friar boasts to Iuliet that he is an authority on the powers of stones, plants, metals, “and diuers other things that in the bowels of earth do lourke.” His words are virtually a literal translation of the text of Boaistuau. If Boaistuau states that Rhomeo washes his face in order to remove evidence of his grief, Brooke adds merely that the water was “cleene,” and consequently efficacious in washing away all “staynes of dried teares.”

Whether by accident or not, Brooke agrees with Luigi da Porto, rather than with Boaistuau or Bandello, in at least one instance. It will be recalled that in Da Porto’s “Giulietta e Romeo,” the hero attends the ball of the Cappelletti, disguised as

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11 “peut estre que sous le voile de ses paroles aimelles il me veut rauir l’honneur pour se venger de mes parens, qui ont offensé les siens.”—Boaistuau, op. cit., fo. 44. Cf. Daniel, ed., op. cit., v. 218, and vv. 387-88, and p. xiii.


a nymph. The ladies who see him, at first not suspecting his sex, compare him with the fairest women and find that he surpasses them all in beauty. Giulietta, with a characteristic frankness which is much attenuated in later Italian versions, actually tells Romeo that he appears to her more beautiful than any of the ladies present. Bandello, who neglects to describe Romeo's mask, naturally omits all comparison between the pulchritude of the hero and that of the ladies who attend the ball. Boaistuau likewise is content to refer simply to the "nayfue beauté" of Rhomeo. Brooke restores almost the exact language of Luigi da Porto:

That Ladies thought the fayrest dames / were fowle in his respect.\(^{21}\)

From the foregoing observations, it would therefore appear that the extent of Brooke's innovations has been greatly overestimated by critics. This fact is the more noteworthy since it was Brooke—and Brooke alone—who said that he "saw the same argument lately set forth on stage with more commendation, then I can look for." The lost play, witnessed by Brooke but apparently not utilized by him, has caused a great deal of ink to be spilled by critics. The curious fact is that all attempt to prove that other writers—Shakespeare, Struijs, et cetera—were influenced by this play, not Brooke himself.

(a) Then he \* vi "crownes of gold / out of his pocket drew: 
And gave them her, a slight reward / (quod he) and so adiew.
In seuen yeres twice tolde / she had not bowd so lowe,
Her crooked knees, as now they bowe, / she swears she will bestowe.
Her crokey wit, her time, / and all her busy payne,
To helpe him to his hoped blisse, / and, crowing downe agayne:
She takes her leave, and home / she hyes with speedy pace:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Nothing was done or said, / that she had left vntolde,
Sawe onely one, that she forgot / the taking of the golde.\(^{22}\)

(b) And then she swears to him, / the mother loves her well:
And how she gaue her sucke in youth / she leaueth not to tell.
A pretie babe (quod she) / it was when it was yong:
Lord how it could full pretely / haue prated with it tong.


A thousand times and more / I laid her on my lappe,
And clapt her on the buttocke soft / and kist where I did clappe.
And gladder then was I / of such a kisse forsooth:
Then I had been to haue a kisse / of some olde lechers mouth.

(c) She setteth foorth at large / the fathers furious rage,
And eke she prayseth much to her / the second marriage;
And County Paris now / she praiseth ten times more,
By wrong, then she her selfe by right / had Romeus praysede before.
Paris shall dwell there still, / Romeus shall not retourne;
What shall it boote her life / to languish still and mourne.
The pleasures past before / she must account as gayne;
But if he doe retourne, what then? / for one she shall haue twayne.
The one shall use her as / his lawfull wedded wyfe,
In wanton loue with equall joy / the other leade his lyfe;
And best shall she be sped / of any townish dame,
Of husband and of paramour / to fynde her change of game.

(d) No Lady faire or fowle / was in Verona towne:
Nor knight or gentleman / of high or lowe renowne:
But Capilet himselfe / hath byd vnto his feast:
Or by his name in paper sent, / appoynted as a guest.

(e) And more there is then you shal nede / for halfe of that is there
Will serue, I undersake / in lesse then halfe an howre
To kill the strongest man aliue; / such is the poysons power.

(f) Thaapotecary high / is hanged by the throte,
And for the paynes he tooke with him / the hangman had his cote.

(g) With woufoll cheere, his wayling frend, / he standeth to beholde.
And then, our Romeus, / with tender handes ywrong:
With voyce, with plaint made horce, w* sobs, / and with a foltr-ing tong,
Renewd with nouel mone / the dolours of his hart,
His outward dreery cheere bewrayde, / his store of inward smart,
Fyrst nature did he blame, / the author of his lyfe,
In which his ioyes had been so scant, / and sorrowes aye so ryfe:
The time and place of byrth, / he fiercely did reprowe,
He cryed out (with open mouth) / against the starres aboue:
The fatall sisters three, / he said, had done him wrong,
The threed that should not haue been sponne / they had drawne foorth too long.

Ibid., vv. 651-58.
Ibid., vv. 2297-2308.
He wished that he (ne) had / before this time been borne,
Or that as soone as he wan light, / his life he had forlorn.
His nurture he cursed, and / the hand that gave him pappe,
The midwife eke with tender grype / that held him in her lappe:
And then he did complain, / on Venus cruel sonne
Who led him first unto the rockes, / which he should warily shone.
By meane whereof he lost, / both lyfe and libertie,
And dyed a hundred times a day, / and yet could never die.\(^{28}\)

(\(4\)) So light he wox, he leapt the wall, / and there he spyde his wife.
Who in the windowe watcht / the cumming of her lorde:
Where she so surely had made fast / the ladder made of corde:\(^{30}\)

(\(i\)) Oh Romeus (of your lyfe) / too lauas sure you are:
That in this place, and at thys tyme / to hasard it you dare.
What if your dedly foes / my kynsmen, saw you here?\(^{30}\)

(\(j\)) But only seeketh by her sight / to feede his houngry eyes
Through them he swalloweth downe / loues sweete empoysonde baite, . . .

As oft the poysond hooke is hid, / wrapt in the pleasant bayte?\(^{31}\)

(\(k\)) The person of the man, / the fewters of his face,
His youthfull yeres, his fayrenes, and / his port, and semely grace,
With curious wordes she payntes / before her daughters eyes,
And then with store of vertues prayse / she heaues him to the skyes.\(^{32}\)

(\(l\)) What force the stones, the plants, / and metals haue to woorke,
And diuers other things that in / the bowels of earth do loorke,\(^{33}\)

(\(m\)) Wherfore when he his face / hath washt with water cleene,
Lest that the staynes of dryed teares / might on his cheeks be seene,\(^{34}\)


\(^{30}\) Daniel, ed., op. cit., vv. 830–32. Cf. p. xiii. Cf. also Boaistuau, op. cit., fos. 45\(^v\) and 49\(^v\).


\(^{34}\) Daniel, ed., op. cit., vv. 2109–10, and p. xiv; Boaistuau, op. cit., fo. 63\(^v\).