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Oedipus at Colonus and *King Lear*: Classical and Early Modern Intersections

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info@skeneproject.it

Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzù
P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138

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Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh's Classics: The Case of Sophocles

Carlo M. Bajetta

Abstract

Studies of influence are frequently based on source identification, and ultimately on the recognition of segments of text within the work of a given author. While this is perfectly legitimate in many cases, in a number of other occasions this may engender confusion and, possibly, error. This is particularly true of a period such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which it is frequently difficult to understand whether a text was materially available to readers or not. This paper will focus on extra-textual elements and examine two test cases, that of Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh, which may prompt some useful considerations on the circulation of Sophocles during the period in which a large part of the members of Shakespeare's public were educated.

Keywords: Queen Elizabeth I; Sir Walter Ralegh; William Shakespeare; Sophocles; influence; sources; allusion; material texts; book history

When discussing books and readers in the early modern period it is hard to resist referring to *King Lear*, Shakespeare's bookless drama. The play, in fact, features the reading of a map and several letters. However, with the exception of the reference to the prognostications which Edmund pretends to have read (Shakespeare 2017: F 1.2; Scene 2.115-16) and of the naming of some lenders' records (Shakespeare 2017: F 3.4; Scene 11.4.77), no real book is ever mentioned.[1] The "Lear Universe" – to borrow G. Wilson Knight's ex-

1 As Charlotte Scott has observed, the word 'book' occurs in thirty-six of Shakespeare's thirty-eight plays. Although it does not appear in *The Comedy*

pression – presents us with a philosophy "firmly planted in the soil of earth" (1978: 179), and with a world which has very little interest in printed or handwritten volumes. Onstage, after all, what matters is the verbal element. "What do you read my lord?"; Hamlet's famous answer in 2.2 to this is less elusive that we might think. Hamlet is indeed reading 'words': what counts is the text, not the book.

In many respects, this is not unlike the assumptions of much traditional scholarly practice: in order to understand what authors read, researchers look at their "words", their texts, and compare them to other sets of "words". Whether starting from Bakhtinian ideas of "dialogism" (or "heteroglossia"; cf. Bakhtin 1981) or from Julia Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality" (or her later concept of "transposition"; cf. Kristeva 1984), no matter how they rely on authorial intention as the trigger for the dynamics of use and recognition of a work (see e.g. Irwin 2001; Ricks 2002: 157), most studies of influence and allusion are ultimately dependant on the recognition of textual segments within the oeuvre of an author.[2] While in many cases this is perfectly legitimate, in a number of other occasions this may engender confusion and, possibly, error (sometimes magnified today by an inconsiderate use of digital resources). This is particularly true of a period such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which indirect quotation and mediated references were common, and in which it is often difficult to understand whether a text was materially available to readers or not. Be as it may, the myth of the 'Renaissance Man' – a phrase, signif-

of Errors and *All's Well that End's Well*, Scott claims that in these works "we still find traces of the semiotic affecting and emblazoning the book, upon the action" (2007: 5, 6). One may want to note that by "book" Scott means "a number of written articles, including a single page, a tablet, a manuscript, lettering, and the printed volume" (6).

2 On the convenience of using 'allusion' as a term (as opposed to terms such as 'echo', as in Hollander 1981; 'reference', and many others illustrated in Marrapodi 2007: 1-12) especially when applied to the Renaissance see Hamlin 2013: 77-124. See, however, also Miola 1988 and 1992. On adaptive imitation in the sixteenth century (and especially in Ben Jonson) see Burrow 2019. Burrow also provides what is probably the best definition of imitation to date: see esp. 33-4.

icantly, still in use today as a compliment – is hard to die. Even a cursory look at the modern scholarship on Shakespeare's allusions makes one feel the Bard of Stratford read many more books than an avid reader can dream of perusing in a lifetime.

This rather long reading-list always seems to be in the making. John Kerrigan (2018: 63-82) has recently added classical tragedies by Seneca, Euripides, and Sophocles – most noticeably *Oedipus at Colonus* via its Latin translation and adaptations – to the list of possible sources for *King Lear*.[3] Kerrigan's book certainly shows us the importance of considering the polyphony of the variations on a theme; but what about the reception of this play? Could an audience – at least, an educated audience – perceive such specific resonances of classical antiquity?

Rather than focusing on the circulation of ideas, this paper will focus on extra-textual elements. It will examine two test cases relating to the reception of Sophocles which can illustrate the circulation of printed and manuscript books at Court during the period in which a large part of Shakespeare's public was educated. The two figures in question, Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Ralegh, are, in a way, representative of the two ends of the Elizabethan (and, partly, Jacobean) courtly cultural milieu. One is the highly read, culturally sophisticated monarch, educated by the best intellectuals of the Tudor period; the other, the prototype of the parvenu courtier, the Oxford student who never took a degree, the inns of Court attendee who spent more time privateering at sea than studying law – who, nevertheless, amassed a substantial library and almost became the epitome of the learned historian.

1. "Greek every day": Elizabeth's Reading

Roger Ascham had little doubt: his pupil was better than most of her contemporaries:

> beside her perfect readiness, in Latin, Italian, French, & Spanish,

3 For a recent survey of Shakespeare's attitude to the classics (and a useful critique of earlier studies on the topic, such as Baldwin 1944) see Burrow 2013. This volume also provides a very useful annotated bibliography (270-5).

> she readeth here now at Windsor more Greek every day, than some Prebendary of this Church doth read Latin in a whole week. (1967: 56)

Ascham was not alone in his praise of Elizabeth. As Queen, she was frequently complimented on her knowledge of the classical languages, in England as well as on the continent, as witnessed by texts as diverse as William Latimer's praise in his biography of Anne Boleyn (cf. Latimer 1990), Celio Magno's 1558 letter and verses (Bajetta and Coatalen 2018), and John Florio's remarks in his *Firste Fruites* (1578: sig. C3v), as well as many others.

Under Ascham's tutorship, Elizabeth translated Demosthenes and Isocrates from Greek into English and then back into Greek, "for the space of a year of two", something that was done every morning, while the afternoon was generally reserved to Cicero (cf. Ascham 1967: 87). In one of his letters, Ascham claims she also worked on Sophocles. "She has always begun the day", Ascham claimed in a letter to Johan Sturm of 1550, "with the New Testament in Greek, and then read selected orations of Isocrates and the tragedies of Sophocles" (Ascham 1989: 167).

As a conclusion to their analysis of Elizabeth's translations of the Greek sections of Boethius, which the Queen appears to have translated with little help from the Latin versions, Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel conclude that "her youthful studies under Ascham had equipped her . . . with a limited but genuine knowledge" of Greek (Elizabeth I 2009: 25). This is certainly plausible; still, there are no quotations from Isocrates listed in the 2000 edition of Elizabeth's *Collected Works*, which includes only one possible (and quite vague) allusion to Demosthenes (88). Textual evidence shows that when she translated Plutarch she made use of Erasmus's Latin version (Elizabeth I 2009: 10-12, 16). The editors of the *Collected Works* identify a possible allusion to Sophocles in a sentence from a speech of 1586: "I am so far from desiring to live as that I think that person to be most happy which is already dead" (Elizabeth I 2000: 187). This, however, is much more likely to be a moralistic statement inspired by standard Christian piety rather than a learned quotation, which would probably have been lost on her audience, the "committees of both Houses" of

Parliament (ibid.). As a matter of fact, the situation at the time – the discussion of the Petition urging the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots – was far too dramatic for allusions to drama.

One may want to look elsewhere to find concrete signals, if any, of Elizabeth's delight in Greek authors, and turn to material evidence. This is certainly no easy task. No contemporary list of the books and manuscripts preserved in the various Royal palaces between 1558 and 1603 is known to survive, even if Sir Thomas Knyvett had probably started a catalogue of "the New Librarie" (at Whitehall) in 1581 (Royal MS 17. B. XXVIII, fol. 128v; cf. also Jayne and Johnson 1956: 292). When the Old Royal Library was presented to the nation by King George II in 1757, and later hosted at the British Museum Library, it had already gone through many unfortunate vicissitudes. During the Commonwealth, books and manuscripts from several royal repositories were transferred to the chapel of St. James's Palace; it was at this stage that several books were lost, stolen or donated (and not sold, as at first decreed by the new government; see Birrell 1987: 1-2; Warner and Gilson 1921: 1.xx; Esdaile 1946: 243-6). In addition to this, sales of duplicates took place at various stages in the life of the library, the first occurring just after Prince Henry's death (1612), when Patrick Young, then Royal Librarian, eliminated numerous spare copies, which were mostly books from the Lumley collection (Jayne and Johnson 1956: xxii, 19). A significant loss for the library's holdings took place between 1769 and 1832 when, due to underfunding, a large proportion of duplicates were sold (Birrell 1987: 3).

Various rearrangements, some of which related the cataloguing process in the early nineteenth century, dispersed what must have been a part of Elizabeth's collection of printed books among the many volumes that are now located at the British Library. As Thomas Birrell – the last scholar to carry out a vast-scale investigation on this topic – observed, what is left of Elizabeth's books amounts to about 300 titles (1987: 25-6). Birrell found the contents of the non-English section rather predictable and dull. Quite intriguingly, though, practically none of the extant manuscript volumes known to have belonged to Elizabeth appear in the series of inventories that the librarians of the Old Royal library, John Durie and his successor Thomas Ross, drew up between 1661 and 1666

(Royal MS Appendix 86, on which see Esdaile 1946: 180), a significant exception being Royal MS 1 A IX, a Greek version of the Book of Daniel by Hugh Broughton. This may point to the fact that most of these volumes were stored separately and re-joined the collection later, something which may, at a later time, have occurred with the Royal maps (many of which, however, did appear in this list and suffered a very different fate: they were probably transferred back to the Whitehall 'private' library of the King at some stage, and probably perished in the fire of 1689 which destroyed almost the entire palace; cf. Wallis 1980: 466). Various books once in the possession of the Queen, in fact, have been identified as copies hosted by other libraries and archives scattered around the globe (cf. e.g., for some Greek, Latin and Italian materials, Bajetta 2001 and Petrina 2014: 100-1). What happened to the beautiful collection of books "well stored with Greek, Latin, Italian and French books . . . bound in velvet in different colours, though chiefly red" that Paul Hentzer (1757: 30-1) saw at Whitehall in 1598? The original extent and subsequent fate of Elizabeth's library will probably never be convincingly described. Indeed, both the contents and the *iter* of the collection of these books appear to be, as Birrell noted, "as elusive as the rest of her personality" (1987: 26).

While information on the real contents of Elizabeth's bookshelves is scarce indeed, we can form an idea of the nature of the books she owned via the various dedications we find in the manuscripts and printed volumes that were presented to her, as well as through the extant lists of the presents the Queen received on New Year's Day. The manuscripts offered to her on occasions such as her visits to Westminster, Eton or the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, for example, do feature a number of Greek texts (cf. Bajetta 2001). In 1566, to quote but an instance, upon entering the church of St Mary's at Oxford, Elizabeth saw "dyvers sheetes of verses in Lattyn, Greeke, & Ebrewe sett vppon the doores & walles", later to be copied into a collection as Cambridge had done two years earlier (cf. Cambridge University Library Add. MS 8915; Bajetta 2020). As Sarah Knight and Elizabeth Archer have observed, "if the University panegyricists continually praised Elizabeth's learning, they also showcased their own, and bombarded the Queen with words in various material and linguistic me-

dia" (Archer and Knight 2007: 14; see also Knight 2015: 21-40, in particular 24-5). These texts had decidedly self-celebratory overtones; for all their intention to impress with their learning, however, the manuscripts that the Schools and Universities donated to the Queen included more Latin than Greek. Granted that, as J.W. Binns observed, the latter language "was taught both at school and University throughout the period . . . sometimes in a patchy and intermittent fashion" (1978: 132), one wonders if these scholars were less naive than it may seem, and if their gifts were not tailored to their learned (but, all in all, not 'that' Greek-loving) recipient. After all, the Chancellors of the Universities of the Elizabethan period were influential courtiers such as The Earl of Leicester (Oxford) and William Cecil (Cambridge). The latter, in 1564, had sent a detailed letter of instructions to the University authorities concerning the Queen's visit (Nichols 2014: 1.380-1; for more on the state of Greek academic studies in this period see also below, note 18).

A source that has not received sufficient attention yet is the official lists of the presents that the Queen exchanged with her courtiers on New Year's day. As Steven May and Jane Lawson have demonstrated, the givers of these presents were persons who, with a few exceptions, were personally known to the Queen; many of them, in fact, enjoyed real courtier status, that is, had access to the Privy Chamber (cf. May 1999: 1-40, esp. 22; Lawson 2013: 1-2). Of the about ninety books given to her as New Year's gifts (Lawson 2013: 535-6), only two are in Greek ('Josephus in Greek', no. 59.199, and 'a Greek book', no. 64.98). These, interestingly enough, are early gifts, and no Greek text appears to have been donated by any courtier after the mid-1560s. If one compares this with the seventeen (or, possibly twenty) books in Italian she received, the difference is striking indeed.

As the New Year's gift lists show, Elizabeth's courtiers had a penchant for lavish and extravagant gifts. They would not be deterred by any difficulties in identifying (after all, most of their secretaries were university-educated men) and purchasing Greek books to donate to their Queen.[4] Her courtiers knew her: she did

4 Christopher Hatton, to quote but an instance, once donated "a Coller of

not – by any means – favour Greek over Latin or the vernacular.

One may want to observe that if the *Sententiae* which are sometimes, based on rather tenuous evidence, attributed to Elizabeth are at all by her, they would just confirm such preference. Here, in fact, the Greek authors are practically all mediated via Latin translations (cf. Elizabeth I 2009: 331). Furthermore, the *Sententiae* draw freely from two well-known florilegia, Domenico Nani Mirabelli's *Polyanthea* (1503) and Thomas Hibernicus's *Manipulus Flores* (1306, printed twice in the 1490s, and later almost annually on the continent in the 1550s and the mid-1560s).[5] One hesitates to employ such evidence, however. In using this sort of ready-made commonplace books so liberally, Elizabeth would have been, in fact, utterly disregarding Ascham's precepts. Her former tutor had clear views on these: one should not "dwell in epitomes" (Ascham 1967: 107; cf. Elizabeth I 2009: 339). The fact that a Latin Demosthenes is used as a source in these texts, anyway, is yet another hint that these may not be by the Queen, who would have possessed, as seen before, at least a reasonable knowledge of this author, having translated it into English and back into Greek in her youth.

Be as it may, the evidence we have is that, at least after the mid-1560s, Elizabeth was not an avid reader of Greek.[6] As ob-

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gold Conteyninge xj peeces" so elaborate that its description runs for about eleven lines in the 1589 list (Lawson 2013: 386, no. 89.1). In fact, it seems at least one Greek scholar presented his work to the Queen. Edward Grant's presentation copy of his *Græcæ Linguæ Spicilegium* (1575), which features a beautiful gold-tooled binding and includes a letter to Elizabeth I offering her "this simple booke", is now in the British Library (shelfmark: C.80.a.20). William and Robert Cecil's secretariat provides a good example of the quality of their collaborators; cf. Barnett 1969; Smith 1968 and 1977. Another interesting instance is that of Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex, relating which see Hammer 1994 and 1999.

5 See the relevant entries in the *Universal Short Title Catalogue*. While the early editions were printed in Venice, these reprints appeared chiefly in Lyon and Antwerp. Ralegh owned a copy of Mirabelli's book; see below.

6 Interestingly, when Elizabeth visited Cambridge in 1564 "great preparacions . . . were imployed / and spent about the Tragedie of Sopohcles entytuled Aiax flagellifer in laten to be . . . played before her". The Queen, however, declined to attend the performance. This, however, might have been due

served above, had she appreciated it so much, her closest collaborators, such as, for example, Lord Burghley (who is known to have been a regular purchaser of books from the continent) and her chief favourites Leicester, Hatton, Ralegh or Essex, all men with good ties with the scholarly world, and some of them inveterate bibliophiles (cf. e.g. Beckingsale 1967: 250-1; Doran 2015: 331n5 and below) would have no doubt found a way to present their Queen with something worthy of her. While there was evidently no shortage of texts, however, none of the almost thirteen editions of Sophocles's tragedies in Greek printed in Europe between 1502 and 1603, seems to have ever reached the Queen's shelves.[7]

2. Sir Walter Ralegh's (Ivory) Tower

Sir Walter Ralegh certainly fits the description of a favourite and of a man with an interest in the classics. While introducing

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to her being "tyred with going about to see the colledges / and hearing of disputacions" and related to the fact that the show might have been declaredly long. A performance of a similar, though not identical, Latin text in 1605 prepared in honour of King James I lasted about four hours, which apparently irritated the King considerably; Nichols 2014: 1.432; see also Knight 2009. It should be added that the Greek manuscripts in the Royal collection dating from about this period are mostly copies of works presented by their authors or translators, who did not enjoy courtier status and who had no real knowledge of the Queen's preferences (e.g. her penchant for velvet bindings; see e.g. Royal MS 1 A XII, presented to the Queen by her chaplain John Bridges, Dean of Salisbury and later Bishop of Oxford). A good case in point is Royal MS 15 A III, a short 26-pages Latin translation of Plutarch's famous essay on how to profit by one's enemies (*De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, as it is commonly known as through the Latin version in the *Moralia*) with a dedicatory letter, together with Greek and Latin epigrams by the Oxford scholar John Raynolds. In his preface, the latter states that he had addressed verses to the Queen on her visit to Oxford University eight years before (probably in 1566), and thanks the Queen for restoring his shipwrecked fortunes.

7 To these one should add about fifteen Latin editions; cf. the entries in the *Universal Short Title Catalogue*. No edition bound with Elizabeth's arms is listed in Morris and Oldfield 2012 or in the British Library database of bookbindings. No Sophocles was among the books dedicated to Elizabeth listed in Williams 1962 or Wilson 1966.

Edmund Spenser and his book to the Queen, however, he does not appear to have been the donor of any volumes to the English Gloriana himself. He was, nevertheless, a book lover: we are lucky to have a list of the contents of his library which he compiled in about 1607 (included in British Library Add. MS 57555; see Oakeshott 1968). Nicholas Popper has justly observed, this "should not be taken as a comprehensive catalog of his sources" (2012: 29n39; see also Oakeshott 1968: 292); in fact, we have evidence that Ralegh continued to collect items for his library in the following years. Some books which are not mentioned in this list were certainly in Ralegh's possession for a while: he owned, for example, the copy of Tasso's *Rime e prose* (2 vols, Ferrara, 1583), which is now at Yale, and one of Nicolas Vignier's *Theatre de L'Antechrist* ([La Rochelle], 1610).[8]

Ralegh was no doubt a gifted translator from the Latin poets and prose writers, but his Greek, if he knew any (see e.g. Popper 2012: 29), must have been very limited. While there are quotations from Greek writers in his works, he almost invariably made use of Latin versions. To quote but a few examples, Thucydides is quoted in Latin in Ralegh's *War with Spain* tract (1829: 8.305; interestingly, some small differences in comparison with the contemporary versions of this short passage suggest that this might have been quoted by heart). In a section of his *History of the World*, quite amusingly, Ralegh mentions Sophocles, but then goes on to quote from Horace (1614: 424; vol. 1, part 2, chap. 13, par. 4).

In his famous conversation with William Drummond, Ben Jonson observed that "the best wits of England were employed for making of his [Ralegh's] History" (Jonson 2012: 5.370). Some people could, in fact, have provided some precious help. Jonson himself claimed he had written "a piece to him on the Punic wars, which he altered and set in his book" (ibid.). John Aubrey once

8 Tasso's *Rime e prose* is in the Beinecke Library (shelfmark: 1975 380, with Ralegh's signature); Vignier's *Theatre* was sold at Sotheby's US on 12 April 2015, bought by Robert S. Pirie (1934-2015) of New York (Beal 2013: RaW 1037 and 1038), and later included in Magg's catalogue of September 2017. On the possible subsequent fortunes of Ralegh's library (which Sir Thomas Wilson tried to seize, allegedly, for the King) see Kew, National Archives, State Papers 14/103 fol. 126 and Beer 2015: loc. 4113-22.

remarked that Dr Robert Burhill, rector of Northwold, Norfolk, whom, he believed, had been Ralegh's "chaplayne", took on a great part of the "the drudgery of his Booke, for criticismes, chronology and reading of greeke and . . . Hebrew authors", while Serjeant John Hoskins (himself at least a part-time Greek scholar) played Ralegh's "Aristarchus" while he was a prisoner in the Tower in 1614, helping "to reviewe and polish Sir Walters stile" (Aubrey 2018: 2.1067). Such remarks, however, need to be taken *cum grano salis*. In fact, they all seem to point to the fact that some people provided the author with transcripts, notes and/or practical help, but not that they acted as his ghost-writers. To provide but an example, Ralegh's friend Thomas Harriot, the mathematician, produced some studies of population growth, which were certainly consulted, and some notes on the postdiluvian settlement of the world which, if consulted at all, were evidently 'not' used to compile the relevant section of the *History* (cf. Sokol 1974; Popper 2012: 32). The extent of Ralegh's reading and notetaking can be surmised from the copious number of holograph entries on historical places in his Tower notebook (British Library MS Add. 57555), many of which can be linked to the sources listed in the same manuscript. To this, one should add the important role vested by chronology in his *magnum opus*, which constituted, among other things, Ralegh's opportunity to vindicate his own orthodoxy after the accusations of atheism he was compelled to face in the 1590s (see Popper 2012: 77-122, esp. 94-100 and 130-4).

Ralegh could use some help, but this certainly came primarily from some of the books he used. He "repeatedly referred to a core of modern authors" including Abraham Ortelius and Joseph Scaliger "to substantiate his points" (cf. Popper 2012: 31-2). In addition to this, however, he seems to have favoured precisely what Elizabeth was told to avoid: compendia. In his 1607 list we find, in fact, a number of florilegia, including Mirabelli's *Polyanthea* and the *Mythologiae* of Natale Conti, or Natalis Comes as he was known internationally (Venice 1568, reprinted various times in the sixteenth century; Oakeshott 1968: 304, no. 141).

Interestingly, the latter was acknowledged as a source by Ralegh on two occasions in his *History of the World*. Michael Rudick, however, has singled out at least thirteen other plac-

es where Comes provides the source text for the verse translations we find in the History. To quote but two instances, Ralegh's Callimachus, as well as what may otherwise seem to be a terribly learned quotation from Athenaeus of Naucratis come from this source (cf. Ralegh 1999b: no. 36.24 and 36.5). Incidentally, one could note that Comes provided a rather substantial amount of excerpts from Sophocles: the *Mythologiae* feature ten quotations from this author, two of which are from *Oedipus at Colonus* (Comes 1568: 2.1, sig. G1v and 3.10, sig. R3v).

3. Borrowing and Book Swapping

Both Elizabeth and Ralegh were known to be avid readers since youth; still, the information we can gather on their libraries can hardly be reconciled to their reputation as appreciators of literature (and in particular of poetry, which appears to be hardly present on their bookshelves),[9] or the frequent erudite quotations we find in their writings.[10] Certainly, access via other, now untraceable, printed or manuscript sources or the use of compendia may account for a number of such citations, and the probable disappearance of a large portion of the volumes they once owned should be taken into account. There is, however, another possible and very simple way to access a text. One may want to remember that in the Renaissance, just like now, people frequently borrowed books.

9 Interestingly, a copy of Petrarch was, quite probably, owned by both; cf. Popper 2012: 31 and below.

10 On Elizabeth see Ascham's (and his contemporaries') remarks, quoted above, and Shenk 2010. John Aubrey's account of Ralegh's life clearly depicts Ralegh as scholarly: "He studyed most in his Sea-voyages, where he carryed always a Trunke of Bookes along with him, and had nothing to divert him" (Aubrey 2018: 1.231). It is Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England*, however, that seems to sum up Ralegh's reputation in the seventeenth century: "So we may say to the *memory* of this *worthy knight, repose your self in this our Catalogue under what topick you please, of States-man, Sea-man, Souldier, Learned Writer*, and what not? His worth *unlocks* our *closest cabinets* and provides both *room* and *wellcome* to entertain him" (Fuller 1662: sig. 2M; italics from this source).

Ralegh is certainly a good example of a man who, especially during his Tower years, obtained many items from other people's libraries and, as we would say today, swapped book with friends and relatives. As witnessed by a holograph letter written about 1610 (British Library, Cotton MS Julius C III, fol. 311; see also Ralegh 1999a: 319), he asked Sir Robert Cotton for thirteen, mostly historical, volumes (see Edwards 1868: 2.322-3). In turn, Sir Walter almost certainly lent Cotton a Portuguese manuscript, a copy of Roteiro de Dom Joham de Castro's *Da viagee que os Portugueses fizeram desa India*, now among the Cotton Manuscripts (MS Tiberius D. IX) as well as other texts.[11] He also lent books to some members of his family. A copy of Bernardino Rocca's *De' discorsi di guerra* (Venice, 1582) is listed among Ralegh's books (Oakeshott 1968, no. 507). The copy is now located at the Royal College of Physicians (Dorchester Library D 32 b/5); the title-page bears the signature of both Ralegh and his cousin, George Carew (1555-1629), Baron Carew of Clopton (cf. Beal 2013: RaW 1035). We have no evidence that this was a gift (Ralegh added his motto at the bottom of the same page), and Carew is not known to have obtained Ralegh's books after the latter's execution. It seems most probable, then, that he borrowed the *Discorsi*, which was never returned. Given such exchanges (and others which may have taken place; see Popper 2012: 29n39), there is every reason to suggest that Ralegh borrowed freely from his old friend and fellow prisoner in the Tower, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, whose library featured works on topics which were certainly of great interest to the author of the *History of the World*: "architecture and

11 Samuel Purchas quite probably referred to this manuscript volume when mentioning one "reported to have beene bought by Sir Walter Raleigh, at sixtie pounds, and by him caused to be done into English, out of the Portugall"; see Beal 2013: RaW 1036l. As Beal notes, "Ralegh himself refers in The History of the World (II.iii.8) to 'the report of Castro, a principal Commander under Gama (which Discourse I gave Mr. Hacluit to publish)'". The possibility that Ralegh's friend, Sir Robert Cotton, could have owned a second (and obviously very expensive) contemporary Portuguese copy of this rare work is perhaps remote, whereas, on the contrary, some of Ralegh's MSS (e.g. RaW 692 and RaW 726) are known to have passed into Cotton's collection (Beal 2013: RaW 1036).

the art of war, philosophy and religion, geography and history, classical authors" as well as many standard "works of reference" (Batho 1960: 257).

These links are intriguing, and one may want to know more about these people's bookshelves. Percy, who had studied his classics, advised his son – notoriously – not to waste his time reading Greek (Percy 1930: 67); one has, therefore, little hope of finding many books in this language here: only one edition of Aristotle in Greek and Latin is listed in Batho (1960: 259). We cannot know which printed volumes were part of Cotton's library, since that part of the collection was dispersed. No Sophocles (apart from some 'verses' once included in a commonplace book; Tite 2003: 229), however, appears to have been part of the manuscript collection before the 1731 fire which destroyed part of it, as one can see from Thomas Smith's *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecæ Cottonianæ* (1696).

At least one Greek manuscript, however, may not have been far from Ralegh's circle. Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.31 is a composite volume made up of sections copied in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, containing some of Sophocles's works: *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Turyn 1952: 150-1). The last leaf of this volume bears the name "Tho*mas* Throckmorton" in a sixteenth-century hand; while probably not Thomas the Elizabethan conspirator, this was almost certainly a relative of Sir Walter's spouse, Elizabeth Throckmorton. [12]

Moving back to the 'other' Elizabeth in Ralegh's life, the Queen, one may note that we have no incontrovertible evidence that she had access to the volumes in the Royal library in her youth. Later in life, however, she had at her disposal the large collection of books once belonging to Henry VII, which was hosted at Richmond until 1602, and to that of her father, hosted in the Jewel

12 Possibly Sir Thomas Throckmorton (1539-1607); cf. Rowse 1962: 9, 190, and Broadway 2004. Rowse (190) points out that Arthur Throckmorton was a relative of the Underhills, and that it was from one of the Underhills that Shakespeare purchased New Place in 1597. Of course, speaking of any possible 'perusal' of this book on Shakespeare's part, however, would be pushing a distant relation too much.

Tower of Westminster Palace at least until 1600.[13] She quite clearly had a good relationship with Katherine Parr, and it seems reasonable to maintain that she could borrow books from her stepmother on several occasions. There were very important books in Henry VII, Henry VIII and Parr's collections (such as Alessandro Vellutello's edition of Petrarch) but not many Greek books were part of their libraries (cf. Birrell 1987; Carley 2004; Elizabeth I 2017: 2, 6-7n9).

Another very learned woman, however, was near Elizabeth in the early days of her reign. William Cecil's second wife, Mildred Cooke, was the daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, Edward VI's tutor. Not only could she read, translate and write Greek (as witnessed by a holograph letter she wrote to the fellows of St John's College, Cambridge and her version from Basil the Great's works) but she also cared about the diffusion of Greek language and culture. In 1587 she gave Christ Church, Oxford, eight volumes of Galen's works, and, on another occasion, a copy of the eight-volumes Polyglot Bible to St. John's in Cambridge.[14] Consulting the *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* database now available through the Folger Shakespeare Library website, one finds that Mildred, who served for a while as Lady of the Bedchamber to Elizabeth, owned a copy of Sophocles's tragedies in Latin and Greek, which she later donated to Westminster School (*PLRE*, Ad77.43; Allen 2013: 53n20).

It really seems Elizabeth read Greek when she had the company of individuals she could share her reading experience with, people such as Roger Ascham and Mildred Cooke. Both, however, were not with her by the late 1560s: Ascham, who had been intermittently ill since 1560, died in 1568; Mildred had moved back to her husband's house soon after Elizabeth's coronation.[15] Her cour-

13 Carley 2004: 21, 25. Elizabeth donated some books from Henry VIII's collection to Burghley (55), and to other people including Sir John Fortescue, her former tutor and cousin (145).

14 Mildred Cooke-Cecil's translation of a sermon of Basil the Great from the Greek (1550) is now British Library, Royal MS 17. B. XVIII, and her letter in Lansdowne MS 104, fol. 158. On her books see Bowden 2005. See also Allen 2013: 39-40.

15 Cf. Ryan 1963: 222-40. Mildred served as Gentlewoman of the Privy

tiers possibly knew this, and avoided presenting her with Greek books after the end of the decade.

Ralegh had people around him (much closer to him than a distant relative of his wife's) who possessed at least a particular Latin version, or better, re-working, of Sophocles: Seneca's *Oedipus*. One was Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644), a man whose career seemed to mirror (with better fortune) that of Ralegh himself, having been educated at Oxford and the Middle Temple and later appointed an esquire of the body to Queen Elizabeth I in 1601. Just like Ralegh, he had befriended poets and intellectuals, including John Donne (cf. Parfitt 1989: 47, 115; Strachan 2004). Ralegh and Roe, incidentally, had an acquaintance in common: the dramatist Ben Jonson – whose library, though, did not include any Sophocles, at least before 1626.[16] Jonson belonged to the happy few: the *PLRE* database lists only thirteen copies of Sophocles (in both Latin and/or Greek) in English booklists before this date.

The existence of a copy of Seneca's works in Roe's library is only partially relevant to the fortunes of Sophocles in this period: Seneca's *Oedipus* and his *Thebais*, in fact, had been translated by Alexander Neville and Thomas Newton respectively in 1563 and 1581 (see Kerrigan 2018: 65). "By the time of *Hamlet*", moreover, "there existed over fifty printings of the collected tragedies in various editions" (Miola 1992: 1). Roe's entourage, nevertheless, is worth exploring. In 1610 he led an expedition to Guyana, which he financed in partnership with Ralegh and Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton (Lorimer 1989; Strachan 1989: 25-6; see al-

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Chamber Extraordinary in 1558 – that is, being one of the Queen's close associates she served as unpaid Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber "sharing the same responsibilities and duties as the paid Gentlewoman, but without a salary" (Kinney and Lawson 2014: 25, 205).

16 Roe owned a copy of Seneca's *Opera Omnia*, cf. *PLRE*: 274.4. On Jonson's books see McPherson 1974; Evans 1987 and 1989; Duroselle-Melish, 2016 which lists two new books at the Sorbonne University Library, Paris, including Jonson's copy of a Parisian edition of Latin and Greek tragedies published in 1626. The twenty-seven Greek manuscripts that Roe donated to the Bodleian Library c.1628 (which he probably acquired during his two embassies in India and Turkey starting from 1617/8) are all theological or related to the scriptures; cf. Madan and Craster 1922: 10.

so Strachan 2004). Southampton had met Ralegh earlier, during the Azores expedition of 1597,[17] and had later occasion to see him again in early 1598, when Ralegh and Essex were both enjoying the friendship of Sir Robert Cecil and were feasting him with plays and dinners on repeated occasions before his departure for France (cf. Rowse 1962: 210; Lacey 1970: 206-7; Strachan 1989: 25). The fact that Southampton had been part of Essex's rebellion did not impede his participation in the 1610 venture with Ralegh. The past mattered relatively little at this stage: after all, the three noblemen evidently had an interest (in all senses) in exploration. Roe and Southampton, in fact, were both actively involved in the East India Company, and both sat in the Royal Council for Virginia (Strachan 1989: 15-18).

Southampton, Ralegh and Roe had all been courtiers of Elizabeth (even if Roe may have started frequenting the Court much later; Strachan 1989: 4-5). They were known for their cultural interests, and were or had all been, patrons of writers: Ben Jonson was a common acquaintance and John Donne may have been one (cf. Strachan 1989: 3 and 2004; Donaldson 2012: 120-1, 139-40 and note 17 here). Did they ever discuss the books they were reading? Was there a circulation of texts which may have been extended to their mutual connections? There is, unfortunately, no way of knowing this. In fact, instead of jumping to any conclusions (especially concerning Shakespeare; cf. Burrow 2013: 246-7) what has been seen so far may prompt some considerations on the topic of influence and 'source hunting'.

4. (Almost) A Conclusion

This paper has suggested that Elizabeth's enjoyment of Sophocles, and possibly of Greek in general, may have been linked to the company of some individuals who had a good knowledge of this language, and that, consequently, her appreciation of Greek literature may have dwindled after the first decade of her reign. Some

17 One may want to remember, incidentally, that John Donne had joined both the Cadiz and the Azores (or 'Islands') voyages and had written poems and epigrams related to these; see Bald 1970: 82-3, 91.

members of her Court, instead, may have had access to Sophocles in the original only through relatives, friends or acquaintances. In general, however, copies of his works in Greek, and even Latin translations 'proper' were demonstrably quite rare in these milieus, while various compendia and Seneca's reworkings were certainly more readily available to them (the latter both in the original and in translation).[18] While one should not make too much of this *per se*, it seems clear that, when combined with more bibliographical research and detailed studies of contemporary allusions (in a far more exhaustive way than the limited space of these few pages can allow), evidence of this kind could be of great help to ascertain the concrete extent of the circulation of Sophocles in this period.

As a matter of fact, bibliography and influence studies can be powerful allies: they can become the tools for a philology of culture which can help critics to form a realistic attitude regarding the dynamics of allusion and reception. Possibly, the reference with which this paper started could be a memento for all of those who 'go hunting' for sources. *King Lear* is a bookless play, but it is a play of ideas. Just as ideas circulate, books circulate, and the mapping of such circulation can be crucial. When we can trace how ideas and books circulate together there is no division of the kingdom, but rather concordance of evidence – and the map we can draw from this is the much more cheerful map of our discoveries.

18 No matter what Ascham told his former fellow student Richard Brandisby in 1542 ("Sophocles and Euripides are now better known here [at Cambridge] than Plautus was when you were here", Ascham 1989: 32), Sophocles was quite certainly known in the original to a limited number of university students in this period, and the situation did not change for well over a decade. The same seems to be true for Westminster and St. Paul's schools, where "The study of Greek . . . between 1530 and 1560 was probably more of an aspiration, rather than fact" (Adams 2015: 62). Greek acquired more prestige and was taught more consistently by the 1570s (see e.g. Adams [n.d.] and 2015: 115-20; Lazarus 2015: 453-4; Brockliss 2016: 122-3; 236-40), which in fact corresponds roughly with the revival of the printing of classical texts at the University presses and in England in general; see McKitterick 1992: 44, 58-72; and Demetriou and Pollard's detailed survey relating to Greek drama in particular (2017: 1-35, esp. 16-18).

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