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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 1

Romeo and Juliet

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi and Emanuel Stelzer



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Italian Dance Tradition and Translation in *Romeo and Juliet*: from Narrative Sources to Shakespeare

FABIO CIAMBELLA

Abstract

This article examines the intertextuality concerning the ball scene in *Romeo and Juliet*'s Italian and French narrative sources, comparing them with the Shakespearean text, with a double aim. On the one hand, I will try to understand how the carnivalesque Italian masked ball, or masquerade, present in the whole intertextual chain (from Da Porto to Shakespeare), acquires a new significance when taken onstage in late-sixteenth-century England. On the other hand, the omission of the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* (Torch or Bonnet Dance), understood as a dance-within-the-masque moment in the sources, and its resemanticisation through the persistence of the symbolism of the torch/light in Shakespeare's tragedy, will be analysed. In both cases, I will argue, the cultural and semantic shift of the dances performed or removed is a direct consequence of their de-Mediterraneanisation (Morris 2003) and change of chronotopic coordinates. My contrastive analysis has been facilitated by the SENS archive (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination) developed at the University of Verona (<https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/>) and carried out by treating the main narrative sources, or sources proximate, and their target text as a trilingual parallel corpus. Specific parts of text, verses and scenes have been compared and contrasted thanks to the text(ual) segmentation of each text available on the website.

KEYWORDS: Shakespearean narrative sources; *Romeo and Juliet*; dance; Torch Dance

1. Introduction

Many scholars have focused on the transcultural confluences that helped shape English dances in 1500s and 1600s drama (see, among others, Brissenden 1981; Howard 1998; Ciambella 2017; 2021), but few have considered the intertextual connections between plays and their sources and how dance scenes are translated, adapted, and/or borrowed from one culture to another, i.e., from Italy to England via France, in the case analysed here. This article examines intertextuality concerning the ball scene in *Romeo and Juliet*'s Italian and French narrative¹ sources, comparing them with the Shakespearean text, with a double aim. On the one hand, I will try to understand how the carnivalesque Italian masked ball or masquerade,² present in the whole intertextual chain (from Da Porto to Shakespeare), acquires a new significance when taken onstage in late-sixteenth-century England. On the other hand, the omission of the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* (Torch or Bonnet Dance),³ understood as a dance-within-the-masque moment

1 It is worth clarifying that the adjective 'narrative' is meant here in its broad, primary sense of "[t]hat narrates or recounts, that tells a story; of or concerned with narration; having the character or form of narration" (*OED*, adj. 1.a). For this reason, Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Iuliet* is also considered a narrative source of Shakespeare's tragedy, since it is a narrative poem.

2 As discussed in section 2 in greater detail, it is hard to expect terminological accuracy in this case because of different factors such as lacunae in sixteenth-century English accounts of masked balls, the late lexicalisation of such nouns as masque, masquerade, etc. In this article, the terms 'masked ball' and 'masquerade' are used interchangeably, but they will be distinguished from 'masque', understood as an out-and-out theatrical genre, which was fully developed with the Stuarts, during the Jacobean and Caroline period. As stated in the *OED*, the noun 'masque' indicated both a masked ball and a theatrical genre in the late sixteenth century; hence, to avoid confusion, I will not use it to indicate the feast at the Capulets' house.

3 Whereas the Torch Dance was quite widespread in the Renaissance, there is no mention in late-medieval or early modern England of the Bonnet Dance. The phrase is used in this article only as a possible – yet not historically confirmed – translation of the Italian *ballo del cappello*, only to recall another famous British dance performed with hats, i.e., the Scots Bonnet Dance.

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My contrastive analysis has been facilitated by the SENS archive (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination) developed at the University of Verona (<https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/>) and carried out by treating the main narrative sources, or sources proximate,⁴ and their target text as a trilingual parallel corpus. Specific parts of text, verses and scenes have been compared and contrasted thanks to the text(ual) segmentation⁵ of each text available on the website. Therefore, the following texts have been

4 Miola's taxonomy of intertextuality is adopted here. In his well-known book chapter entitled "Seven Types of Intertextuality" (see *infra* for bibliographical detail), Miola identifies three categories and seven types of intertextuality, according to three parameters: "first, the degree to which the trace of an earlier text is tagged by verbal echo; second, the degree to which its effect relies on audience recognition; third, the degree to which the appropriation is eristic" (2004, 13). This article considers *Romeo and Juliet's* Italian and French "sources proximate", belonging to Miola's fourth type, first category of intertextuality: "the most familiar and frequently studied kind of intertextuality . . . The source functions as the book on-the-desk; the author honors, reshapes, steals, ransacks, and plunders. The dynamics include copying, paraphrase, compression, conflation, expansion, omission, innovation, transference, and contradiction" (19). Hypotexts, hypertexts and analogues, as indicated in *Romeo and Juliet's* page (<https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/>), have not been taken into consideration, since it is highly improbable that Shakespeare would have read those texts. See Bigliuzzi 2018 for a thorough analysis of *Romeo and Juliet's* main sources and their intertextual relations.

5 Text(ual) segmentation is, very generically speaking, "a method of splitting a document into smaller parts, which are usually called segments . . . Each segment has its relevant meaning" (Pak and Teh 2018, 167). In this study, text segmentation has been used to compare parts of different texts with the same topic or focus, for instance the dance scene at the Capulets' house. For further details about textual segmentation, see the criteria page on the SENS archive website (<https://sens.skene.univr.it/about/criteria/>).

analysed, in addition to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, here considered as the target text:

- Luigi Da Porto's *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti* (two editions: 1530-31; 1539).
- Matteo Bandello's *Novella IX*, second volume of *Novelle* (1554).
- Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires tragiques extraictes des oeuvres italiennes de Bandel* (1559; my emphasis).
- Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Iuliet Written First in Italian by Bandel, and Now in English by Ar. Br.* (two editions: 1562; 1587; my emphasis).
- William Painter's *Novella XXV*, second tome of *The Palace of Pleasure* (1580).

To facilitate the reader's comprehension, only the modernised editions of the above-mentioned texts are taken into account (but line/verse numbers in brackets refer to the diplomatic editions on SENS).⁶

2. *Romeo and Juliet's* Masked Ball from Italy to England: New Significances in New Paradigms

In Shakespeare's tragedy, Romeo, reluctant to enter the enemy's house, defines the feast he and his fellows were about to sneak into as a masque for the first and only time in the play: "And we mean well in going to this masque" (1.4.48).⁷ Later in the scene, the young Montague talks about "this night's revels" (1.4.110) and Capulet defines the masked ball simply as "a feast" (1.5.70). In the late sixteenth century, the noun 'mask(e)' or 'masque' was still not

⁶ Three different versions of the same text/edition have been transcribed in the SENS archive: a diplomatic version which reproduces either the *editio princeps*, or the one the editor(s) have selected for possibly being the edition consulted by Shakespeare; a semidiplomatic version that maintains the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century spelling; and a modernised edition which normalises the spelling and offers a segmented text for intertextual comparison.

⁷ Q₁, Q₂ and the Folio versions do not differ in this case, except for a slightly different spelling of the word in Q₂ ("Mask", instead of "maske", as in Q₁ and Folio). All quotations from Shakespeare's tragedy are taken from the New Oxford Shakespeare edition by Francis X. Connor.

lexicalised, as shown by early modern bilingual (French-English and Italian-English) or monolingual dictionaries.⁸ In the anonymous *A Dictionary French English* (1571), the French lemma *MASQUE* is translated as “a mask, a mummer”, thus referring generically to a performance with masks. Claudius Hollyband’s *A Dictionary French and English* (1593), on the other hand, translates *MASQUE* as “a mask, a vizard”. Both senses are present in Randle Cotgrave’s well-known *A Dictionary of French and English Tongues* (1611); yet the definition “a mask, or a mummer” translates the lemma *MASQUERADE* this time. Both editions of John Florio’s Italian-English dictionary (1598; 1611) distinguish between the noun ‘*mascara*’ (“a mask, a vizard, a covert”) and ‘*mascarata*’ (“a masking, a mask, a mumming or revelling”), both meanings blending when defining the verb ‘*mascarare*’ (“to mask, to revel, to mum, to cloak, to hide”). No entry for ‘*mask(e)*’, ‘*masque*’, or ‘*masquerade*’ is present in the first English monolingual dictionaries, grammar books, tables and lists of difficult words, e.g., Richard Mulcaster’s *Elementary* (1582), Edmund Coote’s *The English Schoolmaster* (1596), Robert Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabetical* (1604), and John Bullokar’s *English Expositor* (1616). This can mean that either such words were perceived as borrowings from Italian and French to be listed and translated in bilingual dictionaries, or they were not among those difficult words the first English monolingual dictionaries dealt with.

Cunliffe (1907), who was among the first scholars to investigate the Italian origins of the English masque, also considered sources other than dictionaries, e.g., revel accounts, letters, etc., and ascertained that “the form *masque* is not found in the sixteenth century English” (140; emphasis in the original). Only the form ‘*mask(e)*’ is found in the mid- and late-1500s, and it indicated “an evening entertainment in which the chief performers were masked courtiers, accompanied by torchbearers, all in costumes” (146).⁹

8 All the entries from early modern dictionaries have been taken from the Lexicon of Early Modern English website (<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>). The spelling of the definitions has been modernised.

9 On this topic, Chambers affirms that “the introduction of a mask, generally as a revel in a royal feast or wedding banquet, becomes a regular dramatic device at least from the last decade of the sixteenth century onwards” (1923, 231).

This definition perfectly suits *Romeo and Juliet*'s masquerade in 1.4-5, which happens at night, and is performed by masked guests accompanied by torchbearers, among whom also Romeo stands. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion between 'mask(e)' and 'masque', and for the considerations above about early modern bilingual dictionaries – especially Florio's and Cotgrave's – in this article I will call the feast organised at the Capulets' house a masked ball or a masquerade, although, as we have seen, Romeo calls it a mask(e) on a single occasion.

This terminological fluctuation about masques, revels, and feasts seems to be exclusively Shakespearean. When resorting to *Romeo and Juliet*'s sources proximate, no doubt arises. Da Porto and Bandello talk about a "festa" (feast or banquet, according to Florio), exactly like Boaistuau's French version, which reads "festin" (again, feast or banquet, according to early modern French-English dictionaries). Brooke and Painter rightly alternate between "banquet" and "feast". Nevertheless, when dealing with the kinds of dance performed during the feast, Shakespeare's text is the only one that omits any mention of the *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello*, as will be seen in greater detail in the next section. I argue that this discrepancy between the sources and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is due to the new significance attributed by the English playwright to the Italian masquerade in 1.4-5 and, in addition, to matters of reception, i.e., evident differences between Shakespeare's audience and his sources' readership.

First of all, both Da Porto and Bandello set their stories during Carnival, or, at least, after Christmas. In Da Porto's *Istoria*, the narrator specifies that the party organised by Antonio Capelletti was held during "un Carnevale" ("a Carnival"). Bandello's *Novella* states that the feast occurred after Christmas ("un anno, dopo natale si cominciarono a far de le feste ove i mascherati concorrevano"), and that Juliet's mother decides to organise a masked ball at that precise time of year because at "il carneval passato" ("the last Carnival") all Juliet's friends found a man and got married. Boaistuau, and Brooke and Painter after him, eliminate any temporal reference to the Carnival, setting their stories 'around' Christmas.¹⁰

10 Boaistuau: "environ la fête de Noël" (171); Brooke: "The weary win-

Lastly, Shakespeare sets his tragedy around mid-July: Juliet was born on “Lammas Eve” (1.3.18), i.e., the 31st of July, and there is “a fortnight and odd days” (1.3.16) left. Therefore, only the two Italian texts develop stories at Carnival, a period of the year when, in Renaissance Italy (especially in the north-eastern area between Verona and Venice), masked balls were usually organised; thus, Da Porto and Bandello, writing for an Italian, educated reader, need not specify what kind of “festa” was organised by Antonio Capelletti: they can take it for granted their readers will know. Similarly, one may suppose that Boiaistua’s, Brooke’s, and Painter’s French and English readerships were well aware of the kind of courtly celebrations and balls that were held around Christmas (especially Twelfth Night) in their respective countries. It goes without saying that Shakespeare’s audience was different and more varied than his sources’. Italian, French, and English readers were generally well-educated, upper- and middle-class men, rarely women (Wilson 1987, xx), probably the same people who attended the kinds of entertainment described by Da Porto and the others in their books. Early modern theatregoers belonged to any strata of the Elizabethan social hierarchy, as noted by contemporary witnesses¹¹ and modern scholars (see, i.a., Harbage 1941, 90; Cook 1974; Banks 2014, 18-21; Chiari and Laroque 2017, 52). This meant that connotations of the Veronese/Venetian Carnival, with its masks and masquerades, were probably too culture-specific to be inserted in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and its connotations understood by Shakespearean audiences. Although this cultural translation/adaptation may be perceived as a de-Mediterraneanisation of the carnivalesque atmosphere conveyed by the Italian sources, Shakespeare wanted to maintain a certain ‘mediterraneity’ by moving the chronological setting of his play to a hot and sunny Mediterranean mid-July. In so doing, I argue, he also put forward a double process of cultural domestication: on the one hand, he supported his choice of setting

ter nights restore the Christmas games, / And now the season doth invite to banquet townish dames” (155-6); Painter: “about the feast of Christmas” (130).

11 Suffice it to quote from John Davies’ epigram no. 17, “In Cosmum”, where theatregoers are described as “[a] thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores, / Porters, and serving-men, together throng” (9-10).

Romeo and Juliet in the summer by substituting the Italian Carnival with an English corresponding feast: Lammas Day, the day when English people thank God for the harvest on the 1st of August. In fact, both the combination of pagan and Christian origins of the Carnival and the way it is celebrated with masks and dances occur in the celebrations connected with Lammas Day, a Christian feast with Celtic¹² origins, where thanksgiving propitiatory dances were performed wearing zoomorphic or anthropomorphic masks. Knowles explains this Carnival-Lammas combination in terms of “align[ment] of the religious and the natural” (1998, 38), where the religious element is their Christian origin, and the natural element is their pagan (Roman or Celtic) origin. On the other hand, the popular connotation of the Italian Carnival (Laroque 2011, 203) is maintained through the mention of a folk/popular English festival.

Thanks to the domestication of the Italian Carnival and its transposition on, transcodification on the Shakespearean stage, we also witness a cultural shift in the subliminal presentation of the Carnival. If, on the one hand, the Carnival-Lammas binomial may be understood in terms of substitution of a culture-specific Italian element with an English one, on the other hand, acknowledging that the masquerade at the Capulets’ house shows influences of the Carnival is also a question of appropriation of an Italian traditional element by the English Renaissance culture. This twofold mechanism of substitution/appropriation was studied, among others, by Cunliffe (1907, 148) and Laroque (2011), who explored how the Italian Carnival influenced the rise of the early modern English masquerades and masques.¹³ Laroque, in particular, discusses the carnivalesque element in Shakespeare’s plays set in Verona and Venice – where grandiose Carnival celebrations were (and still are) held – written between 1592 and 1606, i.e., *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*,

12 In 1.4, the Celtic ‘flavour’ of the feast celebrated at the Capulets’ house is reinforced by Mercutio’s ‘Queen Mab’ monologue which adds a “Celtic note in an otherwise Italian background” (Laroque 2011, 215).

13 In addition to the Italian masquerade in *Romeo and Juliet*, see also Gaveston’s desire for “Italian masks by night” (1.1.55) in Marlowe’s *Edward II* (1592), or Shylock’s concern about the Venetian masque (2.5.27-38) in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596).

and *Othello*. According to Laroque, “Shakespeare, very early on in his work, was interested . . . in the highly theatrical nature of carnival” (209), and problematised the imagery associated with it “in an ambivalent context, half-way between comedy and tragedy” (208), as shown by *Romeo and Juliet*’s masked ball. By reading 1.4-5 via the well-known Bakhtinian carnivalesque principle of “*discordia concors*, where the inclusion of difference and otherness simultaneously connotes harmony and destruction” (212), Laroque perceptively acknowledges Shakespeare’s debt towards the Italian Carnival in interpreting the masquerade as a welcoming moment where the otherness represented by a Montague and his fellows is tolerated and accepted. In Laroque’s words, the masquerade “is an image of inclusion, later confirmed by Capulet’s silencing Tybalt’s storming anger and insisting on the sacred duty of hospitality” (210). Therefore, “carnival could simultaneously become a byword for inclusion and hospitality” (219).

I would go even further by affirming that the connection between the carnivalesque echoes in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* 1.4-5, and such values as tolerance, inclusion, and hospitality are reinforced by the uniqueness of this moment: the masquerade is the only event in the play where a Montague has free access to the Capulets’ house. This is the very essence of Carnival, whose genuine character we find paradoxically more in Shakespeare than in his Italian sources. In fact, unlike his version of the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the two families’ “ancient grudge break to new mutiny” (Prologue, 3) and where the only moment when their enmity is suspended is the carnivalesque masked ball, in *Da Porto and Bandello*, Romeo enters the Capulets’ house after the two families have reconciled or, at least, have called a truce. In *Da Porto*, Antonio Capelletti holds a feast “essendo così costoro pacificati” (44-5: being Montecchi and Capelletti reconciled), and in *Bandello* the Prince Bartolomeo della Scala manages to stop the continuous brawls they usually start in Verona streets, right before Capelletti organises a feast inviting all the young nobles of the city, Romeo included. The French and English narratives that translate *Bandello* acknowledge the hatred between the two families and the Prince’s attempts to prevent the brawls in the city. Besides, any explicit or metaphorical reference to the Italian Carnival is

omitted: in Boaistuau's, Brooke's, and Painter's Christmas feast, Romeo's presence is tolerated not because of "the sacred duty of hospitality" (Laroque 2011, 210). The Capulets endure him only because 1) they do not want to start a brawl in front of their guests, as prohibited by the Prince of Verona, 2) they respect his young age, and 3) they do not want to prove themselves cowards by attacking Romeo alone, or a small group of Montagues.¹⁴ Therefore, just as the terminological accuracy concerning masque, revels, and feast is a Shakespearean stylistic peculiarity, rather than his sources', the carnivalesque concept of *discordia concors*, of "inclusion of difference and otherness" (Laroque 2011, 212) the playwright brings onstage is more significant and salient in his play than in his sources, although he eliminates any explicit reference to the Carnival. As sometimes observed (see James and Rubinstein 2006, 8; Henke 2016, 71; Bigliuzzi 2018, 17; 22-3; 25; 28), this may depend on a series of curious coincidences which might suggest that Shakespeare may have read Da Porto's and Bandello's narratives directly in Italian,¹⁵ or on the fact that he developed the carnivalesque idea of tolerance and hospitality independently, considering the Italian setting of his tragedy and thanks to the circulation of English travellers' accounts about the Italian Carnival (for instance, as will be seen, William Thomas and Sir Thomas Hoby) which may have influenced also later Shakespearean plays such as *Twelfth Night*.¹⁶

14 Boaistuau states that "les Cappellets, dissimulant leur haine, ou bien pour la révérence de la compagnie, ou pour le respect de son âge [de Romeo], ne lui méfirent, ni d'effet ni de paroles" (203-7). Brooke suggests similar reasons: "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. / They use no taunting talk / ne harm him by their deed" (183-9). Lastly, Painter: "the Capellets dissembling their malice, either for the honour of the company, or else for respect of his age, did not misuse him either in word or deed" (149-52).

15 Shakespeare's alleged knowledge of Italian is a very much debated issue, which goes beyond the scope of this article. See, among others, Moore 1937; Ball 1945; Shaheen 1994; Camard 2004 for further details.

16 See, for instance, Logan 1982 for an analysis of the light/darkness in-

Another deletion by Shakespeare concerns the dance performed at the Capulets' masquerade: the Torch Dance. The following section will deal with this topic, analysing a resemanticisation process concerning this peculiar dance of Italian origin and its symbolism.

3. "To Torch Dance or not to Torch Dance": That Is the Question

Since there is no mention of any specific dance at the feast organised by Lord Capulet in Shakespeare's tragedy, dance scholars believe that a number of different choreographies could have been performed on the Elizabethan stage when Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time, for example "a Measure or a Pavan, the Morris Dance, the Canary, or the Coranto, or even the Galliard and La Volta" (Hoskins 2005, 4), although refined courtly dances such as the Measure, the Pavan (Sternfeld 1963, 251), or the Galliard (Berry 1977, 253) are considered the most suitable to the occasion. Nevertheless, all Shakespeare's sources proximate mention the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello*, the latter reported only in Da Porto and Bandello.

The table below shows the occurrences of the Torch Dance in specific segments of the sources here selected (my emphases):

Da Porto	Et passando la mezzanotte, e il fine del festeggiare venendo, <i>il ballo del torchio o del cappello</i> , come dire lo vogliamo, e che ancora nel fine delle feste veggiamo usarsi, s'incominciò. Nel quale in cerchio standosi, l'omo la donna e la donna l'uomo a sua voglia permutandosi, piglia. In questa danza d'alcuna donna fu il giovane levato, e a caso appresso la già innamorata fanciulla posto. (81-91)
Bandello	. . . venne il fine della festa del ballare e si cominciò a far la danza, ossia <i>il ballo del Torchio</i> , che altri dicono <i>il ballo del Cappello</i> . Facendosi questo giuoco fu Romeo levato da una donna, il quale entrato in ballo fece il dover suo e, dato il torchio ad una donna, andò presso a Giulietta, che così richiedeva l'ordine, e quella prese per mano con piacer inestimabile di tutte due le parti. (158-64)

terweave in the play, which the scholar associated with the Italian Carnival. After all, the Illyrian territory where the play is set was part of the Republic of Venice at the time Shakespeare was writing *Twelfth Night*.

Boaistuau	Amour ayant fait cette brèche au cœur de ces amants, ainsi qu'ils cherchaient tous deux les moyens de parler ensemble, fortune leur en apprêta une prompte occasion, car quelque seigneur de la troupe prit Juliette par la main pour la faire danser au <i>bal de la torche</i> , duquel elle se sut si bien acquitter, et de si bonne grâce, qu'elle gagna pour ce jour le prix d'honneur entre toutes les filles de Vérone. (264-74)
Brooke	When thus in both their hearts had Cupid made his breach And each of them had sought the mean to end the war by speech, Dame Fortune did assent their purpose to advance, <i>With torch in hand a comely knight did fetch her forth to dance;</i> She quit herself so well, and with so trim a grace, That she the chief praise won that night from all Verona race. ... Even with his ended tale, <i>the torches' dance had end,</i> And Juliet of force must part from her new chosen friend. ¹⁷ (243-311)
Painter	Love having made the hearts breach of those two lovers, as they two sought means to speak together, Fortune offered them a very meet and apt occasion. A certain lord of that troupe and company took Iulietta by the hand to dance, wherein she behaved herself so well, and with so excellent grace, as she won that day the price of honour from all the damsels of Verona. ... Scarce had he made an end of those last words, but <i>the dance of the Torch was at an end.</i> (188-237)

Table 1. Segments concerning the Torch Dance in *Romeo and Juliet*'s main narrative sources.

Before comparing the five scenes above with *Romeo and Juliet* 1.5, we should clarify what the Torch Dance is and what it symbolises. The *OED* defines it simply as “a dance in which some of the performers carry lighted torches”, and no other dictionary seems to provide a more detailed description of this choreography, except the Merriam-Webster which calls it “serpentine”. In addition to a

17 The layout of Brooke's verses reflects the common practice in the Renaissance of breaking the two long lines of the poulter's measure – an alexandrine followed by a fourteener – into two half lines each.

few descriptions of choreographic directions in dance treatises,¹⁸ literary works and paintings help us understand that it was quite widespread during the Renaissance in Europe.¹⁹ For example, as noted by Naselli (1962, 383), the *Golf Book of Hours* (c. 1540), held at the British Library (Ms. 24098), contains a picture of the Torch Dance illustrated in a Flemish calendar, perhaps by Simon Bening of the Ghent-Bruges school, in the page dedicated to February (f. 19v). It might be a coincidence that February is also the month of Carnival festivals, but it is definitely a curious one.

Albeit originally a folk dance, the Torch Dance soon became an upper-class prerogative in Italy and France (Naselli 1962),²⁰ and was often performed during wedding celebrations at court, the torch being carried by the dancing couple and symbolising their union and the flame of their new-born love. In Renaissance Italy, this dance is known as *ballo del torchio*, where the noun *torchio* is a torch, not to be confused with the word *torchio* in contemporary Italian, i.e., a press, a machine used to produce oil and wine by pressing olives and grapes.²¹ In addition to Da Porto and Bandello, Tasso also refers to *ballo del torchio*. His love sonnet no. 51 (“Mentre ne’ cari balli in loco adorno” [“While dancing in adorned places”], 1561-62) focuses on the metaphorical meaning of the Torch Dance (Solerti 1900, cxlii; Cabani 2018, 77), accusing his beloved of extinguishing the light of the torch they used to carry together. The same metaphorical connotation is introduced in Tasso’s discourse “del maritarsi” (“of getting married”), that is, a letter to his cousin Ercole (1585), where

18 See, for instance, Thoinot Arbeau’s *Branle du chandelier* in his *Orchésographie* (1588), or Cesare Negri’s *danza delle torce* in his *Le gratie d’amore* (1602). See Jones 1986.

19 Perhaps its most famous version is the German Fackeltanz, which reached its apex in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when such composers as Spontini and Meyerbeer wrote a great deal of music to accompany this dance, which was performed during wedding celebrations.

20 Naselli analyses a number of mentions of the Torch Dance in European Renaissance literature and paintings, e.g., in Sannazaro’s *Farsa*, written in 1492, in Lucrezia Borgia’s letters (19 February 1503), in Crispin de Passe’s engraved cycle *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins* (1589-1611), etc.

21 In eighteenth-century Italy, *ballo del torchio* also began to indicate a kind of dance performed around the press, a sort of thanksgiving for a good harvest, given the semantic shift of the noun *torchio*.

the writer resorts to the *auctoritas* principle by stating that Plato recommended having children:

e veramente assai bene disse quel poeta, che l'uno dava all'altro la lampada della vita; non altramente, che a' tempi nostri soglia avvenire nel *ballo del torchio*, quando l'uomo il prende dalla donna, nelle cui mani pare che sia posto il vivere, e il morire. (1823, 142; my emphasis)

[And that poet really said it well, the one gave the other the lamp of life; similarly to what happens in our time in the Torch Dance, when the man takes it from the woman, in whose hands life and death seem to be placed. (My translation)]

Like Da Porto and Bandello's plot, Giraldi Cinthio's novella 5, decade 2 of the *Hecatommithi* (1565) tells the story of two young lovers, Rinieri and Cecilia, who meet for the first time and immediately fall in love during a Torch Dance, as part of the feast organized by Cecilia's father. Tasso's and Cinthio's mentions of the Torch Dance help us understand that in Renaissance Italy it clearly had a metaphorical meaning connected to love and courtship.

Both Da Porto and Bandello also call the Torch Dance *ballo del cappello*, another widespread dance in sixteenth-century Italy. Simeone Zuccolo, in his *Pazzia del ballo* (1549), describes it as a dance of courtship:

[q]uando l'uomo, con un dolce sorriso o un amoroso sguardo, è invitato da una donna a ballare, si leva la berretta e cortigianescamente baciandola glie la pone sulle bionde trecce. Fanno così insieme il ballo, terminato il quale la donna, medesimamente baciandola, ripone la berretta in capo al suo leggiadro cavaliere.

[When a man is invited by a woman to dance with a sweet smile or a loving glance, he takes off his bonnet and, kissing her courteously, places it on her blond tresses. Hence, they dance together, and in the end, the woman kisses the bonnet and puts it back in the hand of her graceful knight. (My translation)]

The two dances followed the same pattern and were characterised by the same gestures: they consisted in choosing a partner by means of an object (a torch or a bonnet) and dancing with him/her.

Boaistuau's translation is responsible for two main changes

affecting later adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*'s story. First of all, the dance performed at Lord Capulet's house is indicated as a Torch Dance; any reference to the *ballo del cappello* disappears,²² perhaps because it was a deeply-rooted tradition of Northern Italy, but not, to my knowledge, of France (see also Rodocanachi 1907, 199). Secondly, while in Da Porto and Bandello *Romeo* dances with some ladies before arriving in front of Juliet, in Boaistuau, Brooke and Painter, as well as in Shakespeare, *Romeo* does not dance, but waits for the Torch Dance to be over and then approaches Juliet. In Boaistuau it is "quelque seigneur de la troupe" (268-9: "some man within the group") who takes Juliet by the hand, exactly as in Brooke "a comely knight / did fetch her forth to dance" (246), in Painter (who follows Boaistuau, literally this time) "[a] certain lord of that troupe and company took Iulietta by the hand to dance" (190), and in Shakespeare it is "the hand / Of yonder knight" (1.5.38-9).

Shakespeare follows Boaistuau's version of the story, certainly mediated by Brooke and perhaps by Painter. Nevertheless, no mention of the Torch Dance is made by the playwright in the scene. At a mere textual and intertextual level, this is probably because both Brooke and Painter do not mention the Torch Dance as soon as it begins, as happens in Da Porto, Bandello, and Boaistuau, but in a different textual segment which Shakespeare does not seem to consider when adapting his sources for his play, when the dance is over, and the couple is forced to separate for no apparent reason, or probably because the dance itself had finished:

the torches' dance had end,
And Juliet of force must part
from her new chosen friend. (Brooke, 309-10)
[T]he dance of the Torch was at an end [and] Rhomeo [saw] himself
pressed to part with the company. (Painter, 237-46)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, the couple part because the nurse calls Juliet; hence the end of the dance does not correspond to the moment when the youths separate: "Nurse: Madam, your mother

22 When translating Bandello's *Novella*, Boaistuau likely missed the assonance *ballo del cappello*/Capelletti, so decided to focus on the Torch Dance, which was also quite widespread in France.

craves a word with you. [*Juliet departs to her Mother*]” (1.5.107). Therefore, Shakespeare’s tragedy is the only text within the intertextual network of Renaissance translations and adaptations of Romeo and Juliet’s story that does not mention the Torch Dance.

Scholars have focused on the fact that Romeo does not dance at all in 1.5, while underlining that 1.4 and 1.5 are set at night, hence torches and torchbearers are necessary to light the ballroom – and the Elizabethan stage, of course. Allison Gaw was probably the first to notice the “decorative stress on the torches in the mask”, and she is correct in asserting that “Shakespeare advances on his sources [Brooke and Painter] by making Romeo . . . insist on being merely a torch-bearer, not a dancer” (1936, 154). In 1.4, Romeo repeats that he wants only to bear a torch three times, when he states “[g]ive me a torch . . . I will bear the light” (1.4.11-2), when he again demands “a torch for me” (1.4.35) and when he declares that he prefers being “a candle-holder and look on” (1.4.37). For this reason, as Anne Daye perceptively affirmed, we must imagine Romeo entering the ballroom torch in hand (1998, 249) and, I would argue, continuing to carry it all the while, since no stage direction indicates that he discards it before speaking with Juliet. We will return to this latter point later on, but let us now analyse the ball scene from the very beginning and see whether a Torch Dance might have been performed or whether it is actually omitted by Shakespeare. If omitted, I contend, Shakespeare resemanticised this dance through a metonymic mechanism which, insisting on the torches, reflects on such axiological contrast as light/darkness, white/black, which helps us continue to read the masquerade through its carnivalesque “double face, a bright as well as a dark one” (Laroque 2011, 205).

Capulet’s welcome speech in 1.5 helps identify him as a master-of-the-revels-like figure: he opens the impromptu masked ball (Gaw 1936; Winerock 2017, 5) and gives essential directions for the performance. At the outset, after welcoming the gentlemen, he asks for more room and invites “the young women to start dancing” (Winerock 2017, 4): “Capulet: A hall, a hall! Give room, and foot it, girls” (1.5.23). As discussed earlier, when dealing with Tasso’s and Zuccolo’s mention of the Torch Dance, this might hint at the *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* since women start inviting their partner(s). According to Renaissance dance sources, in no other choreography

are women specifically required to choose first and begin dancing, so this might indicate that the guests invited by Juliet's father are asked to open the dancing event with a Torch Dance.

Even Capulet's insistence on illuminating the ballroom at the beginning and at the end of the dance (1.5.24; 83) can be read as an attempt to revive the torches whose light might have faded during the performance, because of the steps and movements of the performers, or, as discussed later, to reinforce the symbology of light in the play and in this particular carnivalesque moment. Since the place is too hot, on such a warm Mediterranean mid-July night, Lord Capulet asks to "quench the fire" (1.5.26); hence the only source of light is the torches, carried by the torchbearers, among whom Romeo stands. According to Weis (2012) and Connor (2016), the torchbearers who enter the ballroom, already introduced at the beginning of 1.4, "may or may not be additional to the masquers; the masquers may simply bear torches" (Connor 2016, 1013), as Q2 seems to suggest (Weis 2012, 156). This might be why Capulet asks his servants for more light rather than directly address the torchbearers, who might be dancing a Torch Dance with the ladies. As suggested convincingly by Daye (1998), however, it is only after 1613, with *The Lords' Masque* by Thomas Campion and *Memorable Masque* by George Chapman, both celebrating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I, that torchbearers assumed a definite role as dancers.²³

Scholars rule out the possibility that a Torch Dance may be performed at the Capulets' house (see Winerock 2017; Daye 2019, 127) and that Romeo and Juliet may dance together,²⁴ although many

²³ After 1613, there are mentions of the Torch Dance or of torchbearers dancing in a number of plays, for instance in Thomas Campion's above-mentioned *The Lords' Masque* ("Torch-bearers dance"), in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Augurs* (1622: "The Torch-bearers danced"), in James Shirley's *The Cardinal* (1652: "Enter Columbo, and five more in rich habits vizarded; between every two a torch bearer: They dance"), and in Leonard Digges' translation of Céspedes y Meneses' *Gerardo* (published 1653: "danced the Torch-dance").

²⁴ As summarised by Hazrat, "Most critics have taken this as a clear indication that neither does Romeo himself dance, nor do Romeo and Juliet dance together at any point during the festivities. McGuire, Brissenden,

stagings and adaptations of the play show the couple dancing,²⁵ perhaps because some gestures the young lovers perform recall those of a dance. For instance, when Romeo and Juliet speak for the first time, sharing their first sonnet (1.5.89-102), their touching “palm to palm” (1.5.96) may recall the movements of an Elizabethan masque, as noted by Leopold (2019, 158-9): “[w]hile not every Renaissance dance called for close contact, throughout an Elizabethan masque participants would have often touched palms with fellow revelers while dancing the partnered and group routines documented by Arbeau, John Playford, and many others”. In the case of 1.5.89-102, Hazrat defines Romeo and Juliet’s sonnet as a “dancing lyrical form”, meaning that “the rhetorical form of the couple’s language plays a crucial role in choreographing their [metaphorical] dance” (2019, 230). Arguably, therefore, it is more the rhetorical structure of their poetic dialogue which recalls some choreographic movements, than the actual gestures implied by their words.

As hinted above, Shakespeare may have decided to eliminate any reference to the Torch Dance because his audience would not have understood its symbolism or even because he himself was not aware of the connotations that such a courtly dance had in Italy or in France. After all, dances with objects in England were usually perceived as folk dances (for instance, Cushion Dance, Morris Dance, Sword Dance, etc.; see Winerock 2005, 37-8) and in most cases were associated with lust and promiscuity. For example, as Winerock explains (37), during the Cushion Dance men went around the circle of dancers with a cushion on their shoulders. When they found their favourite girl, they threw the cushion to the ground, kneeled in front of the woman, and if she accepted the invitation to dance, she would kiss the man on the lips. Such dances were not suited to an upper-class masked ball such as the one held by Capulet in his house, and the late-sixteenth-century audience would have probably associated the Torch Dance with other dances with objects of a folk character, thus misinterpreting the original

Sorell, and Lindley refuse the possibility of the couple dancing before or during their first conversation” (2019, 231).

25 Suffice it to think of Zeffirelli’s (1968) and Carlei’s (2013) film adaptations, among others.

significance of a culturally and socially connoted dance as the Torch Dance. As stated by McGuire, the significance of dancing in *Romeo and Juliet* “comes most clearly into view if the ‘old’ strategy of examining the cultural context within (and against) which Shakespeare worked is combined with a ‘new’ approach that calls upon us to think about Shakespeare’s play not just as literature, but also, perhaps even primarily, as theatre” (1981, 87). Early modern theatre implies audiences belonging to different social classes who may not have understood, or even cared about, the connotations of a Torch Dance, while the literary genres adopted by Shakespeare’s sources proximate imply a well-educated upper- or upper-middle-class readership.

Whatever the reason, Shakespeare’s is the only version of the story of the two Veronese lovers where the Torch Dance is not mentioned. Nevertheless, I suggest that the symbolism associated with the torch is metonymically resemanticised in 1.4-5 and in the entire play through an emphasis on the contrast between light and darkness that pervades *Romeo and Juliet*, having interesting similarities with the carnivalesque light/darkness, harmony/destruction connotations hinted at above. Torches have in fact a pivotal function in the masquerade scene analysed thus far: they light the room when Capulet orders to quench the fire. Unlike his narrative sources, which set the story at Carnival or in December and where torches have multiple functions, that is, they light the room, warm it up, and are used by the couples as a symbol of love and courtship during the Torch Dance, Shakespeare reduces their function to the sole illumination of the ball room, since in Italy it is too hot in July to have torches that heat up the environment. Thus, he also restricts the polyphonic symbolism they are associated with, that is, from light, warmth, love, and courtship to simply light. During the ball scene, Juliet’s father orders more light twice (in 1.5.24 and 83) and Juliet herself is compared to a torch by Romeo, not because she is warmer than they are, but because she teaches them “to burn bright” (1.5.40): she is brighter than they are. A few lines later, Romeo compares Juliet’s dancing among the other girls to the flight of “a snowy dove trooping with crows” (1.5.44), again reinforcing the antithesis between light and darkness.

Yet, exactly as in the Carnival with its double bright/dark face

which brings “harmony and destruction” (Laroque 2011, 212), light and darkness are more interwoven than one may think in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the association between light and darkness, rather than their contrast, increases as the play comes to its tragic end. William Thomas, the first who brought the word ‘Carnival’ into English in 1549, describes the Venetian Carnival as a cruel spectacle where poor people forget about their miserable conditions and laugh tragically at it (Salingar 1974, 192). Similarly, Sir Thomas Hoby, while visiting Venice in 1549, reported that the bright costumes and the boisterous, chaotic atmosphere of freedom and subversion of social status of the Carnival were the perfect justification for people who wanted vengeance and justice or who were simply too drunk to stay lucid: he himself witnessed “a brawl over a lady in a masked ball at night, which cost [a] nobleman his life” (191). It is with this double sense of darkness masked by light (Laroque 2011, 205) that the Italian Carnival entered English Renaissance culture and the same oxymoronic proximity between light and dark is one of the main themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, a play set in the birthplace of the carnivalesque festivities in Italy. The light of day is not favourable to the young lovers in 3.5 and Juliet denies that “[y]on light is . . . daylight” (3.5.12); on the contrary, she states that “[i]t is some meteor that the sun exhales / To be to [Romeo] this night a torchbearer / And light [him] on [his] way to Mantua” (3.5.13-15). The image of the torch and the torchbearer comes back, and it is again associated with Romeo and light, not with warmth, since it is not daylight, but the cold light of a meteor. The oxymoronic image of darkness masked by light is reinforced by Romeo’s statement “[m]ore light and light, more dark and dark our woes” (3.5.36), meaning that when the sun rises he must separate from his beloved Juliet. Lastly, a macabre image of light is evoked by Romeo, when he finds what he believes to be Juliet’s dead body: “here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light” (5.3.85-6). Even in the darkest and most ‘destructive’ hour, Romeo seems to recall the carnivalesque feast, the masked ball where he first met Juliet and the light of the torches that illuminated the room, which, however, once again, cannot compete with Juliet’s radiant presence, whose light floods their grave.

3. Conclusion

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare adapts the cultural framework offered by his narrative sources, considering, on the one hand, the different genre he was employing, and on the other the audience he was addressing. In the case of the Italian masked ball organised by Capulet, the playwright domesticates the carnivalesque connotation of the performance and moves the period when “these sad things” (5.3.306) take place from Carnival, as in Da Porto or December, as in Boaistuau, Brooke, and Painter, to mid-July, when similar celebrations occurred in England before Lammas, the festival of thanksgiving celebrated on 1 August, on the eve of which Juliet was born. In so doing, he maintains the association between local Italian and English feasts with masks and masked balls, yet domesticating a culture-specific Italian element, i.e., Carnival.

Nevertheless, I have argued that the carnivalesque Bakhtinian idea of the *discordia concors* permeates the entire play, not only the masquerade in 1.4-5, but also other scenes in the ensuing acts, especially dealing with the contrast between light and darkness which in the tragedy becomes increasingly interwoven in the course of the play, culminating in 5.3, where Romeo finds Juliet bright even in the darkest hour of death. The contrast between light and darkness has also been problematised and contextualised in the resemanticisation of the Torch Dance that Shakespeare, unlike all his Italian, French, and English narrative sources proximate, eliminates from his play, but that acquires new significance thanks to the playwright’s insistence on the association between torches/torchbearers and light both in the masquerade and in other scenes as well.

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