

## PIERRE BOAISTUAU

In 1559 appeared the first edition of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires tragiques*, a collection of tales selected and adapted from Bandello's *Novelle*, which had been published five years earlier.<sup>1</sup> As his third tale, Boaistuau tells the "Histoire . . . de deux amans dont l'un mourut de venin, l'autre de tristesse."<sup>2</sup> The author, however, makes numerous alterations in the work of Bandello, whose style he dislikes. The result has been a long and oscillating debate over the question of Boaistuau's originality.

According to a view prevalent several decades ago, Boaistuau was an imitator of Luigi da Porto, rather than of Bandello. This theory was vigorously opposed in 1913 by René Sturel,<sup>3</sup> who, while admitting a few unimportant borrowings from Da Porto, believed thoroughly in Boaistuau's originality. According to Sturel, Boaistuau invented not only the famous scene of the apothecary of Mantua, but also the miserable defense which Frere Laurens made before the magistrates.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Sturel felt that Boaistuau gave evidence of powers of psychological analysis when he introduced the scene where Juliet first upbraids her husband in his absence and then condemns her own injustice.<sup>5</sup>

Already a reaction has set in against this high appraisal of Boaistuau's originality. As we have seen, Henri Hauvette demonstrated that the true creator of the apothecary scene was Adrien Sevin.<sup>6</sup> Sevin, it will be recalled, states that Halquadrich purchases from an apothecary a stick of poison four fingers long.

<sup>1</sup> Boaistuau, Pierre. *XVIII Histoires extraictes des oeuvres italiennes de Bandel, et mises en langue françoise . . . Les six premières par Pierre Boisteau, surnommé Launay, natif de Bretagne. Les douze suivantes par Franc. de Belle Forest, Comingeois.* Lyon, 1578. Boaistuau acknowledges much assistance received from his collaborator, Belle Forest. For the date of the first edition, see H. Hauvette, "Une variante française de la légende de Roméo et Juliette," *Revue de littérature comparée*, I, 3 (1921), p. 330, et cetera.

<sup>2</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fos. 37<sup>v</sup>-77<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Sturel, René. "Bandello en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle." *Bulletin italien*, XIII (1913), pp. 210-27 and 331-47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>6</sup> Hauvette, *op. cit.* Cf. Chap. VII, d.

Here Boaistuau's originality consists solely in enlarging as usual on his model, furnishing a somewhat detailed description of the apothecary shop and of its owner. The pharmacy, he says, is so poorly supplied with boxes and other equipment that Rhomeo is encouraged to draw the proprietor aside and offer him five hundred ducats, in exchange for a poison guaranteed to prove fatal in a quarter of an hour. The wretched apothecary, pretending before the other persons present that he is making a legitimate transaction, delivers to Rhomeo a dose of poison, half of which will kill the strongest man alive within an hour.<sup>7</sup> Hauvette says nothing about Boaistuau's feeble psychological analysis. On the other hand, Hauvette observes significantly that the far more original Sevin introduced the idea of the *pundonor*: Burglipha, after the slaying of her brother Bruhachin, begins by calling her lover Halquadrich the greatest traitor in the world. However, her *pundonor* is quickly satisfied, and after a little persuasion by the messenger Bostruch, she is reconciled with her lover, "oubliant l'homicide en son frère." Hauvette might have noted also that in the *dénouement* Boaistuau perhaps follows Sevin in his account of the heroine. Instead of her holding her breath until she is dead, like the Giuliettas of Da Porto and Bandello, Iuliette kills herself with Rhomeo's dagger, much as Burglipha takes half Halquadrich's poison.<sup>8</sup> In the argument placed at the beginning of Boaistuau's *Histoire*, however, Iuliette dies of grief, as in the *Argomento* of Masuccio's Thirty-Third *novella*.

It is my purpose to add a few words to the excellent article of H. Hauvette, and to reopen the question of Boaistuau's literary obligations to Luigi da Porto.

Hauvette, in his discussion of Burglipha's *pundonor*, notes simply that Sevin is a precursor of Corneille. He might have observed also that Sevin with his idea of *pundonor* is the direct source of Boaistuau, and consequently of Shakespeare. Boaistuau's Iuliette has a *pundonor* very similar to that of Sevin's Burglipha. Consequently, when Iuliette first hears of the death of Thibault, she curses Rhomeo because of his "acte si lasche & vituperable," behaving of course in a manner utterly unlike the heroines of Da Porto and Bandello. But for Iuliette, as for Burglipha, the *pundonor* is a thin veneer. A few moments later, Iuliette readily changes her mind without explanation, and curses her "langue

<sup>7</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 69<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 72<sup>r</sup> and 73<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. VII, f.

meurtrière" for criticizing Rhomeo "duquel chacun approuve l'innocence."<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, both Da Porto and Bandello describe a sudden change of heart by Giulietta. The situation, however, is quite different: Giulietta, who has just met Rhomeo, hesitates at first, then decides to marry him. This scene, considerably diluted, is also found in Boaistuau, who thus affords Juliette the luxury of two important and extremely lachrymose *revirements*.<sup>10</sup> He thus completely outdistances his Italian precursors, who never thought of a Chimène-like heroine who detests her lover out of a sense of duty to family. Luigi da Porto, as we have observed, actually omits all reference to any grief by Giulietta for the death of Tebaldo. Clizia's Giulia merely pretends to grieve over the loss of her cousin, and, as we have seen, Bandello's Giulietta behaves in substantially the same manner.<sup>11</sup>

If Boaistuau is indebted to Sevin for the motive of the *pun-donor*, as well as for the apothecary scene, he is under even greater obligations to Luigi da Porto, the most important of which concern the character of Frere Laurens. We have already noted the transformation of Fra Lorenzo by Bandello, including his omission of all references to improper relations between the friar and Romeo, as well as charges of necromancy and of grave robbing leveled against the churchman during a most embarrassing public trial. Boaistuau restores completely the more sinister character depicted by Luigi da Porto. He speaks of the "particuliere amitié" existing between Rhomeo and the friar. The Frere Laurens of Boaistuau acts in a suspicious manner when he is arrested at the vault of the Capellets, and is readily accused of black art and desecration of tombs.<sup>12</sup> Like the Frate Lorenzo of Luigi da Porto, he makes the painful public confession that he has lied—or rather, that he has "eslargi sa conscience,"<sup>13</sup> preferring to place a slight stain upon his soul, rather than permit the young girl to commit suicide and be forever damned. As in the version of Luigi da Porto, his only excuse is his good intentions.

We may recall that René Sturel, while refusing to admit the importance of the influence of Luigi da Porto on Boaistuau, admitted certain slight points of resemblance between the two

<sup>9</sup> Hauvette, *op. cit.*, p. 334. Cf. Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fos. 53-54.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 44<sup>v</sup>-45<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chaps. VIII, g, and IX, s.

<sup>12</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 73<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 75<sup>v</sup>.

authors. Considered separately, these relationships are negligible. But in view of the fact that Boaistuau completely restored the sinister character of Frere Laurens, according to the conception of Luigi da Porto, it becomes necessary to give a new appraisal to the parallels cited by Sturel, of which the following are examples: Boaistuau agrees with Da Porto in having Rhomeo go directly to Saint-François after leaving Iuliette; like Da Porto, he omits the letters written by Rhomeo to Iuliette during his exile. These *petits faits* become now what Hippolyte Taine would have considered very *significatifs*. They are in fact the proof that Boaistuau had before his eyes, at all times, not only Bandello, but also Luigi da Porto.

So far as the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is concerned, the true originality of Boaistuau consists almost exclusively of rather naïve details which he adds to the Italian narratives, frequently for the purpose of rendering his exotic story more plausible to French readers. For instance, he states that the servant Pierre experienced no difficulty in obtaining for his master Rhomeo a rope ladder equipped with two strong hooks at each end, for such contrivances were commonly used in Italy.<sup>14</sup> He explains that Frere Anselme was commissioned by Frere Laurens to carry a message to Mantua, because in Italy the Franciscans regularly have in their monasteries obliging brethren who are accustomed to perform errands in the city.<sup>15</sup>

In numerous instances, Boaistuau added details for realistic effect, just as Bandello himself had done when recasting the work of Luigi da Porto. One or two examples of the author's attempted improvements upon his originals will suffice here: Iuliette receives Rhomeo in a brilliantly lighted bedroom. She is simply dressed, her only finery being a kerchief, which slips down upon her neck, as soon as she spies Rhomeo.<sup>16</sup> Rhomeo, when informed by Pierre of the burial of Iuliette, weeps bitterly. Before leaving the room, he washes his face so that traces of his grief will not be visible.<sup>17</sup>

Boaistuau carries his tendency towards realism into the field of character analysis. He seems to feel that the manners of Bandello's Giulietta are far too independent for a well-bred girl. For this reason, he not only adopts readily the idea of the *pundonor*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 49<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. IX, n.

<sup>15</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 68<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 49<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 69<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Matteo Bandello, *Le Novelle*, Gioachino Brognoligo, ed., "Scrittori d'Italia" series, Bari: Gius. Laterza e figli, 1910, II, p. 400.

introduced by Sevin, but also continues the movement already begun by Clizia for the conventionalization of the heroine. His Juliette listens meekly while her father Antonio invokes the harsh power of life and death which Roman parents exercised over their offspring, and threatens to incarcerate her in the gloomiest of prisons if she fails to marry the man of his choice.<sup>18</sup> Instead of contesting such an arbitrary assertion of authority, she remains humbly on her knees, sobbing.

It is no wonder that such a dutiful daughter greets Rhomeo at the Capellets' ball with a modesty not described by Italian writers. Her voice trembles, not with the passion of love, as in Bandello's *novella*, but with maidenly reticence. When she welcomes Rhomeo, she dares not squeeze his hand amorously, as Luigi da Porto's *Giulietta* had done. Rather she is so overwhelmed that her feelings make her inarticulate.<sup>19</sup>

Such relatively forward heroines as Leonora and Bandello's *Giulietta* had offered the suggestion that their lovers provide themselves with rope ladders, in order to pay clandestine visits. It is not surprising that Boaistuau, more conventionally, makes the mention of such a ladder come from Rhomeo himself.<sup>20</sup>

Another character altered by Boaistuau is the nurse, or confidante, whose classic role seems to grow in importance in proportion to the conventionalization of Juliette. The nurse prepares the nuptial bed for Rhomeo, and consoles Juliette at the time of Thibault's death. For concealing the clandestine marriage from Rhomeo's father,<sup>21</sup> she is banished by the Seigneur Barthelémy de l'Escale.

As for the plot, most of Boaistuau's deviations from Bandello occur in the *dénouement*: Rhomeo expires before Juliette awakens, his death being precipitated by the violence of the effort which he makes to fall upon her body.<sup>22</sup> Frere Laurens, who enters the tomb with Pierre, discovers the fate of Rhomeo. At the same time

<sup>18</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fos. 60<sup>v</sup> and 61<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 42<sup>v</sup>-43<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 49<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. IX, *n.*

<sup>21</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 76<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 71<sup>r</sup>. J. J. Munro says: "Romeo's man and Laurens arrive after Romeo's demise, while Juliet still sleeps, a circumstance which may be due to the influence of Clizia, or to another version of the legend."—Munro, J. J. *Brooke's 'Romeo and Juliet'*. London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Duffield and Co., 1908, p. xxxv. However, Boaistuau here differs materially from Clizia, whose *Giulia* recovers consciousness before Romeo dies (Clizia, "L'infelice Amore de' due fedelissimi amanti Giulia e Romeo scritta in ottava rima da Clizia, nobile veronese ad Ardeo suo," in Alessandro Torri's *Giulietta e Romeo*, Pisa, 1831, IX, 14) and uses almost the exact words of Luigi da Porto's *Giulietta*, who says to Romeo: "Se voi per la mia finta morte morite, e che non debbo io

Juliette awakens. While she grieves over the loss of her lover, Pierre and Frere Laurens depart, frightened by a noise.<sup>23</sup> Pierre is exonerated by the Seigneur Barthelemy de l'Escale because he has faithfully obeyed his master, while Frere Laurens is pardoned in consideration of his former services to the Republic of Verona, as well as of his excellent general reputation.<sup>24</sup> The most noteworthy omission made by Boaistuau is thus the touching farewell scene between the dying lovers, which Luigi da Porto, followed by Bandello, had introduced after the model of the Pyramus and Thisbe story.

It is evident that so far as really essential changes in the story of Romeo and Juliet are concerned, Boaistuau gives evidence of little originality. We may recapitulate his principal borrowings as follows: For the celebrated episode of the apothecary he is indebted to Adrien Sevin, as H. Hauvette demonstrated. From Sevin also comes the idea of the Cornelian honor of the heroine, and perhaps the manner of her suicide. Luigi da Porto furnishes Boaistuau the model of a corrupt priest who maintains compromising relations with Romeo. Luigi da Porto, not Boaistuau, is the first to depict a Frate Lorenzo who is a great liar and is suspected of necromancy.

The one important alteration of the plot by Boaistuau—the omission of the last touching farewell of the hero and heroine—is most unfortunate.

(a) Ah Rhomeo, Rhomeo quand au commencement i'eu accointance de vous, & que ie prestois l'aureille à vos fardees promesses confirmees par tant de iuremens, ie n'eusse iamais creu qu'au lieu de continuer nostre amitié & d'appaiser les miens, vous eussiez cherché l'occasion de la rompre par vn acte si lasche & vituperable, que vostre renommee en demeure à jamais interessee, & moy miserable que ie suis sans confort & espoux: Mais si vous estiez si affamé du sang des Capellets, pourquoy auez vous espargné le mien, lors que par tant de

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per la vostra non finta fare?"—Da Porto, Luigi. "Giulietta e Romeo." Second edition, 1535, reprinted by Cino Chiarini in his *Romeo e Giulietta*, Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906, p. 33. Clizia's Giulia says:

Morrete voi pel finto morir mio,  
E che io non debba uccidermi credete  
Pel vostro morir vero? . . .

—Clizia, *op. cit.*, IV, 15.

The sole possible point of resemblance between the versions of Clizia and Boaistuau is the death of Romeo before the friar's arrival. Bandello, however, says Romeo is *almost* dead before Fra Lorenzo appears.

<sup>23</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 72<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 76<sup>v</sup>-77<sup>r</sup>.

fois & en lieu secret m'avez veuë exposer à la mercy de vos cruelles mains? La victoire que vous auiez euë sur moy ne vous sembloit elle assez glorieuse, si pour la mieux solemniser elle n'estoit couronnee du sang du plus cher de tous mes cousins? Or allez donc desormais ailleurs deceuoir les autres malheureuses comme moy, sans vous trouuer en part ou ie sois, ne sans qu'aucune de vos excuses puisse trouuer lieu en mon endroit. Et ce pendant ie lamenteray le reste de ma triste vie avec tant de larmes, que mon corps espuisé de toute humidité cherchera en brief son refrigere en terre. Et ayant mis fin à ses propos, le coeur luy serra si fort qu'elle ne pouuoit ny plorer ny parler, & demeura du tout immobile, comme si elle eust esté transie, puis estant quelque peu reuenue avec une voix foible disoit: Ah langue meurtriere de l'honneur d'autruy, comme oses tu offenser celuy auquel ses propres ennemis donnent louenge? comment reiectes tu le blasme sur Rhomeo, duquel chacun approuue l'innocence? ou sera desormais son refuge, puisque celle qui d'eust estre l'unique propugnacle & assure rampart de ses malheurs, le poursuit & diffame? Reçoy, reçoy donques Rhomeo la satisfaction de mon ingratitude par le sacrifice que ie te feray de ma propre vie: . . . <sup>25</sup>

(b) Le ieune Rhomeo (comme auons ià dit) des son ieune eage auoit tousiours eu ie ne scay qu'elle particuliere amitié avecques frere Laurens, & luy communiquoit ses secrets.<sup>26</sup>

(c) . . . les gardes de la ville passoient fortuitement par là aupres, lesquels aduisans la clarté en ce tombeau, soupçonnerent incontinent que ce estoient Nicromanciens qui auoient ouuert ce sepulchre, pour abuser des corps morts, & s'en aider en leur art.<sup>27</sup>

(d) . . . toutesfois pressé d'importunité & de pitié, & craignant que Iuliette exercest cruauté contre elle mesme, il auoit eslargi sa conscience, & mieux aimé donner quelque legiere atainte à son ame que de souffrir que ceste ieune Damoiselle defeit son corps & meist son ame en peril.<sup>28</sup>

(e) . . . & luy commanda de recouurer promptement vne eschelle de cordes avec deux fors crochets de fer, attachez au deux bouts, ce qu'il fait aisement, par ce que elles sont fort frequentes en Italie.<sup>29</sup>

(f) Et pour ce que la coustume d'Italie est que les Cordeliers doiuent prendre vn compaignon à leur conuent pour aller faire leurs affaires par ville.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 53<sup>v</sup>, 54<sup>r</sup>, and 54<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Chap. VII, *a* and *b*.

<sup>26</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 47<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. VI, *g*.

<sup>27</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 73<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. VI, *x*.

<sup>28</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fos. 75<sup>v</sup>-76<sup>v</sup>. Luigi da Porto has: "Perdonatemi, signor mio, se a voi la bugia di quel che mi richiedeste, io dissi; chè ciò non feci per malizia nè per guadagno alcuno, ma per seruire la promessa fede a due miseri amanti di me data."—Da Porto, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 49<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Chap. IX, *n*.

<sup>30</sup> Boaistuau, *op. cit.*, fo. 68<sup>r</sup>.

(g) . . . sans aucun peril il entra en la chambre, laquelle estoit aussi claire que le jour à cause de trois mortiers de cire vierge que Iuliette auoit fait allumer pour mieux contempler son Rhomeo. Iuliette de sa part pour toute pareure seulement de son couurechef s'estoit coiffée de nuict, laquelle incontinent qu'elle l'aperceut se brancha à son col.<sup>31</sup>

(h) A raison dequoy apres s'estre lauë la face de peur qu'on cogneust son deuill il part de sa chambre.<sup>32</sup>

(i) Vien ça ingrata & desobeissante fille, as tu desia mis en oubly ce que tant de fois as ouy racompter à ma table, de la puissance que mes anciens peres Romains auoient sur leurs enfans? ausquels il n'estoit pas seulement loisible de les vendre, engager & alier (en leur necessité) comme il leur plaisoit, mais qui plus est, ils auoient entiere puissance de mort & de vie sur eux. De quels fers, de quels tourments, de quels liens te chastiroient ces bons peres, s'ils estoient resuscitez? & s'ils voioient l'ingratitude, felonnie & desobeissance de laquelle tu vses enuers ton pere, lequel avecques maintes prieres & requestes t'a pourueue de l'vn des plus grands seigneurs de ceste prouince, des mieux renommez en toutes especes de vertus, duquel toy & moy sommes indignes, tant pour les grands biens (ausquels il est appellé) comme pour la grandeur & generosité de sa maison de laquelle il est issu: & neantmoins tu fais la delicate, & rebelle; & veux contreuenir à mon vouloir.<sup>33</sup>

(j) . . . elle . . . se tourna vers luy, & la voix tremblante avec vne honte virginale entremeslee d'vne pudicité, luy dist: Benoiste soit l'heure de vostre venue, à mon costé, puis pensant acheuer le reste, amour luy serra tellement la bouche qu'elle ne peut acheuer son propos.<sup>34</sup>

(k) Puis saisi d'vne douleur desesperée se laissa tomber sur le corps de Iuliette de telle vehemence, que le coeur attenué de trop grand tourment, ne pouuant porter vn si dur & dernier effort, demeura abandonné de tous les sens & vertus naturelles: en facon que le siege de l'ame luy faillit à l'instant, & demeura roide estendue.<sup>35</sup>

(l) Et comme elle pensoit continuer ses plainctes, Pierre aduertit frere Laurens, qu'il entendoit vn bruit pres de la citadelle, duquel intimidez, ils s'esloignerent promptement, craignans estre surpris.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 49<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Boaiustauu, *op. cit.*, fo. 69<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Bandello, Matteo, *Le Novelle*, Gioachino Brognoligo, ed., "Scrittori d'Italia" series, Bari: Gius. Laterza e figli, 1910, II, p. 400.

<sup>33</sup> Boaiustauu, *op. cit.*, fos. 60<sup>v</sup>-61<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 42<sup>v</sup>-43<sup>r</sup>. Bandello writes: "Giulietta . . . con lieto viso alquanto verso lui rivotata, con tremante voce gli disse:—Benedetta sia la venuta vostra a lato a me! —e così dicendo amorosamente gli strinse la mano."—Bandello, *op. cit.*, II, p. 375.

<sup>35</sup> Boaiustauu, *op. cit.*, fo. 71<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 72<sup>v</sup>.