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A more likely outcome: a research poem

Abstract:

In this text, the plot of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been recrafted as a poem incorporating the advice given to Italian princes by Niccolò Machiavelli, the most infamous political theorist of the 16th century. Shakespeare's 1597 *Romeo and Juliet* play was based on an Italian tale, told and retold by Italian writers, the most important of whom were Masuccio Salernitano (born in 1410), Luigi da Porto (born in 1485) and Matteo Bandello (born in 1480). Bandello's novellas were translated into French by Pierre Boaistuau (born in 1517) and François de Belleforest (born in 1530). These French translations, in turn, were translated into English by William Painter (born 1540) and Arthur Brooke (born 1563). Literary critics agree that the primary source of inspiration for Shakespeare's play was Brooke's narrative poem, titled *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*, which condemns the young lovers for neglecting the authority of their parents. By taking a poetic leap, using fragments, insights and variations of the original Italian novellas and their translations, the poem will attempt to unveil the Italian flavour of the plot, lost behind all those rewritings, reinterpretations and well-intended but nefarious distortions which embellished the tale beyond recognition. Adding a layer of realpolitik inspired by the writings of Machiavelli, the raw political moral of the story will become apparent, almost.

Biographical note:

Daniel Martín teaches Spanish in the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at the ANU. Daniel's non-traditional research output includes nine books, scripts for three films, two radio plays and four theatre plays, as well as shorter works published in literary and science fiction magazines and anthologies in Argentina, Spain, Colombia, Venezuela, Italy and Australia. His latest novel is *Piratas Genéticos*. Daniel's traditional research output includes papers on the Spanish-speaking community in Australia, the politics of language teaching in Australia, the use of technology in language teaching, and student attrition and retention in language studies. His latest book is *The Doubters' Dilemma*.

Keywords:

Romeo and Juliet – Shakespeare's sources – Machiavelli – translation – recrafting

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*Politics have no relation
to morals*

Niccolò Machiavelli

The Monticoli & Capelletti families
were categorically opposed
to their requited love
because they enjoyed their feuds, quarrels and vendettas
now four generations strong
more than airy-fairy tales of romantic devotion.
In fact, in spite of its inordinate woes
this is universally considered
one of the most famous love stories of all time –
until, of course, you read the small print,
or take into account
the political point of view
of the town's Prince,
Bartolomeo della Scalla,
lord of Verona,
who, because of his magnificence and hospitality
was called the “great Lombard”
by Dante Alighieri in his *Paradiso*.

The youngsters fell in love at very first sight
in a masquerade ball Romeus had gatecrashed,
where they (accidentally) kissed.
Giulietta confessed her forbidden love for him to the stars;
Romeus overheard her, and unmasked himself
revealing the extent of his crushing ardour.
They (accidentally) exchanged vows of passionate love
on her balcony, under the starry night.

An imprudent friar

named Lorenzo da Reggio,
confessor to both feuding houses,
(accidentally) married them in secret the next day;
and a foolish nurse allowed them
to consummate the forbidden marriage
spending a furtive but glorious night together,
even whilst Romeus had (accidentally) killed Giulietta's cousin
in a duel,
stirring a further cycle of gruesome vendettas
condemned by Prince Bartolomeo,
who exiled Romeus from the town
to prevent further bloodshed.

Giulietta's family
blessedly ignorant of the aforementioned (accidental) events,
but smelling a rat,
compelled her to marry someone else
on the spot.

She, in desperation, drank a narcotic potion
provided by Lorenzo, the negligent friar,
which for a time would cause her to appear dead.

Romeus broke the terms of his exile,
went clandestinely to her crypt,
and, believing her to be lost to the world and to him,
dutifully drank cheap poison
to find her in paradise, purgatory
or the inferno.

Giulietta woke up,
realised that his tender dead body was still warm,
and tried to snatch the rest of the venom
from his earnest lips.

There was, unfortunately,
not enough poison left to do the job,

so she took his dagger and mercilessly thrust it
through her own ardent heart
to immediately join him in paradise, purgatory
or the inferno
beyond the reach of all earthy obstacles
to their pristine and undying love.

The Monticoli & Capelletti families,
summarily summoned by Prince Barlolomeo
who urged them, with the menacing roars
of a mighty lion,
to put an end to their unending grudges,
graciously considered to reconcile at the funerals
conducted by Lorenzo da Reggio,
the very same irresponsible friar
who fired the lovers' impatient passion.
However, behind the scenes,
the Prince promptly ensured
that the star-crossed lovers
were (accidentally) placed
on opposite sides
of the netherworld.

The foxy Prince, in addition,
promptly fuelled the traditional discord
between the feuding families
to avoid a syrupy reconciliation
which would had put his tenuous control
over the town of Verona
in serious jeopardy.

In the court, the market and the church
in heaven, in limbo
and in hell

Prince Bartolomeo had, in fact,
all the necessary connections
to prevent the quarrels, battles and vendettas
between the Monticoli & Capelletti families,
now four generations strong,
being adverted, subverted or diverted
by the (accidental) reckless passion
of two impulsive conceited kids
who did not understand the first thing
about politics.

Research Statement

Research background

Recent scholarship on Shakespeare's theatre has dealt with the influence of Machiavelli, especially in the historic plays (Oseman 2010; Roe 2002; Grady 2002), and also with the influence of Italian political ideas in general (Cracolici 2007; Herbeck 2005). In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, however, the Verona Town Prince behaves according to the 'intermediating' virtues of the statesman prescribed by Cicero in *De Officiis* rather than to the recommendations found in *The Prince*, which proposes to treat political life on its own terms, independent of philosophy, virtue or good intentions (Weinberg 2003; Adams 1968; Remer 2009).

Research contribution

In this text, Shakespeare's plot has been recrafted as a poem incorporating the advice given to Italian princes by Niccolò Machiavelli. It will make use of the rhetorical technique of paradiastole, that is, the dressing up of vice as virtue. The technique was extensively used by Machiavelli in his reframing of Cicero's analogy of the fox and the lion found in Chapter 18 of *The Prince* (Barlow 1999). Paradiastole was also used by Shakespeare in of his historic plays like *Henry VIII*, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* (Struever 1988; Roe 2007).

Research significance

Recrafting the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* as a political story allows recovering some features of the original Italian novellas which was lost in the series of translations extensively studied by Moore (1950), Levenson (1984), Bullough (1957) Law (1929) and Roberts (1902). In particular, the machiavellisation of Prince Bartolomeo della Scalla permits a reframing of the question of love in the afterlife, present in the Italian and French predecessors of the tale, which Shakespeare removed, influenced by the Protestant rejection of the doctrine of Purgatory (Targoff 2012 & 2014; Ranald 1979; Siegel 1961).

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