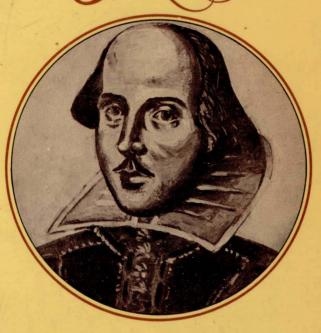
Sources Of Shakespeare's Plays



KENNETH MUIR

THE SOURCES OF ASHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

by KENNETH MUIR

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PREFACE

When Shakespeare's Sources I appeared in 1957 I had hoped to complete the second volume by 1960. For various reasons this proved to be impossible and I have had many enquiries, and a few reproaches, during the past fifteen years. Meanwhile Professor Geoffrey Bullough had completed in eight volumes his Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare and this splendid work has necessitated a change of plan in mine. As my first volume has been out of print, and as I have changed my mind on a number of points, I have revised this volume and added a discussion of the Histories. The other part of the original plan — a detailed discussion of Shakespeare's reading — will, I hope, be published in a series of separate essays.

It will be noticed that the revision of the previous work has been substantial and that the publication of Shakespeare as Collaborator, Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence, and Shakespeare the Professional, together with a forthcoming book on the Comedies, has enabled me to save a good deal of space in the present volume.

In my original preface I acknowledged the generous help of many scholars. Six of them, John Dover Wilson, Kenneth Allott, Ernest Schanzer, James Maxwell, Frederick May and Arnold Davenport are now dead. Many of them have been appointed to chairs, including G. K. Hunter, Harold Brooks, Ernst Honigmann, Inga-Stina Ewbank and R. A. Foakes. I have incurred renewed indebtedness to them all. I also mentioned two theses written under my supervision: I must now add those of Dr S. Carr, Mr P. Akhtar, Pauline Dalton, and Dorothy Earnshaw. My greatest debt, however, is to Geoffrey Bullough.

I was awarded a Visiting fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1957; and in 1975 the Leverhulme Trust awarded me an Emeritus Fellowship which has enabled me to expedite the work with the expert assistance of Mrs Jane Sherman. To both these bodies and to her I wish to express my gratitude.

ABBREVIATIONS

CHEL	Cambridge History of English Literature
DUJ	Durham University Journal
EA	Etudes Anglaises
EC	Essays in Criticism
ELH	English Literary History
ES	English Studies
HLB	Huntington Library Bulletin
нцQ	Huntington Library Quarterly
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLR	Modern Language Review
MΡ	Modern Philology
NA	(New) Arden edition of Shakespeare
NC	New Cambridge edition of Shakespeare
NQ	Notes and Queries
OA	(Old) Arden edition of Shakespeare
PLPL	Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RD	Renaissance Drama
REL	Review of English Literature
RQ	Renaissance Quarterly
RES	Review of English Studies
SAB	Shakespeare Association Bulletin
SJ	Shakespeare Jahrbuch
SP	Studies in Philology
S Q	Shakespeare Quarterly
SR	Sewanee Review
SS	Shakespeare Survey
sst	Shakespeare Studies
TLS	Times Literary Supplement
UTO	University of Toronto Quarterly

Bullough Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (8 vols)

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I INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE of this book is, first, to ascertain where possible what sources Shakespeare used for the plots of his plays and to discuss the use he made of them; and, secondly, to give illustrations, necessarily selective, of the way in which his general reading is woven into the texture of his work. Since Anders wrote *Shakespeare's Books* in 1904 several bibliographies and many annotated editions of his plays have appeared. These have increased our knowledge of Shakespeare's reading¹ and have shown that it was more extensive than was thought at the beginning of the century.

It is necessary at the outset to say something of Shakespeare's knowledge of foreign languages. T. W. Baldwin in his monumental volumes² has given us a clear idea of the kind of education Shakespeare would have followed at a petty school and a grammar school. As he somewhere acquired the equivalent knowledge, there is no reason to doubt that he attended both; but it is possible that the crisis in his father's fortunes may have meant that he did not complete the full curriculum. He acquired a reasonable knowledge of Latin, and perhaps a smattering of Greek.

The extent of Shakespeare's classical learning is nevertheless still a matter of dispute. Some believe that Jonson's 'small Latin and less Greek' should be taken to mean 'hardly any Latin and no Greek'.³ Others think that although Shakespeare had little or no Greek, he understood Latin 'pretty well' (to use the phrase of an early biographer⁴), and that his knowledge of the language was small only in comparison with Jonson's or Chapman's. Those who adhere to the

former point of view show that many of the parallels with Latin literature, collected by generations of critics, may well be fortuitous, or may be borrowed from some intermediate source; that Golding's translation of the Metamorphoses is so bad that a good Latin scholar would not have tolerated it;5 that Shakespeare's actual quotations from Latin authors are mostly in early plays – \hat{H} enry VI and \hat{T} itus Andronicus – in which he may have had collaborators, or of passages so familiar that they prove nothing about his competence as a latinist; that he makes a number of blunders about classical mythology;6 that his spelling 'triumpherate' shows that he was ignorant of the derivation of the word;7 and that he is guilty of shocking anachronisms. None of these arguments has much substance. It is true that many of the alleged parallels between Shakespeare's works and Latin literature are unconvincing. Percy Simpson's list of parallels does not contain a single one which is beyond dispute.8 He does not distinguish between works which were available in translation and those which were not. In some cases he has ignored sources more easily accessible than those he suggests: Shakespeare did not have to go to Latin comedy for the plot of Pericles when he had more obvious sources, which he certainly used, by Gower and Twine. Some ideas and images which may be traced ultimately to Latin writers had become commonplaces by the sixteenth century. There is no reason to believe that Helena, at the end of the first scene of A Midsummer-Night's Dream, is echoing Propertius in her complaints about Cupid.9 Laertes' words about the dead Ophelia -

from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring – (v. i. 233-4)

fit in with the flower-imagery associated with the girl and are not necessarily based on lines by Persius which, we are told, Shakespeare could have read in the notes to Mantuan:¹⁰

nunc non e tumulo fortunataque favilla nascentur violae?

On the other hand, since Shakespeare alludes to two of Horace's poems in the storm-scenes of *King Lear*, critics have been unduly sceptical about two Horatian echoes in earlier plays.¹¹ Horace instructs a girl:¹²

prima nocte domum claude neque in vias sub cantu querulae despice tibiae.

Shylock similarly instructs Jessica:

When you hear the drum, And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife, Clamber not you up to the casements then, Nor thrust your head into the public street.

(II. v. 28-3I)

The other parallel is even more striking. The line in one of Horace's Satires (11. 5) -

Furius hibernas cana nive conspuet Alpes -

must surely be the origin of the address by the French King to his nobles in Henry V:

Rush on his host as doth the melted snow Upon the valleys, whose low vassal seat The Alps doth spit, and void his rheum upon.

(III. v. 50-2)

Golding's translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses is read today largely because it is known to have been a favourite of Shakespeare's, but we cannot deduce from its clumsiness that he could read Latin only with difficulty. He doubtless read some Ovid at school, and a copy of the Metamorphoses, bearing his possibly forged signature, is still in existence. Even at the end of his career, thirty years after he left school, he still remembered enough Latin to improve on the accuracy of Golding's translation. Prospero's farewell to his art is based on Medea's invocation in Book VII, and the phrasing is influenced by Golding's. In the opening words,

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes,

Shakespeare borrows Golding's precise phrasing. But it is equally clear that he also used the original Latin. Ovid uses the words 'ventos abigoque vocoque'; Golding translates 'I rayse and lay the windes'; Shakespeare, more accurately, has 'call'd forth the mutinous winds'. A more striking proof that Shakespeare was not merely relying on Golding can be seen from their versions of the lines:

vivaque saxa, sua convulsaque robora terra, et silvas moveo. (VII. 204–5)

Golding translates:

And from the bowels of the Earth both stones and trees doe drawe. Whole woods and Forestes I remoue: (VII. 272-3)

Prospero boasts that he has

rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt . . .
and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar.

It has been pointed out¹³ that 'pluck'd up' conveys, more faithfully than Golding's version, the sense of 'convulsa'; that Shakespeare specifies the particular kind of tree, as Golding does not; and that by the epithet 'stout' he alludes to the alternative meaning of 'robora'.

Shakespeare, then, used translations when they were available; but he did not use them slavishly, and there is plenty of evidence that he read Latin works of which there was no translation – two plays by Plautus, Buchanan's and Leslie's works on Scottish history, and (if the last two Sonnets were indeed his) a Latin version of poems in the Greek Anthology. He knew some Virgil in the original, though he may also have read four translations by Douglas, Surrey, Phaer, and Stanyhurst. He knew some of Erasmus' Colloquia; he consulted his Adagia; he probably read The Praise of Folly, either in the original or in Challoner's translation; and apparently he knew De Conscribendis Epistolis. Erasmus, writing of banishment, uses images of armour and milk:

animum armare solet. Hujus ut ita dicam, lacte cum ab ipsis sis incunabulis enutritus.

He was echoing Boethius, who was writing of adversity in general, not of banishment; so that Friar Lawrence's words to Romeo are more likely to come from Erasmus than from Boethius in Chaucer's translation:¹⁷

I'll give thee armour to keep off that word; Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy, To comfort thee, though thou art banished.

(III. iii. 54–6)

There is also some evidence that Shakespeare had read some of Seneca's plays in the original, as well as the Tudor translation of the *Ten Tragedies*. ¹⁸

The absence of Latin quotations in the later plays may merely indicate that Shakespeare had come to recognize that, as part of his audience would not understand them, they were of dubious dramatic value, and they were therefore an indulgence he could not afford.

The mistakes made by him with regard to classical mythology prove very little. He makes Antony speak of Dido and Aeneas together in the underworld, though Virgil's Dido scorns her lover when she encounters him there. It would be dangerous to assume that Shakespeare had not read, or had forgotten, the sixth book of the Aeneid. His treatment of mythology here and elsewhere was creative. It may even be suggested, not altogether frivolously, that he was aware that in the year of Antony's death, Virgil's epic was not yet written. He often fused medieval with classical sources: when he gives Dido a willow in The Merchant of Venice (v. i. 10) he drew on Chaucer's tales of Dido and Ariadne in The Legend of Good Women. He has been blamed for his conflation of Arachne and Ariadne to form the name of Ariachne; but as he was perfectly familiar with the stories of both ladies, this cannot be taken as a proof of ignorance. He may have varied the name to suit the metre, or have wished to recall Ariadne's thread as well as Arachne's, or have even used the name to characterize the turmoil in Troilus' mind.19

Shakespeare frequently takes liberties with the spelling of classical proper names, but similar liberties were taken by Elizabethans whose latinity is not in dispute. Spellings like 'triumpherate' do not necessarily prove Shakespeare's ignorance: they may be due to compositors, and in this particular case a quibble may have been intended. Most Elizabethans, including the learned, allowed themselves considerable licence with regard to spelling. Shakespeare himself spelt 'silence' as 'scilens',20 although he must have known its derivation: and Marston, who could compose in Latin, has the same odd spelling.

A similar defence may be made of the anachronisms. Some may be due to ignorance or carelessness. Shakespeare may have forgotten that Aristotle lived after the fall of Troy; but he must have known that the famous Cato lived after Coriolanus.²¹ Most of the anachronisms, however, can be justified on dramatic grounds, as most critics now recognize.²²

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of Shakespeare's having had a fluent knowledge of Latin is afforded by his coinages. Occasionally he blunders, as when he uses 'orifex' for 'orifice'; but generally speaking, his coinages, or those reputed to be his, compare favourably with those of Marston and Chapman. Indeed, it may be argued that the excessive latinisms in *Troilus and Cressida* may be due to Shakespeare's attempt to emulate the style of Chapman's Homer.

Of modern languages Shakespeare acquired some knowledge of

French, Italian, and perhaps a smattering of Spanish. He could certainly read French; and he could write it sufficiently well for his purposes in Henry V. He had read Eliot's Ortho-Epia Gallica, a conversation manual, and he had lodged with a French family.²³ There is evidence, too, that he had read Florio's First Fruites and Second Frutes, presumably because he had started to learn Italian.²⁴ Some of his plots were not available, so far as is known, in any other language. He could have read Boccaccio in a French translation; but he appears to have read Giraldi Cinthio's Hecatommithi, Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, and one or two plays in the original Italian.²⁵

Shakespeare is known to have made use of translations, including Florio's Montaigne, ²⁶ Holland's Pliny, ²⁷ and Chapman's Homer. ²⁸ It is less certain that he knew Holland's translation of Plutarch's *Moralia* and of Livy, or Googe's Palingenius. ²⁹ The doubt in these and other cases is due to the widespread dissemination of their ideas. Palingenius, for example, speaks of men whom 'dreadful dreams doe cause to shake', as Macbeth speaks of 'terrible dreams/That shake us nightly' (III. ii. 18–19); he says that

Beastes consist of brutish minde,
To sleepe and foode, addicted all, (p. 114)

and asks 'What is Man? a foolishe beast' (p. 114) as Hamlet asks

What is a man

If the chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more!

(IV. iv. 33-5)

and he says that ambition is

Much like a spurre, and many brings to toppes of Vertue hye With prickes . . . (p. 98)

resembling Macbeth's comparison of ambition to a spur to prick the sides of his intent (1. vii. 25-8). But interesting as these parallels are, Palingenius is notoriously unoriginal, and so we cannot be certain that Shakespeare derived his imagery from this source.

There were a number of collections similar to Erasmus's Adagia which were designed to assist writers in their compositions. Dekker, it is thought, echoed the Fathers by a discreet use of Flores Doctorum. Shakespeare, too, took at least one idea from Lactantius, either from the Flores, or, more likely, from Ponet's Treatise on Politic Power.³⁰

This example may serve to illustrate the impossibility of determining to which of two or more sources Shakespeare was indebted, especially when we remember that many books of the period have not survived.

It is possible that Shakespeare read hundreds of books which have left no trace on his writings; but the most unlikely books did leave their traces. It is difficult to believe that he was conscious of echoing Henry Swinburne's Brief Treatise of Testaments and Last Willes in the third scene of Hamlet,³¹ Lewkenor in the third scene of Othello,³² or Rich in the third scene of Twelfth Night;³³ and we may suppose that, like Coleridge, he created much of his poetry from forgotten reading.³⁴

The influence of certain books on Shakespeare's work has been examined in detail. The Bible left its mark on every play in the canon and, as Richmond Noble showed,³⁵ the earlier echoes are mostly from the Bishops' Bible, which was read in church, and the later ones mostly from the Geneva version. There are only one or two doubtful echoes from the Catholic versions. We may suspect that neither Noble nor Carter³⁶ has exhausted the subject, for an earlier critic, Walter Whiter, demonstrated³⁷ that the story in St Mark's Gospel of the woman with an issue of blood influenced the phrasing of the Duke's words in the first scene of *Measure for Measure*. St Mark tells how

a certaine woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood . . . when shee had heard of Iesus, shee came in the presse behind, and touched his garment . . . when Iesus did know in himselfe the vertue that went out of him, he turned him round about in the prease, and said, Who hath touched my clothes? (v. 25-30)

The Duke tells Angelo:

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd But to fine issues. (I. i. 33-7)

The subject of the Duke's discourse is taken from the previous chapter in the gospel: 'Commeth the candle in, to bee put vnder a bushell, or vnder the bed, and not to be put on a candlesticke?' There are some echoes from the Prayer Book, and a great many from the *Homilies* appointed to be read in church.³⁸

The Ovidian influence was pervasive, especially in the earlier plays, 39 and the *Metamorphoses* was probably Shakespeare's main source for

information about classical mythology. A Mirror for Magistrates, a popular but dreary collection of poems, redeemed only by Sackville's splendid contribution, left its mark on several of the Histories, and on the pseudo-histories, King Lear and Cymbeline.⁴⁰ Florio's translation of Montaigne affected both the thought and vocabulary of later plays, although there are only two extended borrowings, both in The Tempest.⁴¹ There are echoes of Samuel Harsnett's Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures, not only in King Lear, but also in The Tempest. David Kaula has recently argued⁴² that Shakespeare echoed a whole series of pamphlets in the arch-priest controversy – this I find hard to believe.

It is certain that as an actor Shakespeare was acquainted with a large number of plays in which he took part.⁴³ Most of these are doubtless lost. Although he did not act in Marlowe's plays, he echoed *Tamburlaine*, *Dido*, and *Edward II*; he quoted from *Doctor Faustus* in *Troilus and Cressida*; he quoted a line from *Hero and Leander* in *As You Like It*, and referred there to Marlowe as 'dead shepherd'. But, as everyone recognizes, his debt to Marlowe was more profound. His own blank verse was developed from Marlowe's 'mighty line' and his own conception of tragedy was evolved from Marlowe's.

Shakespeare learnt a good deal from the other University Wits, and their pioneering work reduced the period of his apprenticeship. He had read several of Greene's works, including his two best novels, Menaphon and Pandosto, and two of the coney-catching pamphlets.44 He had read the attack on himself in A Groatsworth of Wit - if Greene wrote that death-bed diatribe.45 Although it used to be argued by enthusiastic editors⁴⁶ that Greene's heroines served as models for Shakespeare's, it is only in Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale that there seems to be much resemblance, and this is more to do with situation than characterization. The wronged wives, Imogen and Hermione (Greene's Bellaria), forgive their husbands, as Greene's heroines in novels and plays invariably do, but there the resemblance ends. From Greene's practice Shakespeare may have seen the advantages of interweaving several plots, but this is something he could equally well have learnt from Lyly, whose comedies were of seminal importance. Many characteristics of Shakespearian comedy can be traced to Lyly's - wit combats, the disguising of girls as boys, mischievous pages, interspersed songs, and many other things. Furthermore, as I argued long ago,47

Shakespeare learned from Lyly how to write prose, and though in

1 Henry IV he poked fun at the excesses of Euphuism, he remained to the end of his career profoundly affected by it. . . The civilized prose of the great comedies owes much in its constructions, its rhythms, its balance and its poise to the example of Lyly. It sharpened the edges of [Shakespeare's] wit and gave his dialogue more bite and sparkle.

To this may be added the fact that even as late as King Lear Shakespeare bore unconscious witness to his familiarity with Euphues. Ferardo in that novel complains of his daughter's ingratitude, declaring as Lear did of Cordelia, that he had hoped to find comfort from her care in his old age.⁴⁸ He asks:

Is this the comfort that the parent reapeth for all his care? Is obstinacy payed for obedyence, stubbernnesse, rendred for duetie, malycious desperatnesse, for filiall feare?

In this context Lyly uses words which seem to be echoed by Shake-speare:

But why cast I the effects of this vnnaturalnesse in thy teeth, seeing I my selfe was the cause? I made thee a wanton, and thou hast made me a foole: I brought thee vp like a cockney, and thou hast handled me like a cockescombe.

Lear blames his flesh for begetting unnatural daughters; and the Fool tells him:

Cry to it, Nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em i'th'paste alive; she knapp'd 'em o'th' Coxcombs with a stick, and cried 'Down, wantons, down!'

(II. iv. 119-23)

There is some evidence that Shakespeare had read some of the Nashe-Harvey controversy, as it left its traces on Love's Labour's Lost;⁴⁹ but one of Nashe's pamphlets, Pierce Penilesse, seems to have left its mark on Hamlet,⁵⁰ and to a lesser extent on Othello.⁵¹ Shakespeare alludes to Soliman and Perseda;⁵² he was clearly influenced by Thomas Kyd's more famous play, The Spanish Tragedy, the revenge play that provided a model for the original Hamlet and Shakespeare's variations on the same theme. Thomas Lodge gave him the plot of As You Like It and a few phrases in Richard II, but he had less influence on Shakespeare than the other University Wits.⁵³

Shakespeare knew most of Sidney's work, including Astrophel and

Stella, The Defence of Poesy, 54 and Arcadia, 55 and most of Daniel's – Delia, Rosamond, 56 A Letter from Octavia, 57 Cleopatra, 58 The Civil Wars, 59 and The Queens Arcadia. 60 He had, of course, read The Faerie Queene, but Spenser seems to have influenced him less than many minor writers. 61

So many books and plays have perished that even if we had read all the extant English books published before 1616, we could still assume that we had not read all the books known to Shakespeare; and some ideas and phrases apparently echoed from books we know may in fact come from books which are now lost. Even apart from this, some resemblances may be quite fortuitous; or Shakespeare may have derived the word, the phrase, the image, or the idea from casual conversation, from overhearing in a tavern, from the playhouse, from dictionaries, or from letters. An interesting example of the kind of pitfall into which the source-hunter is liable to fall is afforded by the death of Cleopatra, and her referring to the fatal asp as 'baby'.

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast That sucks the nurse asleep? (v. ii. 307–8)

One critic pointed out a parallel with Peele's Edward I, in which an asp is addressed with the words 'Suck on, sweet babe'. 62 But this striking comparison was a commonplace. Nashe, in Christ's Tears, says,63 'At thy breasts . . . aspisses should be put out to nurse'; and Cooper, writing of Cleopatra in his Thesaurus (1587), speaks of 'two serpents sucking at hir pappes'. Yet we cannot be sure that Shakespeare derived the idea from any, or all, of these sources, for it is possible that the sucking image was suggested by Charmian's aspostrophe 'O eastern star!' This may have recalled the star in the east, which led the Magi to Bethlehem, where they found the infant Jesus in his mother's arms. 64 It must therefore be borne in mind that apparently close parallels may be deceptive, and that even when Shakespeare is known to have read the work in question, his actual source may be different. In other cases, as we shall see, a single line in one of his plays may combine echoes of more than one source. When, for example, the Clown tells Autolyous, 'We are but plain fellows, sir', and he replies, 'A lie: you are rough and hairy' (IV. iV. 710-11), he is thinking of the story of Jacob and Esau. In the Geneva version Jacob is 'plain' (i.e. clean-shaven) and Esau is 'rough'; but in the Bishops' Bible Esau is described as 'hairy'.65 There is a similar conflation in The Merry Wives of Windsor, this time of two versions of Psalm xlix.66 Pistol tells Ford: