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**THE SOURCES OF
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**

KENNETH MUIR

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SOURCES OF
SHAKESPEARE'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.

University of Liverpool

KENNETH MUIR

ABBREVIATIONS

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

Bullough *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (8 vols)

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 – *Henry VI* and *Titus 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. 28-31)

The other parallel is even more striking. The line in one of Horace's *Satires* (II. 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 rayne 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

rified 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*;¹⁴ he consulted his *Adagia*;¹⁵ he probably read *The Praise of Folly*, either in the original or in Challoner's translation;¹⁶ 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 composers, 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 Frutes* 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 (I. 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 Groatworth 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 Shakespearean 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 *Euphuës*. 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, stubbornnesse, rendred for duetie, malycious desperatnesse, for filiall feare?

In this context Lyly uses words which seem to be echoed by Shakespeare:

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:

He woos both high and low, both rich and poor,
Both young and old, one with another, Ford.

(II. i. 101-2)

This is partly based on the prayer-book version: 'High and low, rich and poor; one with another'; but it also echoes the metrical version:

Both hie and low, both rich and poore
that in the world doe dwell.

Pistol alludes to the same verse in an earlier scene: (I. iii. 83)

And high and low beguiles the rich and poor.

He proceeds to extemporize in doggerel verse: (92-5)

And I to Ford shall eke unfold
How Falstaff, varlet vile,
His dove will prove, his gold will hold,
And his soft couch defile.

The same rhymes and references to illicit gain and adultery are to be found in the metrical version of the next psalm:

When thou a theefe dost see,
by theft to liue in wealth,
With him thou runst and dost agree,
likewise to thriue by stealth.
When thou dost them behold,
that wiues and maids defile,
Thou lik'st it well, and waxest bold
to vse that life most vile.

Shakespeare thus combined a variety of different sources in the texture of his verse, and the process, in most cases, was apparently unconscious. Just as J. Livingston Lowes was able to demonstrate that 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan' were a complex tissue of words and phrases borrowed from Coleridge's multifarious, and probably forgotten, reading, so it would be possible, if we had a complete knowledge of Shakespeare's reading, to show that words, phrases, and images coalesced in his poetry. Nor is there reason to doubt that the conditions of such coalescence were the same as with Coleridge: two or more passages became linked in his mind if they had a common factor, although the resulting phrase might not include that factor. T. W.

Baldwin has provided us with many illustrations of the process. One stanza in *Lucrece* may serve as an example:⁶⁷

The aged man that coffers up his gold
 Is plagu'd with cramps and gouts and painful fits,
 And scarce hath eyes his treasure to behold,
 But like still-pining Tantalus he sits,
 And useless barns the harvest of his wits,
 Having no other pleasure of his gain,
 But torment that it cannot cure his pain. (855-61)

Ovid briefly refers to the story of Tantalus in the *Metamorphoses* (iv. 458-9) and in a note on this passage Regius says: 'hac autem poena avari omnes affici videntur, qui patris pecuniis per avaritiam uti non possunt'. The connection between the story of Tantalus and avarice is brought out in Horace's first satire, a passage quoted by Erasmus in his *Adagia*, where Shakespeare may have seen it:

Tantalus a labris sitiens fugientia captat
 flumina. quid rides? mutato nomine de te
 fabula narratur: congestis undique saccis
 indormis inhians, et tamquam parcere sacris
 cogoris aut pictis tamquam gaudere tabellis.
 (i. i. 68-72)

Erasmus goes on to quote (under the same heading) a passage from one of the Odes (iii. 16):

Contemptae dominus splendidior rei,
 quam si, quicquid arat impiger Apulus
 occultare meis dicerer horreis,
 magnas inter opes inops.

This reference to the hoarding of wheat links up with the parable of the covetous man (Luke, xii. 15-21) who proposed building greater barns, only to be told (in the Geneva version): 'O foole, this night will they fetch away thy soule from thee'. On this parable the Geneva version has the following note:

Christ condemneth the arrogancie of the rich worldlings, who as though they had God locked vp in their coffers and barnes, set their whole felicitie in their goods, not considering that God gaue them life and also can take it away when he will.

Shakespeare seized on the coffers and barns of this note and turned them into verbs. Thus in a poem derived mainly from Livy and an annotated edition of Ovid, we have in one stanza echoes from two poems of Horace, a Biblical parable and the marginal note on it, and possibly (if we are to believe Professor Baldwin) from Juvenal's description of the miseries of old age. It is probable that Shakespeare, here and elsewhere, consulted the *Adagia* of Erasmus.⁶⁸

We cannot hope to track down more than a small fraction of the passages which Shakespeare made use of, for reasons stated above. Caroline Spurgeon believed that the famous triple image of flatterers—dogs—sweets, first analysed by Walter Whiter, was peculiar to Shakespeare, exhibiting a personal phobia; but it may well have been a literary commonplace.⁶⁹

We are on surer ground when we attempt to trace the sources of his plots, though even here there are obstacles in the way. In a number of cases – e.g. *Hamlet*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – there was probably a lost source-play – and not much can be deduced about the changes made by Shakespeare. The Histories present a special problem, since there is so much disagreement about the material on which the poet worked. It used to be generally accepted that *King John* was based on *The Troublesome Raigne*, but Professor Honigsmann has argued that Shakespeare's play came first. There may have been a lost play behind *Richard II*; both *Henry IV* and *Henry V* were derived in part from *The Famous Victories*, a play which exists in such a mangled text that we can only guess how much Shakespeare owed to it.⁷⁰ The authenticity of *1 Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus* is still a matter of dispute and until we know how much, if at all, Peele contributed to these plays, any discussion of their sources must be tentative. There is a similar problem with *Henry VIII* which some critics still regard as partly Fletcher's.

Shakespeare's method of composition differed from play to play. For some of his plots he seems to have used only one source, but generally speaking he combined two or more. In the remainder of this book the plays will be discussed in approximately chronological order. The narrative poems have been excluded from consideration and so, too, have the apocryphal plays – *Edward III* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I have given my views on these plays in *Shakespeare as Collaborator*.

II

EARLY PLAYS



THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

It is convenient to begin with *The Comedy of Errors*, although it may not have been Shakespeare's very first play, because it shows him, even so early, challenging the most admired writers of comedy, Plautus and Terence, on their own ground, and overgoing them both in complexity and ingenuity of plot and in subtlety of characterization. The two Plautine comedies which provided the basis for Shakespeare's plot – the *Menaechmi* and the *Amphitruo* – were frequently included in grammar school curricula.¹ There is no reason to think that Shakespeare knew any of the Italian adaptations of the *Menaechmi*, and William Warner's English translation did not appear until 1595. The fact that in this translation the wife refers to herself as a stale,² as Adriana does, may be fortuitous; for if Shakespeare had seen the manuscript of the translation one would have expected more verbal echoes, and not this solitary one.

The main plot is taken from the *Menaechmi*, in which one of the twins, Menaechmus Surreptus, arranges to have dinner with a court-ezan named Erotium. Menaechmus Sosicles is taken for his brother and gets the meal instead. Peniculus, a parasite, who was to have shared the meal, exposes Menaechmus to his wife. Eventually all is explained. Shakespeare begins his play with a scene, taken from the story of Apollonius of Tyre (in either Gower's version or Twine's)³ in which Ægeon explains how he lost his wife and sons. His name is probably derived from Aegeus, who was drowned in the Aegean sea, which provides the geographical background of the play. Ægeon is con-

demned to death because of a trade war between Ephesus and Syracuse, suggested by another play of errors, *Supposes*, which was to serve as the main source of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Antipholus of Ephesus says he was brought to the town by Duke Menaphon; and in Greene's *Menaphon*⁴ there is a shipwreck which parts the husband from the wife and their infant son, and pirates who separate wife and baby. In *Apollonius of Tyre* and its derivatives, including *Pericles*, the wife is supposed to die in childbirth, the father leaves his daughter in the care of others, and she is stolen by pirates. In *The Comedy of Errors* there is a shipwreck which severs the husband and one of the twins from the wife and the other, and rude Corinthian fishermen afterwards rob the wife of her son. Shakespeare greatly complicates matters by adding twin servants, separated like their masters, the name Dromio being taken, perhaps, from Lyly's *Mother Bombe*.⁵ The possibilities of error are thereby multiplied. Antipholus of Ephesus can be mistaken by his father, and by Dromio of Syracuse; Antipholus of Syracuse can be mistaken by Adriana, Luciana, the Courtezan, Dromio of Ephesus, the Goldsmith, and the Merchant.

Shakespeare may have studied Golding's translation of the geographer Solinus (1582) for details of the journeys of his characters, for this is the name given his Duke; but he seems also to have taken hints from the missionary journeys of St Paul.⁶ Certain details are taken from Acts, xix, describing his visit to Ephesus: Antipholus of Syracuse complains of sorcerers and witches, as well as of the cheats mentioned by Plautus, and we are told in this chapter of exorcists, evil spirits, and people who 'used curious arts'. The change of setting from Epidamnium to Ephesus may have been suggested by the *Miles Gloriosus*, another play of errors, which immediately follows the *Menaechmi* in editions of Plautus. But Apollonius had been reunited to his wife in the same city, as Ægeon is reunited to Æmelia, the temple of Diana being changed to a Christian priory.

Shakespeare does not directly use the substance of Act I of the *Menaechmi*; but he incorporates much of the material of Act II in his second scene, and develops the whole of his second act from *Menaechmi*, II. 3. For the first scene of the third act, in which Antipholus of Ephesus is kept out of his own house while his twin is within, Shakespeare took a hint from the fourth act of *Menaechmi* where the husband is told by the wife when he promises to return the cloak: 'Otherwise thinke not to roost within these doors againe'; and Erotium shuts him out, so that he exclaims:⁷

Now I am euerie way shut out for a very bench-whistler; neither shall I haue entertainment heere nor at home.

Shakespeare amplified this hint by memories of the famous scene in the *Amphitruo* (iv), in which the hero is shut out of his own house while Jupiter is with his wife. The business of the chain was suggested by a 'spinter' which had formerly belonged to the wife and which the Courtezan's maid gives to the wrong Menaechmus to have repaired. Shakespeare's chain is intended by Antipholus of Ephesus as a present for his wife; when he is shut out he decides to give it to the Courtezan, although afterwards he apparently promises it in exchange for a diamond ring. When the Courtezan is refused the promised chain by the wrong Antipholus, she decides to tell Adriana that her husband had taken the ring; and Antipholus of Ephesus is arrested at the suit of the Goldsmith for refusing to pay for the chain. Adriana, convinced that her husband is mad, goes with Dr Pinch to secure him and exorcize him; and when they afterwards meet Antipholus of Syracuse, they assume that he has escaped. He and Dromio take refuge in the priory. The arrival of the other Antipholus and the Abbess's recognition of Ægeon, now being led to execution, lead to the resolution of the plot.

It will be seen that Shakespeare's play is much more complex than Plautus'. The invention of the two Dromios leads to many additional 'errors'; the invention of Luciana provides a bride for Antipholus of Syracuse and a confidante for Adriana; and the wife becomes the central figure of the play, instead of a peripheral one, while the Courtezan becomes a minor figure, her relationship with Antipholus being comparatively innocent, and surprisingly unmercenary. The invitation to dinner is given by the wife, not by the Courtezan, to the wrong Antipholus. The change to a Christian setting enables Adriana to plead for the sanctity of marriage. Although Shakespeare adds more farcical elements – Dromio's wife and Dr Pinch, for example – he also added elements that are not farcical at all. The doomed Ægeon opens the play on a serious note and his discovery of his wife provides a moving scene, looking forward to *Pericles*. The study of Adriana's jealous love, the lyrical proposal of Antipholus of Syracuse to Luciana, and his sense of bewilderment and horror, lift the play above the farcical. There is some good verse – both blank and rhymed – and Shakespeare's immaturity is most apparent in the rhymed doggerel which takes us back to *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*.⁸

T. W. Baldwin has given a detailed account of the way in which Shakespeare constructed *The Comedy of Errors* from heterogeneous materials, as we have shown from the above summary. He summed up his conclusions in the following passage:⁹

His grammar-school training had been insistent that he must gather into notebook and mind materials out of which later to compile by imitation his own work. So here he assembles in his mind all accessible plays on mistaken identity; *Amphitruo*, *Menaechmi*, possibly *Miles*, and probably Gascoigne's . . . *Supposes*. . . *The Comedy* is not merely constructed principally from two plays of Plautus; it also analyses and reconstructs those plays into the *Andria* formula of Terentian structure.

Not all scholars have agreed with Baldwin about Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure,¹⁰ and not all have agreed with him that the play was written as early as 1589, or that there is a valid parallel between the sentence of death on Ægeon and the execution of a seminary priest in October 1588;¹¹ but Baldwin has given us by far the most comprehensive examination of Shakespeare's use of his source-material in this play.



THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE of the play was *Diana* by J. de Montemayor, which Shakespeare could have read in a French translation (1578), or possibly in B. Yonge's English version, not published until 1598, but made some sixteen years previously.¹ The central situation is similar to that of *The Two Gentlemen*: Felismena dresses as a man, finds that her lover Felix is wooing Celia, becomes his page, and is sent with a letter to Celia, who falls in love with the messenger. Celia dies and Felix and Felismena eventually marry. Here we have the germ of the Julia-Silvia-Proteus triangle; but there is no equivalent of Valentine, no conflict between love and friendship, and Silvia does not fall in love with the

messenger, as Olivia in *Twelfth Night* was later to do. A play was performed in 1585 entitled, no doubt inaccurately, *Felix and Philomena*,² and this may well have been Shakespeare's model, although there is nothing to suggest that it contained the sex-rivalry of two friends. There are numerous analogues of the conflict between love and friendship. In one of the most famous, the story of Titus and Gisippus in *The Governour* of Sir Thomas Elyot (1531), friendship triumphs over love, Gisippus relinquishing Sophronia to his friend: 'Here I renounce to you clerely all my title and interest that I nowe haue or mought haue in that faire mayden'. The lady is not consulted, Titus taking his friend's place on the wedding night, without her knowing it. Elyot has to predicate a close resemblance between the two friends. Titus does not act treacherously as Proteus does and he is not guilty of attempted rape, so that Gisippus' conduct is not as absurd as that of Valentine when he offers to relinquish Sylvia. Sophronia does not seem to mind which man she has; but both Julia and Sylvia have reason to be outraged by Valentine's offer. Presumably Shakespeare was aware of the absurdity, despite parallels in the *Sonnets* – which may have been written afterwards. There the Dark Lady seduces the poet's friend, and the poet in any case condemns his own enslavement to a woman he despises. There is another analogy in Lyly's *Euphues*, where the hero betrays his friendship for Philautus by wooing Lucilla, who is quite willing to respond for a while, afterwards jilting Euphues and marrying another man 'of little wealth and lesse wit' (Bullough, I. 221 ff.).

Whether Shakespeare derived his variations on Montemayor's tale from an unknown source, dramatic or otherwise,³ or invented them himself does not greatly matter. It is clear, not merely from the last scene of the play, but also from the portrait of the knight-errant, Eglamour, and from the comments of Speed and Launce, that Shakespeare was satirizing romantic ideas of love and friendship. Moreover, his two heroines are very unlike their reputed models. Julia is not Amazonian like Felismena, Silvia is not the sort of woman to die of an unrequited passion like Celia – or like Viola's imaginary sister – nor could she change partners like Lucilla, or meekly accept a substitution in bed like Sophronia. By giving his women identities, minds of their own, morals, and common sense, Shakespeare torpedoed the pseudo-romantic attitudes of his heroes. Yet Julia's tearing of Proteus' letter, which she afterwards pieces together, was obviously suggested by the devious behaviour of Felismena on receiving a letter from Felix.



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

THERE ARE three theories about the relationship of Shakespeare's play to *The Taming of a Shrew*: (1) that *A Shrew* was the main source of Shakespeare's play; (2) that it was piratically derived from it; (3) that both *A Shrew* and *The Shrew* were derived from a lost play, the *Ur-Shrew*. Not many critics cling to the first of these views. The third view, of the lost play, has the advantage of evading the awkward differences between most bad quartos and *A Shrew*. There are hardly any verbal echoes of Shakespeare's play in *A Shrew*; and although there is some plagiarism from Marlowe, most of the verse is at least respectable, beyond the scope of the normal pirate. Richard Hosley, in what is the most convincing contribution to a continuing debate,¹ has argued that *A Shrew* postdates *The Shrew*, that it is a piratical version of it, and that the author responsible deliberately deviated from Shakespeare's play, altering the names of most of the characters, giving the Shrew a third sister, and adding an epilogue to round off the Sly story.

If we accept Hosley's arguments, as I have gradually come to do, Shakespeare must have based his play on a number of different sources. The Sly Induction is derived ultimately from a story in *The Arabian Nights*, a variant of which Shakespeare could have read in *De rebus burgundicis* of Heuterus (1584), or in a lost collection of stories by Richard Edwardes (1570). (Translations of Heuterus by Goulart into French (1600) and English (1607) were, of course, too late for Shakespeare to have used them.) The drunk artisan tricked by the Duke of Burgundy in Goulart's version is entertained with a pleasant comedy.² Shakespeare, unless an epilogue dropped out during the thirty years that elapsed before his play appeared in print, avoided a scene in which the tricked drunkard awakens to his normal existence.

The second strand in the play was provided by Gascoigne's *Supposes* (1566), a lively version of Ariosto's *I Suppositi*. As the prologue explains, the word 'Suppose', as used in the play, 'is nothing else but a mistaking or imagination of one thing for an other'. Gascoigne calls attention to twenty-five supposes in marginal notes. Most of these are caused by the numerous disguises, master as servant, servant as master,

stranger for friend, and friend for stranger. Polynesta, the heroine, is pregnant by Erostrato, but Shakespeare's Bianca is a virgin. Erostrato's servant, posing as his master, persuades a Siennese merchant to pretend to be his rich father whose coming with a dowry he had promised, by warning him that Ferrara was dangerous to people from Sienna. (From this incident Shakespeare derived Ægeon's plight in *The Comedy of Errors*.) When Erostrato's father arrives there follow complications similar to those in Shakespeare's play. Cleander, the aged suitor corresponding to Gremio, turns out to be the father of Dulipo, the bogus Erostrato. Shakespeare does not make use of this twist in the plot. He gives Bianca three suitors and adds the business of the Latin and music teachers. It has been suggested³ that the Latin lesson is based on a scene in *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (1590), but the debt may be the other way round. Hortensio's marriage to a widow and Lucentio's to Bianca provide two apparently docile wives to contrast with the genuinely obedient Katherine.

The main plot, of the taming, seems to have no identifiable source. The taming of a shrew is a popular theme and there may well have been something closer to Shakespeare's plot than *A Shrewde and Curste Wyfe*, a ballad in which the shrew is chastened with birch rods. Hosley points out a number of parallels⁴ – the contrast of the shrew with her sister, the description of the shrew as mad, a fiend, as angry as a wasp, and the mention of the rout at the wedding – but the only one that makes it fairly certain that Shakespeare did know the ballad is 'He that can charme a shrewde wyfe,/ Better then thus', which is close to Shakespeare's 'He that knows better how to tame a shrew'; but Menaechmus, in W.W.'s translation, exclaims similarly: 'Would euery man could tame his shrewe as well as I doo mine' (t. iii).

Details of the taming plot may be derived from various sources. The scolding of the tailor is similar to an anecdote about Sir Philip Caultrop in Legh's *Accedens of Armoury* (1562).⁵ The scene of the wager is reminiscent of *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, which Caxton translated in 1484.⁶ Three merchants wager on their wives' obedience. There is an analogue of the scene in which Katherine agrees with statements she knows are absurd in *El Conde Lucanor* but Shakespeare is unlikely to have known this.

There are some curious parallels⁷ with one of Erasmus' *Colloquies*, translated as *A Mery Dialogue, Declaringe the Propertyes of Shrowde Shrewes and Honest Wyves* (1557), in which a young wife, who has become shrewish through her husband's misbehaviour, like Adriana in

The Comedy of Errors, is advised to be patient so that she may gradually reform her husband. Two passages in the first scene of the play seem to echo passages in the colloquy:

But if it were, doubt not her care should be
 To comb your noddle with a three-legg'd stool. . .
 A pretty peat! it is best
 Put finger in the eye, an she knew why.

(i. i. 63-4, 78-9)

Compare the following:

I gat me a thre foted stole in hand, and he had but ones layd his littell finger on me, he shulde not haue founde me lame. . . (Sig. A3^v)

She withdrew her good mynde and dylygence and when her husband called vpon her, she put the finger in the eye, and wepte. (Sig. A9)

Shakespeare seems to have echoed another of the *Colloquies* – one that had not been translated – in Katherine's sermon to the disobedient wives:⁸

our Condition is much preferable to theirs: For they, endeavouring to get a Maintenance for their Families, scamper thro all the Parts of the Earth by Land and Sea. In Times of War they are call'd up by the Sound of the Trumpet, stand in Armour in the Front of the Battle; while we sit at home in Safety.

So Katherine tells the other wives that the husband is

one that cares for thee,
 And for thy maintenance commits his body
 To painful labour both by sea and land,
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
 Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe.

(v. ii. 147-51)

There were, of course, countless sermons on the subordination of women to their husbands. The same doctrine had been preached by Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors*. Hosley quotes an interesting passage from *A Very Frutefull and Pleasant Boke Called the Instruction of a Christen Woman* by Juan Vives, translated by Richard Hyrde (c. 1529). Although there is no reason to believe that Shakespeare had read this book, one sentence suggests that Katherine's tactical submission may be interpreted

as a strategic victory: 'A good woman by lowely obeysaunce ruleth hir husbande'.⁹

The names of Tranio and Grumio, but nothing else, were taken from the *Mostellaria* of Plautus.

The three plots are brilliantly linked structurally (as the attempts by Garrick and others to play the Taming on its own inadvertently proved) but they are also linked thematically.¹⁰ In all three plots there are characters who are rôle-playing. Sly, for a few hours, is made to play the part of a lord; characters in the Bianca plot pretend to be servant or master, music tutor or Latin tutor, father or son; Petruchio pretends to be a male shrew in order to cure Katherine; and she enters into the game of pretending. The play is not, therefore, the crude and degrading farce it has been thought to be by some critics; but, it must be confessed, some of the verse, particularly in the first scene, is flat and feeble. This is not merely a device, as used later in *Much Ado about Nothing*, to throw into relief the more vital pair of lovers, but a positive lack of poetry; it compares unfavourably in this respect with all the other early plays.



TITUS ANDRONICUS

TITUS ANDRONICUS presents us with a number of problems. In the first place, it may not be wholly Shakespeare's. On the one hand there is H. T. Price's conviction that there was no other dramatist of the period who was capable of displaying the powers of construction apparent in this play;¹ on the other hand, two recent editors have thought to detect traces of Peele's style in the early part of the play.² The second problem is the question of date, which is not relevant to the question of sources. Thirdly, there is the difficulty of knowing whether *The History of Titus Andronicus*, published in the eighteenth century, was derived from, and was substantially the same as, Shakespeare's main source. Fourthly, there is the question of the date of the ballad on the subject, whether it was based on the play, or one of its