

**BROOKE'S 'ROMEUS AND
JULIET,' BEING THE ORIGINAL
OF SHAKESPEARE'S 'ROMEO
AND JULIET'**

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ARTHUR BROOKE & J. J. MUNRO

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ORIGINAL OF SHAKES-
PEARE'S 'ROMEO AND
JULIET' NEWLY EDITED
BY J. J. MUNRO



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INTRODUCTION

General Consideration of the Story.—The Middle Ages have left us many tales of unhappy love, wherein the golden promise of youthful passion is transformed by unkindly circumstance into woe and death. Such tales were generally produced by a process of growth occupying many years and passing from land to land.

— Perhaps the most beautiful and tragic, certainly the most famous and highly developed of such old tales is the history of *Romeo and Juliet*. Its real origin is involved in much obscurity; but as Boswell¹ and Simrock² first pointed out, the story, in its principal elements, possesses striking analogy to the older love-tales of *Hero and Leander*, and *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and *Tristan and Isolde*. This analogy, however, should not be unduly pressed: it would be too much to say that its existence proves organic connexion between these stories, although an exceedingly remote relationship is possible; a number of other tales, like that of *Ulysses and Penelope*, possess too an analogy in some respects with *Romeo*, but can have no relation to it. Cino

¹ Boswell's Forewords to *Romeo and Juliet*, 1821, V. vi., p. 265.

² Karl Simrock on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays, ed. Halliwell Shak. Soc., 1850.

Chiarini¹ and Keightley² are two of those who are apt to press the connexion too much, in considering *Pyramus and Thisbe* as the ultimate source of the *Romeo* legend. This theory of absolute relationship with one ancient story is hardly tenable in the light of evidence which we subsequently adduce, and the fact that the simple theme of two distressed lovers would call forth the same type of story in different minds, may explain some of the similarity.

In the three principal stories mentioned above, the theme, on examination, is found to be the same and consists of two main elements:

- (a) the separation of two lovers by some obstacle;
- (b) their ruin brought about by an error which one holds in regard to the other, or by a misfortune, which, happening to one, the other shares.

Pyramus and Thisbe are separated by a wall; they attempt to meet at the tomb of Ninus, where nothing shall part them, but where Pyramus, thinking Thisbe dead, slays himself; whereupon, Thisbe kills herself also. Hero and Leander are parted by the Hellespont, which Leander swims in order to reach Hero; Hero's guiding light is one

¹ *Romeo e Giulietta, La Storia Degli Amanti Veronesi nelle Novelle Italiane e nella Tragedia di Shakespeare, nuovamente tradotta da Cino Chiarini*, Firenze, 1906, pp. xix-xx. This book contains reprints of Da Porto and Bandello.

² Furness's *Variorum Romeo*, p. 408.

night extinguished, and Leander loses heart and drowns; Hero drowns herself on the following morning on seeing his body washed ashore. Isolde and Tristan are parted by precepts of honour, Isolde being married to Mark; Tristan has, moreover, killed a kinsman of Isolde, and is therefore the natural enemy of her people; Isolde, however, goes to Tristan, but he dies through false news concerning her; Isolde herself dies on the body of her lover, seeing his sad fate.

Now taking *Tristan and Isolde*, the most northerly, and perhaps the most evolved of these tales (excepting *Romeo*), we see an advance on the other two: the obstacle between the lovers is no longer principally material, but is moral; and the slaying of the kinsman is a new and important feature. These developments are carried further in *Romeo*.

Besides these three old tales, however, there are two others not previously noticed in this connexion, and exceedingly popular in the Middle Ages, which also bear close analogy to *Romeo*; these are *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Floris and Blanchefleur*. The story of the first pair of lovers briefly is, that Troilus, who scorns love, sees Cressida, and falls in love with her. Troilus pines; his friend Pandarus comes to his aid with good counsel, and promises to win Cressida for him. Pandarus persuades Cressida, who pities Troilus, and finally consents to allow him to go to her bedside. They pass nights together, all their arrangements being made by the friendly Pandarus, their mutual

messenger. Calchas, however, Cressida's father, has deserted Troy and joined the Greeks, and he prevails on his new friends to ask for the exchange of Cressida for their own Antenor. The parliament of Troy consents to this. The grief of the lovers at the prospect of this parting is uncontrollable, and each is comforted by the philosophic Pandarus. Troilus goes to Cressida at night for the last time and bids her farewell as the day begins to dawn. Troilus is afraid her father will desire to wed her to some other man; but Cressida swears constancy and promises to return in ten days. She is led to the Greek host by Diomedes, who loves her and woos her. His wooing is so successful that Cressida breaks her promise to Troilus and does not return. Letters pass between the lovers, and still Troilus hopes Cressida is true; till one day Deiphobus captures the armour of Diomedes and Troilus sees thereon the brooch he has given Cressida: thereupon he swears vengeance on Diomedes and seeks every day to fight with him, but is slain by Achilles. The parallelism between this story and *Romeo* is too apparent to require pointing out.

The romance of *Troilus and Cressida* is not of classical origin. The earliest version of it known to us is in *Le Roman de Troie*, by Benoit de Sainte-More,¹ a Norman poet of the French court of our English Henry II.² Other

¹ For a lengthy and able discussion of the Troilus story see M. A. Joly's *Benoit de Ste-More et le Roman de Troie*, Paris, 1870; and Jung's *Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Cressida*, Chaucer Society, 1907.

² Joly, p. 109.

poets had treated of the siege of Troy before him, but in his book first is the history of Troilus. M. Joly holds that he produced his long poem between 1175 and 1185, but the now accepted date is about 1160.¹ Benoît's work became speedily famous; the story became known in many lands, not only to the cultured people, but to the populace. It passed into histories and *gestes* and was a favourite theme of poets. Its glory was still further extended by a Latin *remaniement* of Benoît's poems by Guido delle Colonne of Messina, called the *Historia Destructionis Trojæ*, written in 1287.² Guido's production became even more famous than Benoît's, and on the advent of printing, the presses of every land in Europe were soon actively reproducing his work.³ When Boccaccio retold the story in his *Filistrato*, he gave it new life and significance. He took his main outlines from Guido and Benoît, but he owed little more to them. He wove into the history the joy and anguish, the sweetness and the bitterness, of his own love-affair—for he, too, had lost his love, the beautiful Maria, whom he called Fiammetta, and had met at the Neapolitan court of Queen Giovanna; and Jung shows, too, that his innovations are mainly due to borrowings from the early part of his own *Filiscalo*, based on the medieval romance of *Floris and Blanchefleur*. Benoît had occupied

¹ See Jung, chap. I.

² *Texti Inediti di Storia Trojana* (4 vols.), by Egidio Corra, Turin, 1887. See vol. i., pp. 105-6.

³ Joly, p. 500.

himself chiefly with the feelings of Briseida (as Cressida was then named); Boccaccio fixed attention chiefly on Troilus. In Benoit and Guido there was no Pandarus; Boccaccio was solely responsible for his creation.

The great Italian version of *Floris and Blanchefleur* is Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. I shall notice chiefly here the points which most interest us. Florio (Floris) was the son of King Felice of Spain who had killed Lelio, a Roman noble, husband to Giulia and father to Biancofiore (Blanchefleur), born after his death. Biancofiore was brought up with Florio at Felice's court and as the king noticed the growing love between the two young people, he sent his son away to Duke Feramonte in Montorio (corresponding to Mantua). The Duke tried unsuccessfully to turn the young man's thoughts from Biancofiore, who, meanwhile, had been induced by the king, through his steward, to serve the guests at a banquet with a poisoned pheasant, and had been on that account condemned to be burnt. Florio was warned by Venus and rescued Biancofiore. A rival to Florio arose in Fileno; Florio became jealous, and would have killed him, had he not fled. Felice then sent Biancofiore away by merchants, who sold her to the Admiral, and she was put in a tower at Alexandria. Felice then made a sumptuous tomb and gave out that Biancofiore was dead. Florio went to the sepulchre and lamented bitterly, and wished for death; his mother, however, told him the truth, and he went in search of Biancofiore, eventually finding her and passing through many adventures.