SHAKESPEARE AND ARTHUR BROOKE

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Considering how closely Shakespeare followed the source of Romeo and Juliet, the improvements which he has made in it are particularly striking. There are other plays which are as close to their sources—Julius Caesar, for instance; but the biographies from which Shakespeare took Julius Caesar are themselves dramatic and poetic, while the source of Romeo and Juliet is tiresome, childish, and often doggerel. It is this fact that makes Shakespeare's achievement so extraordinary.

I say the source of Romeo and Juliet, for there is, practically, only one source, Arthur Brooke's poem Romeus and Juliet. In critical prefaces to the play it is sometimes made to seem that other versions of the story are of equal importance. ¹ One may argue that this or that minor digression from Brooke indicates that Shakespeare had seen one or another of these versions, but that is all. Everyone who has made a careful study of the play agrees that Brooke's poem was what Shakespeare followed. ²

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¹ The most important versions of the story before Brooke were those by Luigi da Porto, Matteo Bandello, Pierre Boaistuau (who translated Bandello into French), and William Painter (who translated Boaistuau into English). Attempts have been made to prove that Shakespeare made use of one of these earlier versions, but, as E. K. Chambers says, "substantially his source, so far as we know, was Brooke" (William Shakespeare, A Study of Facts and Problems, Vol. I, p. 347). Brooke says in his preface, "I saw the same argument set forth on the stage with more commendation then I can look for: (being there much better set forth then I haue or can doe)," and H. de Wulf Fuller has tried to prove that this lost play is one of the sources used by Shakespeare, his argument being that the extant Dutch play of Romeo and Juliette by J. Struijs (1634) contains indications that it is an off-shoot of a play which influenced Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliette, M. P. iv. 75 [1906]). Most scholars are not convinced by Fuller's argument. It seems most likely that the source of the Dutch play was Boaistuau, as Chambers says. Other critics have attempted to prove that Shakespeare was influenced by Luigi Grotò's La Hadriana, or by Wily Beguiled, an English play by an unknown author; but their arguments are supported by slender proof.

It is hard to understand how Shakespeare ever became sufficiently well acquainted with *Romeus and Juliet* to use it. Most of us feel like tossing the book away after reading a dozen lines, and it is only our duty as students of Shakespeare that prevents our doing so. That Shakespeare was well acquainted with Brooke is, however, clear, for the play follows the poem closely. Shakespeare must have read it, not once, but several times. He gives every evidence of knowing it thoroughly.

Distressing offenses against taste abound in Brooke’s poem. He is like a talkative child who must tell everything he knows. This discursive style is due in part to the exigencies of the rhyme. For it is evident that Brooke sometimes wrote the hexameter line of a couplet of his Poulter’s measure without a thought of what was to come in the heptameter line, and then added any rhyming idea that came into his head with the same insouciance as Ogden Nash. An example of Brooke’s verse which reveals his limitations is the passage in which he introduces the warring families (ll. 25–30):

There were two ancient stocks, which Fortune high did place  
Above the rest, indue with wealth, and nobler of their race,  
Loved of the common sort, loved of the prince alike,  
And like unhappy were they both, when Fortune list to strike;  
Whose praise, with equal blast, Fame in her trumpet blew;  
The one was clepéd Capulet, and th’other Montague.

When this is compared with the opening lines of Shakespeare’s first chorus, the chasm which separates Shakespeare from his source is apparent. Brooke’s taste seems to be chiefly at fault, and his unhappy meter is “like the forced gait of a shuffling nag.” Even if we didn’t have Shakespeare’s play to compare with it, his poems would seem extraordinarily unpoetic. Many examples of Brooke’s limitations will appear in what follows.

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4 Here is an example from near the end of the poem (ll. 2293-2294):

Th’ apothecary high is hangéd by the throat  
And for the pains he took with him the hangman had his coat.

5 In this and later quotations of Brooke’s poem modernized spelling is used.

6 There are many indications that Brooke’s faults are in part the result of extreme youth. In his prefatory poem addressed to the reader Brooke compares his poems to the newborn cubs of a bear. *Romeus and Juliet*, his eldest work and the only one that has been licked into shape, is, he says, a youthful work. It is sometimes assumed that this may mean that *Romeus and Juliet* had been written years before, but, as Munro points out (p. xxxv), Brooke’s source, Boissatuan’s *Histoires Tragiques*, had not been published until 1559, three years before Brooke’s poem appeared. Therefore Brooke seems to have been referring to his present youth.
The question is, then, Why did Shakespeare use this source? Why didn't he make use of a prose version of the story? The answer seems to be that Shakespeare followed Brooke because he liked him. A careful study of Brooke's poem and the changes Shakespeare made in it supports this thesis.

II

In the structure of the story Shakespeare made one radical change—he reduced the time of the action from several months to less than a week. This was not surprising since Shakespeare was making a long narrative poem into a short drama, but the final effect of the change was to make the love of Romeo and Juliet seem more passionate and precipitant—more like the lightning—than it had been in Brooke's poem. Shakespeare achieved a similar effect when he wrote Othello.

Another important change is the introduction of Mercutio. He is a mere name in Brooke, and Shakespeare has shown great skill in working him into the plot. It has been claimed that Shakespeare killed Mercutio before the end of the play because he was monopolizing our attention and lessening our interest in Romeo, but this theory fails to take into account Mercutio's function in the play. Apparently he was created by Shakespeare for the very purpose of being killed. In Brooke, Romeo's fight with his new kinsman Tybalt is poorly motivated. We are merely told that when taunted by the young man Romeo suddenly lost control of himself and killed him. Shakespeare apparently felt that this endangered our sympathy for Romeo; so he represented his anger against Tybalt as the result of the killing of his friend. After creating Mercutio in this manner, Shakespeare made him as attractive as possible so that Romeo's anger would be even better motivated.

Tybalt's bellicose talk about Romeo at the Capulet ball is another bit added by Shakespeare to the story as he took it from Brooke. Shakespeare's purpose seems to have been to fill out his delineation of Old Capulet's character. As will be shown later, Capulet's scolding of Tybalt here is very similar to his scolding of Juliet, and this last was taken from Brooke. The first conversation between Paris and Capulet about Juliet and the killing of Paris at the tomb are other minor additions by Shakespeare.

III

It is in the characters that Shakespeare made the greatest improvement. Except for Mercutio, Shakespeare did not originate
them, for they are clearly drawn in Brooke's poem; but the changes he did make reveal his genius as strikingly as anything he wrote.

Romeo is a young man whose whole interest in life is love. At the beginning of Shakespeare's play he is love-sick in an excessive manner that suggests both youth and a desire to be fashionable. He wanders abroad at night and shuts himself in during the day. When Mercutio says that the beautiful women at the Capulet ball will make him forget Rosaline, Romeo's protestation is a ne plus ultra of artificiality.

As soon as Romeo meets Juliet, however, this is all changed. It is true that his first words to her (and her replies) are artificial in form and meaning, but for the most part he speaks thenceforth the language of real love. His passion for Juliet lifts his outpourings far above ordinary speech, but he now speaks poetry that comes from the heart and not from an overactive brain that imagines that it is a heart.

The sure hand with which Shakespeare made this distinction was not guided by Brooke. In fact, Brooke does not make the distinction at all clear. Brooke's Romeo is in love with another woman before he meets Juliet, but Brooke gives no indication that the quality of this love is different from that which comes later. The feeling of Brooke's Romeo for both women seems equally artificial.

Shakespeare developed Romeo's love for Rosaline far more than Brooke had. There is nothing in Brooke to suggest Romeo's use of the sonneteering idea expressed in a series of couplets that Rosaline should marry so that her beauty will live on in her children (I, 1, 212–220); or his conceit concerning the "devout religion of his eye" expressed in a sestina (I, 2, 91–96). Romeo's first conversation with Juliet is also original with Shakespeare. Brooke represents Romeo and Juliet as pressing their palms together, but this causes a temporary dumbness in them. Shakespeare's lovers, on the other hand, speak a sonnet.8

But after this first meeting with Juliet, Romeo's words and actions

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7 The poetic way in which Benvolio describes Romeo's state (I, 1, 122–134) indicates that he approved of it. Lovesick melancholy was a fashionable pose. (Cf. Hamlet (or rather Polonius's opinion of him) and Orsino at the beginning of Twelfth Night.)

8 The first sentence spoken by Shakespeare's Romeo after he sees Juliet (I, 5, 47):

O she doth teach the torches to burn bright
owes something to Brooke (I, 246):

With torch in hand a comely knight did fetch her forth to dance.
approach much closer to those of Brooke's Romeus. The main difference is that Shakespeare has made Romeo's love for Juliet more convincing than Brooke did and much more precipitant, the latter being in keeping with Shakespeare's shortened time. And Romeo becomes more like his model as the play progresses. It is, of course, true that Shakespeare succeeds in making his character speak poetry, while Brooke fails to do so. Compare, for instance, the following passages:

Brooke, II. 2660–2670:

'Ah, cousin dear, Tybalt, whereso thy restless sprite now be,
With stretchèd hands to thee for mercy now I cry,
For that before thy kindly hour I forced thee to die.
But if with quenched life not quenched be thine ire,
But with revenging lust as yet thy heart be set on fire,
What more amends, or cruel wreak desirest thou
To see on me, than this which here is showed forth to thee now?
Who reft by force of arms from thee thy living breath,
The same with his own hand, thou seest, doth poison himself to death.
And for he causèd thee in tomb too soon to lie,
Too soon also, younger than thou, himself he layeth by.'

Shakespeare, V, 3, 97–101:

Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
O, what more favour can I do to thee
Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain
To sunder his that was thine enemy?
Forgive me, cousin!

Juliet is a sweet and beautiful girl who from the moment when she meets Romeo is wholeheartedly in love with him—thenceforth he dominates her life. She is naturally modest, too; and yet, in spite of this submission to Romeo and this modesty, she has a strong character. Like many of Shakespeare's heroines she does her share of the wooing, asking for information about Romeo when they first meet, and insisting on his declaring his intentions in the balcony scene. She has shown strength of character earlier than this, too, in her quiet insistence to her mother that she doesn't want to marry. When Romeo kills Tybalt she for a moment blames her lover, but is quickly dominated by her love for him. In a sort of epithalamium she looks forward to the consummation of this love with poetic ardor. In spite of some womanly fear, she has the fortitude to take the sleeping potion and at the end to stab herself.

Juliet's character is somewhat closer to the model in Brooke than is Romeo's. The reason for this is partly that Romeo is developed
earlier in the play than is Juliet, for Shakespeare departs from Brooke more in the first scenes of the play than later. Brooke's Juliet is older than Shakespeare's (sixteen instead of fourteen) and much more a woman of the town. In fact, Shakespeare's greatest change in the character lies in his omitting speeches given her by Brooke which are not altogether sweet and modest.

Brooke's Juliet is a strong character. She asks about Romeus at the ball and insists on his declaring his intentions in the balcony scene. Her words in this scene are close to those of Shakespeare's play and again show how a poor poet can inspire a great one. Consider the following passages:

Brooke, ll. 531-544:

'In few unfinâned words your hidden mind unfold,
That as I see your pleasant face, your heart I may behold.
For if you do intend my honour to defile,
In error shall you wander still, as you have done this while;
But if your thought be chaste, and have on virtue ground,
If wedlock be the end and mark which your desire hath found,
Obedience set aside, unto my parents due,
The quarrel eke that long ago between our households grew,
Both me and mine I will all whole to you betake,
And following you whereso you go, my father's house forsake.
But if by wanton love and by unlawful suit
You think in ripest years to pluck my maidenhood's dainty fruit,
You are beguiled; and now your Juliet you beseeks
To cease your suit, and suffer her to live among her likes.'

Shakespeare, II, ll. 142-153:

Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.
If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

(Nurse, [within]: Madam!) I come, anon.—but if thou mean'st not well,
I do beseech thee—

(Nurse, [within]: Madam!) By and by, I come:—
To cease thy suit and leave me to my grief.

The epithalamium speech of Juliet is suggested by Brooke, but Brooke merely observes that to both lovers the day before their mar-

⁹ See below, p. 103.
riage night seemed to pass slowly, and does not put the words into Juliet's mouth. Shakespeare is influenced by Brooke in making Juliet first blame and then forgive Romeo when she hears that he has killed Tybalt, though Brooke makes her blame her lover much more harshly than does Shakespeare. Brooke's representation of Juliet's fear just before she takes the sleeping potion is unusually close to the lines in Shakespeare (Brooke, II. 2361–2402 and Shakespeare, IV, 3, 21 and 30–58). This passage in Shakespeare has often been called Senecan, and it is; but the Senecan influence comes via Brooke.

As has been said, Shakespeare suppressed a certain worldliness which Brooke had given Juliet. Brooke's character is a "wily wench" who leads Paris on to love her after she has been given the sleeping potion and knows that it is therefore safe to do so. She sets forth her "wares" so cunningly that his longing for her is increased (Brooke, II. 2269–2276). Shakespeare's Juliet meets Paris at the same point (IV, 1, 17–43) and treats him modestly. Brooke's Juliet is also less completely in love with Romeo than is Shakespeare's. After the meeting at the ball Brooke represents her as undergoing a long mental struggle between her love for Romeo and her suspicion that he, as a member of the enemy family, is trying to undo her (ll. 367–402).

Old Capulet is one of Shakespeare's greatest creations. He is a headstrong, irascible old man who likes to remember the days of his youth. Though he feels his years, he is proud of the fact that he still has a great deal of physical and mental energy. His readiness to quarrel seems to be a family characteristic, since it is found also in his nephew Tybalt. And the precipitancy which he shares with almost all the other characters in the play goes well with his other qualities.

These qualities are best developed in the scenes in which Old Capulet quarrels with other members of his own family—Tybalt, Juliet, and, to a lesser extent, his wife. He dominates those around him because that is one of the perquisites of age, but the qualities because of which age is respected—self control and good judgment—are no more found in him than in those younger. He wants to have his own way and he insists upon having it, whether it be a question of marrying off his daughter, fighting with the Montagues, or staying up late. The subtlest bit of Shakespeare's delineation is in the scene at the ball when he is quarreling with Tybalt, for which there is no
source in Brooke. Here he is taking the side of peace and harmony, but in doing so he shows as little equanimity and self control as when he is flourishing his sword in the street fight.

One occasion Old Capulet does speak with dignity and gravity. This is in the scene in which he replies to Paris’s first request for Juliet’s hand. The old man explains quite sensibly that Juliet is too young for marriage as yet and that it is important for Paris to win her love if the marriage is to be successful. But his discretion here merely makes Capulet seem all the more wilful and capricious later when he turns against this decision and rules that Juliet must marry Paris and must do so at once. This contrast is a device that Shakespeare uses often—with especial effectiveness in the character of Hamlet. Old Capulet’s senile delight in the dancing and the merry-making at the ball and in the preparation of the marriage banquet, to observe which he insists on staying up all night, are quite in keeping with his other actions.

Less of this character came from the source than of the characters already discussed. But one passage in Brooke suggested the old man’s most important trait, and, as we shall see, Shakespeare enlarged on this suggestion and added to it. The passage that Shakespeare used is ll. 1961–1982 of Brooke:

Such care thy mother had, so dear thou wert to me,
That I with long and earnest suit provided have for thee
One of the greatest lords that wones about this town,
And for his many virtues’ sake a man of great renown.
Of whom both thou and I unworthy are too much,
So rich ere long he shall be left, his father’s wealth is such,
Such is the nobleness and honour of the race
From whence his father came: and yet, thou playest in this case
The dainty fool, and stubborn girl; for want of skill
Thou dost refuse thy offered weal, and disobey my will.
Even by His strength I swear, that first did give me life,
And gave me in my youth the strength to get thee on my wife,
Unless by Wednesday next thou bend as I am bent,
And at our castle called Freetown thou freely do assent
To County Paris’ suit, and promise to agree

10 Brooke merely says (ll. 183–188):

The Capulets disdain the presence of their foe,
Yet they suppress their stirréd ire, the cause I do not know:
Perhaps t’offend their guests the courteous knights are loth,
Perhaps they stay from sharp revenge, dreading the Prince’s wroth.
Perhaps for that they shamed to exercise their rage
Within their house, ’gainst one alone, and him of tender age.

Brooke does not even mention Capulet and Tybalt here.
To whatsoever then shall pass ’twixt him, my wife, and me,
Not only will I give all that I have away
From thee, to those that shall me love, me honour, and obey,
But also to so close and to so hard a gaol
I shall thee wed, for all thy life, that sure thou shalt not fail
A thousand times a day to wish for sudden death,
And curse the day and hour when first thy lungs did give thee breath.

Shakespeare used this when he came to write III, 5, 142–197.
The part of this passage nearest to the lines I have quoted from Brooke follows:

God’s bread! it makes me mad.
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match’d; and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train’d,
Stuff’d, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion’d as one’s thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune’s tender,
To answer, “I’ll not wed,” “I cannot love,”
“I am too young,” “I pray you, pardon me.”
But, an you will not wed, I’ll pardon you:
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me:
Look to’t, think on’t, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend;
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I’ll ne’er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good.
Trust to’t, bethink you; I’ll not be forsworn.

There is no doubt about the positive, direct influence; and yet
could two similar passages be more different? It is hard to under-
stand how a man who was able to write the vigorous, completely con-
vincing, living speech that Shakespeare created here and elsewhere
could have had the patience to become acquainted with Brooke’s arti-
ficial, tautological, undramatic, sing-song verse.

The irascibility and lack of self control which Capulet exhibits in
this scene were introduced by Shakespeare into Capulet’s character
elsewhere. Especially striking is the scene in which Capulet scolds
Tybalt for his proposal to oust Romeo from the ball, for which there
is no source in Brooke. Shakespeare’s scene in which Capulet replies
to Paris's suit with advice against haste is also absent from Brooke. Brooke represents Paris as making but one request for Juliet's hand and gives us none of Capulet's words on that occasion.

Shakespeare's Friar Laurence is perhaps closer to Brooke's friar than are any of the other characters to their models. His dignity and kindliness and his philosophical disposition are all in the poem, though this latter faculty is less striking there, since Brooke philosophizes so much himself. Shakespeare has followed Brooke particularly closely in the introduction he gives us of the Friar when he is shown gathering flowers and plants for his semi-magical potions and philosophizing about their uses. In fact, most of the Friar's scenes in Shakespeare are about as close to the passages in Brooke as is possible, considering that one is poetic dramatic and the other sing-song rhyme. Shakespeare's improvements on Brooke's friar are in places, however, immense. One of the most striking of them is evident in the scene in which Romeo first reveals to Friar Laurence the change of his affections from Rosaline to Juliet. Brooke says (II. 597–600):

A thousand doubts and mo in th'old man's head arose,
A thousand dangers like to come the old man doth disclose,
And from the spousal rites he redeth him refrain
Perhaps he shall be bet advised within a week or twain.

Friar Laurence is much more human in his reaction, bursting out with the energetic lines beginning (II, 3, 65):

Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!

Then, too, Shakespeare shows none of Brooke's embarrassment at the fact that the friar is Catholic. Brooke makes him all in all a good man, but he tells us that when he was younger he had secreted women in his cell (I. 1273) and he evidently feels that even this is not sufficient blackening of his character to please his Protestant audience, for in his prose address to the reader he blames Romeus and Juliet for "conferring their principal counsels with ... superstitious friars (the natural fit instruments of unchastity) ... [and] using auricular confession, the key of whoredom and treason." It sounds as if Brooke, realizing that he has represented a Catholic as being a good man, is making tardy amends. It is worth noting, too, that Brooke's friar apologizes for his botanizing and admits that the science is
“against the laws of man.” Shakespeare wholly approves of the friar.  

Friar Laurence’s long explanation at the end of the play of how the deaths of Romeo and Juliet came about is particularly close to the poem (Brooke, ll. 2915–2970 and Shakespeare, V, 3, 231–266). Here Shakespeare’s improvement on Brooke is less striking than in the earlier parts of the play. In fact, in many of his plays Shakespeare shows more originality toward the beginning than later. This, I suppose, should give comfort to the Shakespeare skeptics, for it indicates that he grew tired as well as other men.

The Nurse is a foolish, talkative, vulgar woman. She is an emotional creature whose interest in Juliet has endeared her to the Capulet family, and they allow her a freedom of speech not enjoyed by the other servants. When the question of Juliet’s marriage is first brought up, she is made one of the family council and talks more than the wiser ones of the group. This same presumption is revealed by the Nurse throughout the play, especially when she scolds old Capulet for staying up late to help prepare for Juliet’s marriage to Paris; and after the discovery that Juliet is apparently dead, when she takes a part in the laments of the family. Her talkativeness and her vulgarity cause her to dwell on the physical aspects of married love. A more basic vulgarity in her character appears when, after Romeo’s banishment, she advises Juliet to forget him and marry Paris.

The main outlines of the Nurse’s character are from Brooke. Brooke makes her tell Romeo how she suckled Juliet in a “tedious long discourse” (ll. 652–66), and this passage apparently created the Nurse for Shakespeare. Not only does he enlarge on the passage itself, but from here on he develops the character in the spirit of this speech. Brooke’s nurse is not well unified. After this excellent opening he at times makes her too philosophical, that is, too much like himself. For example, when in Brooke’s poem the friar gives Romeus the admonitory sermon against giving in to depressing thoughts about his banishment, the nurse has already paralleled this discourse with a similar one to Juliet (Brooke, ll. 1205–1246 and 1353–1480). It is evident that Brooke is carefully arranging this effect, for he says at the end of the two speeches (ll. 1511–1512):

11 When Brooke’s friar explains the deaths of Romeus and Juliet at the end of the poem, he again admits that his delving in science is a sin (ll. 2934–9958). Shakespeare omits this.

12 This contrast might very well be used by those who, like J. Dover Wilson, think that Shakespeare himself was a Catholic. In 1562, however, it was more necessary to avoid the danger of seeming Catholic than it was in 1594.
The old man's words have filled with joy our Romeus' breast
And eke the old wife's talk has set our Juliet's heart at rest.

At one point in this speech the Nurse declares that if Juliet dies she will kill herself, and at the end of the poem Brooke dignifies her further by having her banished from Verona for her part in the tragedy.

In spite of this serious element in Brooke's character, however, it is in most of the poem a model for Shakespeare. Shakespeare shows Brooke's influence in the Nurse's conversation with Romeo in which they arrange for the rope ladder to be hung from Juliet's window (Brooke, ll. 653–660 and Shakespeare, II, 4; 216–266). The two passages are not so close as some of the others I have cited, but their spirit is the same. And the next scene in which the Nurse toys with Juliet by withholding the news about Romeo is also close to Brooke (Brooke, ll. 675–688 and Shakespeare, II, 5, 38–46). The indecency of the Nurse's language is suggested by Brooke, though Shakespeare does give us new instances of it. Finally, the Nurse's callous advice to Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris is very close to Brooke (Brooke, II. 2297–2304 and Shakespeare, III, 5, 215–227). Several of her speeches are, however, not even suggested by Brooke, the most interesting addition being her long explanation to the Capulet family of how she remembers exactly how old Juliet is (I, 3, 15 ff.), her mystified irritation at Mercutio's taunts (II, 4, 110 ff.), and her ridiculous attempt to imitate Lady Capulet's lament when Juliet is found apparently dead (IV, 5, 49–54).

IV

As G. G. Gervinus pointed out in 1850, Shakespeare has achieved an unusually poetic atmosphere in Romeo and Juliet. He has done this, not merely by using poetic figures of speech, which are here in extraordinary abundance, but also by introducing more highly developed conventional poetic forms into the dialogue. A careful study reveals the fact that this lyricism is influenced by Brooke. This seems surprising in view of the clumsiness and ineffectiveness of Brooke's poem. We have seen, however, that Shakespeare knew the poem well, and when we find in Shakespeare's play a poetic figure of speech or a poetic device like one of Brooke's it seems almost certain that it was imitated from him, in spite of the inevitable improvement.

One of the conventional lyrical passages of Shakespeare's play mentioned by Gervinus is the soliloquy which Juliet speaks when she

is waiting for Romeo to join her so that they can consummate their marriage (III, 2, 1 ff.):

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Toward Phoebus' lodging: such a waggoner
As Phaethon would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.

Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

As Gervinus observed, this is really an epithalamium, and it is therefore influenced by all the poets who developed the conventions of that poetic form. But the figures of speech are strongly influenced by Brooke. Consider the following:

II. 821–826:
How long these lovers thought the lasting of the day
Let other judge that wonted are like passions to assay:
For my part, I do guess each hour seems twenty year:
So that I deem, if they might have, as of Alcume we hear,
The sun bound to their will, if they the heavens might guide,
Black shade of night and doubled dark should straight all over hide.

II. 227–228:
He in her sight did seem to pass the rest as far
As Phoebus' shining beams do pass the brightness of a star.

II. 836–838:
To light the waxen quariers, the ancient nurse is pressed,
Which Juliet had before prepared to be light,
That she at pleasure might behold her husband's beauty bright.

Shakespeare's improvement is great, but he owes Brooke a poetic debt. Consider also the following:

14 P. A. Daniel (op. cit.) quotes two passages (cited by Malone) which also influenced Shakespeare here, but does not refer to the lines I have cited from Brooke, nor does Munro. The passages observed by Malone and Daniel are from Marlowe's Edward II and Barnabe Riche's "Historie of Apolonius and Silla" in his Farewell to the Military Profession. The passages follow:

Edward II:
Gallop apace bright Phoebus through the sky.
"Apolonius and Silla":
The day to his seeming passed away so slowly that he had thought the stately steeds had been tired that drawe the chariot of the Sunne.... and wished that Phaeton had been there with his whip.
Shakespeare must have remembered these words, but the influence of Brooke's lines is more important.
Shakespeare, II, 2, 2-3:
But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!

Brooke, I. 1726:
For each of them to other is as to the world the sun.

Shakespeare, II, 2, 23:
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand . . .

Brooke, I. 518:
In window on her leaning arm her weary head doth rest . . .

Shakespeare, II, 2, 75:
I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes . . .

Brooke, II. 457-458:
But when on earth the Night her mantle black hath spread,
Well armed he walketh forth alone, ne dreadful foes doth dread.

Shakespeare, III, 3, 109-113:
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!

Brooke, II. 1353-1358:
'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 outhased,
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 breast.'

Shakespeare, III, 5, 60-64:
O fortune, fortune! all men call thee fickle:
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him
That is renown'd for faith? Be fickle, fortune;
For then, I hope thou wilt not keep him long,
But send him back.

Brooke, II. 1667-1668:
For Fortune changeth more than fickle fantasy;
In nothing Fortune constant is save in unconstancy.

There are two poetic passages in Shakespeare's play which bear a slightly different relationship to their sources. They are not so close to Brooke as are the examples that have been given, and yet they show his influence. Consider the following:
Shakespeare, II, 4, 204–208:
Within this hour my man shall be with thee,
And bring thee cords made like a tackleed stair;
Which to the high top-gallant of my joy
Must be my convoy in the secret night.

Brooke, II. 801–804:
The seas are now appeased, and thou, by happy star,
Art come in sight of quiet haven; and, now the wrackful bar
Is hid with swelling tide, boldly thou may'st resort
Unto thy wedded lady's bed, thy long desired port.

Shakespeare has improved Brooke by changing the figure of sailing to one of mounting the rigging of the ship—this being more closely connected with the idea of climbing to Juliet's window. And yet the fact that Brooke's figure is of a ship and the emotional tone of both passages indicate, I think, that Brooke influenced Shakespeare. Consider also the following:

Shakespeare, II, 4, 13–17:
Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead... the very pin
Of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft. . . .

Brooke, II. 229–234:
In wait lay warlike Love with golden bow and shaft,
And to his ear with steady hand and bowstring up he raft.
Till now she had escaped his sharp inflaming dart,
Till now he listed not assault her young and tender heart.
His whetted arrow loosed, so touched her to the quick,
That through the eye it strake the heart, and there the head did stick.

Shakespeare has taken Brooke's comment on Juliet and put it into the mouth of Mercutio when he is discoursing on Romeo, and it is, of course, immensely improved. Observe, however, that what Shakespeare got from Brooke was not merely the idea that a lover is shot by Cupid's dart (this could have come from a thousand sources) but the idea of describing Cupid with a bit of realistic detail—as if he were a modern archer. Brooke speaks of Cupid's pulling back the bowstring "to his ear" and Shakespeare refers to the "pin" of Romeo's heart and to Cupid's "butt-shaft." It is a bit of Brooke's childish matter-of-factness which Shakespeare has made into one of Mercutio's jokes.

As has been said, Shakespeare's greatest changes in his source are found in the first three acts of the play. Toward the end he relied much more on Brooke, and this can be shown by a series of quotations from Act IV together with their parallels from Brooke:
Shakespeare, IV, 1, 94-101:
And this distilling liquor drink thou off
When presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour; for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease;
No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest;
The roses on thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To paly ashes, thy eyes' windows fall,
Like death when he shuts up the day of life. . .

Brooke, ll. 2152-2157:
Then drink it off, and thou shalt feel throughout each vein and limb
A pleasant slumber slide, and quite dispread at length
On all thy parts, from every part reave all thy kindly strength;
Withouten moving thus thy idle parts shall rest,
No pulse shall go, ne heart beat once within thy hollow breast,
But thou shalt lie as she that dieth in a trance . . .

Shakespeare, IV, 1, 119-120:
If no inconstant toy, nor womanish fear,
Abate thy valour in the acting it . . .

Brooke, ll. 2145-2146:
Cast off from thee at once the weed of womanish dread
With manly courage arm thyself from heel unto the head . . .

Shakespeare, IV, 3, 1-4:
Ay, those attires are best; but, gentle nurse,
I pray thee, leave me to myself tonight;
For I have need of many orisons
To move the heavens to smile upon my state,

Brooke, ll. 2325-2331:
'Dear friend,' quoth she, 'you know tomorrow is the day
Of new contract; wherefore, this night, my purpose is to pray
Unto the heavenly minds that dwell above the skies,
And order all the course of things, as they can best devise,
That they so smile upon the doings of tomorrow,
That all the remnant of my life may be exempt from sorrow:
Wherefore, I pray you, leave me here alone this night . . .'

Shakespeare, IV, 3, 30-50:
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!
Shall I not then be stifled in the vault,
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?
Or, if I live, is it not very like,
The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
Where, for this many hundred years, the bones
Of all my buried ancestors are pack'd;
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies festering in his shroud; where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort:
Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
So early waking, what with loathsome smells
And shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad:
O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environed with all these hideous fears?

Brooke, ll. 2370–2388:

'Or how shall I that always have in so fresh air been bred,
Endure the loathsome stink of such an heaped store
Of carcasses not yet consumed, and bones that long before
Intombed were, where I my sleeping-place shall have,
Where all my ancestors do rest, my kindred's common grave?
Shall not the friar and my Romeus, when they come,
Find me, if I awake before, y-stifled in the tomb?'

And whilst she in these thoughts doth dwell somewhat too long,
The force of her imagining anon did wax so strong,
That she surmised she saw, out of the hollow vault,
A grisly thing to look upon, the carcasse of Tybalt;
Right in the selfsame sort that she few days before
Had seen him in his blood embued, to death eke wounded sore.
And then when she again within herself had weighed
That quick she should be buried there, and by his side be laid,
All comfortless, for she shall living fere have none,
But many a rotten carcasse, and full many a naked bone;
Her dainty tender parts 'gan shiver all for dread,
Her golden hairs did stand upright upon her chillish head.

Shakespeare, IV, 5, 1–7:

Mistress! what, mistress! Juliet!—Fast, I warrant her, she:
Why lamb! why lady! fie, you slug-a-bed!
Why, love, I say, madam! sweetheart! why, bride!
What, not a word? You take your pennyworths now;
Sleep for a week; for the next night, I warrant,
The County Paris hath set up his rest
That you shall rest but little. God forgive me!

Brooke, ll. 2407–2410:

First softly did she call, then louder thus did cry:
'Lady, you sleep too long; the earl will raise you by and by!'
But, well away, in vain unto the deaf she calls,
She thinks she speaks to Juliet, but speaketh to the walls.
Shakespeare, IV, 5, 84–90:

All things that we ordainéd festival,
Turn from their office to black funeral;
Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change,
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse,
And all things change them to the contrary.

Brooke, II. 2507–2514:

Now is the parents’ mirth quite changed into moan,
And now to sorrow is returned the joy of every one;
And now the wedding weeds for mourning weeds they change,
And Hymene into a dirge;—alas! it seemeth strange:
Instead of marriage gloves, now funeral gloves they have,
And whom they should see married, they follow to the grave.
The feast that should have been of pleasure and of joy,
Hath every dish and cup filled full of sorrow and annoy.

The superiority of Shakespeare lies largely in the dignity of blank verse as compared with Poulter’s measure, and the advantages of compression as compared with undisciplined loquacity. This last is, of course, more important than the verse form. But Shakespeare does not merely leave out Brooke’s unnecessary detail; he also adds significant detail. Brooke, for example, tells us that Juliet dreads being buried with the bloody corpse of Tybalt and dwells on the horror of this fact for several lines. Shakespeare says much more in a line and a half:

Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth
Lies festering in his shroud. . . .

V

After an examination has been made of the relationship between Shakespeare’s play and Brooke’s poem, it seems unlikely that Shakespeare had any other important source such as the old play referred to in Brooke’s preface. Most of Shakespeare’s scenes are clearly based on Brooke’s poem. Moreover, some of Shakespeare’s additions, such as Old Capulet’s quarrel with Tybalt and the scene in which preparations are being made for the wedding banquet, are suggested by lines in Brooke. At another point Shakespeare reveals even more clearly that his source was Brooke’s poem and not one of the other known versions of the story. This is in the Friar’s explanation to Juliet of what will happen after she drinks the potion in IV, 1, 109–112:
Then as the manner of our country is,
In thy best robes uncover'd on the bier
Thou shalt be borne to that same ancient vault
Where all the kindred of the Capulets lie.

It seems odd that Shakespeare should represent the Friar as explaining to Juliet the customs of her own country. The reason Shakespeare does so is that he is carelessly adapting the lines in which Brooke makes this explanation of Italian customs to the English reader (ll. 2523–2525):

Another use there is, that whosoever dies,
Borne to their church with open face upon the bier he lies.

VI

One important way in which Shakespeare has shown his independence of Brooke is in his attitude toward the tragic fact. That is, he has made the play a tragedy of character, rather than one of fate as it was in Brooke. Romeo’s tragic flaw is precipitancy, and nearly all the other characters of the play (Benvolio is an exception!) have the same failing. Of course, fate enters into the tragedy, too, and Shakespeare makes this clear, not only by calling Romeo and Juliet “star-crossed lovers” in the first chorus, but also by having Romeo express misgivings just before he first sees Juliet (I, 4, 107–109):

... my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night’s revels ...

This, however, does not distinguish Romeo and Juliet from Shakespeare’s other tragedies. Shakespeare’s catastrophes always result

15 “Precipitancy” is Gervinus’ word. He says also (op. cit., p. 228): “We cannot accuse any blind accident of fate, nor can we blame any arbitrary exercise of punishment on the part of the poet; it is this tumultuous nature alone, in the violence of one happy yet fatal passion, which shatters the helm of its own preservation and exercises justice upon himself. This poet could not let those live who destroyed themselves.”

Gervinus seems to take too little account of fate here, but on the whole his accent on character is well considered. He is less wise, however, in some of his other comments. He overpraises Brooke, for instance, when he speaks (p. 209) about his “power and exuberance.” Moreover, he says of Mercutio (p. 218): “He is a man without culture; coarse, rude, and ugly.”

16 Observe, too, Juliet’s words (III, 5, 54–56):

O God! I have an ill-divining soul:
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb...
from a combination of character and fate. And, as has been often observed, a part of the tragedy lies in the fact that in each drama the hero, strong in many ways, happens to be weak in the one peculiar quality which the situation calls for. Thus Romeo or Othello would have had no difficulty with Hamlet's problem, nor he with theirs.

One clear indication that the tragic flaw in Romeo's character is largely responsible for the tragedy is Friar Laurence's chorus-like comment to Romeo on the situation. He makes the comment just before he marries the two lovers (II, 6, 9-11):

These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumphs die, like fire and powder
Which as they kiss consume.

This precipitancy is not found in Brooke's Romeus. In Brooke many days pass between the meeting of Romeo and Juliet at the ball and the balcony scene, and it is several months after their marriage that Romeo kills Tybalt. Moreover, Brooke curses again and again the cruel chance that brought the deaths of his lovers. He mentions Dame Fortune and the Three Fates, in fact, almost as often as any of the other characters in the poem.