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*What is a Greek Source
on the Early English Stage?
Fifteen New Essays*

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi and Tania Demetriou

S K E N È *Texts and Studies.* Text DA

ClaRE
Classical Receptions in
Early Modern English Drama

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Contributors

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PART 1
AUTHORITIES *vs* SOURCES

1

Invisible Books: Shakespeare and 'Narrative Sources'

Colin Burrow

Abstract

Books onstage in Shakespeare tend to be provocatively unidentifiable, or serve as props for dialogue between characters. The naming of sources on-stage in early modern drama tends to happen when someone who is either a pedant or a plagiarist is either boasting about their rudimentary learning or having it exposed. Plays with clear classical 'sources' typically do not explicitly identify them, and rely instead on readers and audiences to recognise parallels and divergences. What does this tell us about early modern reading and writing practices, and how should it inform critical practice? Recent work on relationships between early modern drama and the classics typically explores how Greek and Latin writing provides intellectual frameworks as well as invisible structures and forms that may underlie early modern drama. This invisibility is in keeping with early modern reticence about 'sources', but (as this paper will argue) work still needs to be done to develop a vocabulary and a set of criteria for persuasively making such identifications.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Ben Jonson; John Marston; Classical Antiquity; Authority; Imitation; Source

This paper is in a mixed genre, being in part palinode and in part gentle pushback. To take the palinode aspect first, in the ten years since *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* appeared there has been a lot of highly convincing work about Shakespeare's relationship to Greek tragedy. John Kerrigan and others have explored echoes of *Oedipus Colonus* in *King Lear*, while Tania Demetriou, Tanya Pollard, and many others too, including in volumes published by *Skenè*, have shown various ways in which Shakespeare's engagement with Greek was far greater than has hitherto been thought.[1] The

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1 Kerrigan 2018; Pollard 2017; Pollard and Demetriou 2017; Bigliazzi 2019; Demetriou and Valls-Russell 2021. Work on Greek learning in the period generally has also enjoyed a recent renaissance: see Rhodes 2019.

result of all this work is that it no longer sounds risqué to find the *Trojan Women* influencing Shakespearean tragic heroines or to hear echoes of *Alcestis* in *A Winter's Tale.* Indeed not to hear the footsteps of Orestes echoing through the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* is today tantamount to confessing if not to deafness then at least to tone-deafness. My palinode is simple: I wish that there had been more room for Greek material in Shakespeare in *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, beyond the inevitable chapter on Plutarch. My excuse is weak but common: the book was already overdue and overlong when I finished it, and because each chapter was about Shakespeare's response to a single author it would have been messy to include another chapter on all of Greek tragedy.

The pushback element in this paper is nothing that resembles a rebuttal or resistance to the recent Greeking of Shakespeare. It is indeed more of a sidestep or a dodge than a pushback. I will propose adopting a very broad view of what might be thought of as a 'source' in early modern England, and will use that broad view of the topic to suggest that, although the many verbal echoes of and allusions to Greek tragedy which have been recorded cumulatively establish the case for Shakespeare's knowledge of a reasonably wide range of Greek plays, verbal echoes are only one means among many of arguing convincingly for a strong relationship between Greek and early modern drama. The echo or verbal resemblance has become established as the principal foundation for identifying a 'source' for a number of reasons. One is that there is, as we say, 'a case to be made' that Shakespeare's small Latin and less Greek was actually capacious, and the way to prove that case is by what we call 'facts', and 'facts' in this context has a forensic sense, meaning in effect 'evidence that X did Y', or in this case that 'William Shakespeare read Euripides'. Another reason lies in the much longer history of annotations in scholarly editions of classical texts, from which the practices for annotating and interpreting the vernacular texts which have become canonical chiefly derive. Classical editors have always been keen to annotate close verbal resemblances between a Latin and a Greek text, and for good reason: one of the ways in which Latin authors simultaneously established their own authority and that of their language was by creating verbal parallels in Latin to Greek texts, and hence noting such parallels in commentaries on Latin texts

has both a hermeneutic purpose (it could show what the author was trying to do) and a wider cultural point (it could indicate the close and conflicted relation between Rome and captive Greece). 'Source criticism' as practised in the twentieth century was profoundly indebted to the methodology of the classical commentary, in much the same way that study of Shakespeare's texts and their transmission was dominated, at least for the central third of the twentieth century, by practices calqued off classical textual scholarship. By the early 1980s critics began to realise that the techniques of classicists (in particular recension in an effort to reconstruct a single lost archetype) were not appropriate for dealing with the texts of Shakespeare's plays, in which lateral influence between discreet versions coexisted with strong evidence of authorial revision, as well as strong evidence of collaboration and theatrical adaptation.[2] By the early 1980s too 'source study' was stigmatised as an 'elephant's graveyard', and fell, nay, positively crashed, from favour (Greenblatt 1985, 163). Much has been done to refine, complicate, and deconstruct the concept of a 'source' since then.[3] But despite these theoretical developments, in practice, and in particular when arguing for the influence of Greek texts on Shakespeare, the 'verbal allusion as evidence of influence' model still remains if not unquestioned then nonetheless dominant – and perhaps at times the desire for 'proof' can be stronger than the evidence available.

In *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (2019) I argued that in what I termed 'formal imitation' there often is no verbal connection between an imitand and its imitation. The relationship between the two texts may be more akin to a learned practice or a family resemblance than a shared phrase (Burrow 2019). It is probably self-evident to any practitioner of the creative arts that imitators imitate structures and rhythms as well as words, and the anxieties about verbal appropriation of prior texts, which are deeply intertwined with the history of *imitatio*, can be at least partially laid to rest by seeking to resemble the practice of an earlier text, its shape or habitual syntax, rather than its exact phrasing. The concept of 'formal

2 Notably Taylor and Warren 1983.

3 See e.g. Maguire and Smith 2015; Belsey 2015; Drakakis 2021, and on the metaphor of the 'source' Quint 1983.

imitation' had its roots in the work of my D.Phil. supervisor, Emrys Jones, who argued powerfully both for the transmissibility of what he termed 'scenic form' from one play to another, and for Shakespeare's awareness of Greek tragedy (Jones 1971; Jones 1977). It also rested on heroic work by Kathy Eden and Peter Mack in particular which showed the influence of Johannes Sturm and Philipp Melanchthon on rhetorical culture in the sixteenth century (e.g. Eden 1997; Mack 2002). One working assumption behind *Imitating Authors*, though, carried with it a large implicit debt to classical scholarship: in that book I tended to assume that theoretical discussions of imitation in the sixteenth century were necessarily, though in complex and refracted ways, reflected in practice. To put it crudely, *Imitating Authors* tends to assume that Shakespeare and his contemporaries put into practice what Melanchthon and Sturm and (though to a lesser extent) Erasmus theorised. There are good grounds for believing that 'theory' from the period can provide some kind of guide to practice, since rhetorical training was as much a way of life as a set of precepts, but there are also hazards in using the language of 'imitation' to describe textual relationships. The word 'imitation' has strong associations with the kinds of close textual relationship which we now usually call 'allusions', and is deeply embedded in the wider history and assumptions of classical scholarship. A key moment in this history is found in the textual apparatus to Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*, the notes to which always describe clear allusions to classical texts as 'imitations'. The Advertisement to the 1729 edition says that these "imitations", or what would now usually be termed "allusions", are noted "to gratify those who either never read, or may have forgotten" the texts to which they allude (Pope 1729, 4). This is a joke, like most of Pope, but also like most of Pope it is a joke with explosive force. It comically exposes the attitudes of the reading public in the 1730s: the assumption is that the learned reader of an annotated text already knows the texts to which "allusions" are made, and that assumption, Pope teasingly implies, is probably false. It also indicates that the word "imitation" by the first third of the seventeenth century was associated with close verbal resemblances. That association has not gone away, particularly among classical scholars, and it makes "imitation" a potentially risky word to use when describing interrelationships between texts.

Despite this problem, the theoretical writings of Johannes Sturm or Roger Ascham or Quintilian can indeed give insights into how early modern readers and authors thought about the interrelationship between texts. But other kinds of evidence about attitudes to what we call 'sources' in the period are available which are in their way just as revealing. There are several occasions in early modern writing in which fictional characters are represented talking about books and the relationships between texts – who are, as it were, themselves early-modern source-hunters – and these can give a slightly different angle on the ways that early modern writers thought about what we call 'source hunting'. Most of these representations occur in satirical contexts. This is not surprising, since satire was the genre in which the first English usages of the word 'plagiary' are to be found, and was a genre in which both the origins of and responsibility for authorship were subjected to particular scrutiny.[4] The source-hunter is of course distinct from "the plagiarie sonnet-wright" imagined by the satirist Joseph Hall, or from "plagiary" who steals poems from Horace in Jonson's *Poetaster*, or from the person who "(beggarly) doth chaw" Donne's words at the start of his second satire, but is usually also an object of ridicule, as though both plagiarists and those who police plagiarism are equally absurd. Lady Politic Would-Be in Jonson's *Volpone* is perhaps the most extreme instance of a source-hungry early-modern reader. Her frenzied name-dropping – she drops them so heavily that Montaigne's name is broken into three, rather than two, syllables – is not simply a cheap misogynistic satire on learned ladies. It is also an index of a wider aspect of early modern literary culture:

> Lady Would-Be Here's *Pastor Fido* –
> Volpone [*Aside*] Profess obstinate silence,
>   That's now my safest.
> Lady Would-Be All our English writers,
>   I mean such as are happy in th' Italian,
>   Will deign to steal out of this author, mainly;
>   Almost as much as from Montagnié:

4 See *Virgidemiarum*, 4.2.83 in Hall 1969; Jonson, *Poetaster*, 4.3.83 in Jonson 2012 (all quotations from this edition); Donne Satire 2.25-30 in Donne 1967. On plagiarism see Kewes 2003 and Eden 2008.

> He has so modern, and facile a vein,
> Fitting the time, and catching the court ear.
> (3.4.86-92)

Lady Pol implies that people who write so that their sources are overtly on display are doing something illegitimate, and that she has the learning to catch them at it. Meanwhile Jonson implies, by Volpone's asides, as well as through Lady Pol's errors (Montaigne gains a syllable and she seems to treat Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* as the name of an author), that readers who seek to trap authors in acts of theft by identifying specific sources are themselves absurd.

The source-hunting critic is mocked at birth in this passage – though Jonson himself was probably indebted to a slightly earlier piece of satire on source-hunters by his collaborator and rival, John Marston. In *The Scourge of Villainy* 6 from 1599 Marston describes a critic, or what he calls a "new discarded academian", at work reading Marston's own satires. Naturally the critic is an idiot, since in Marston's world everyone including Marston himself is an idiot; but critics of Marston are necessarily turbo-idiots:

> Then straight comes Friscus, that neat gentleman,
> That new discarded academian,
> Who, for he could cry 'Ergo' in the school,
> Straightway with his huge judgement dares control
> Whatsoe'er he views: 'That's pretty, pretty good;
> That epithet hath not that sprightly blood
> Which should enforce it speak; that's Persius' vein;
> That's Juvenal's; here's Horace' crabbèd strain',
> Though he ne'er read one line in Juvenal,
> Or in his life his lazy eye let fall
> On dusky Persius. Oh indignity
> To my respectless, free-bred poesy.
> (6.89-100)[5]

Marston's Friscus identifies not 'sources', or direct verbal debts, but what he calls "veins", or passages which are stylistically reminiscent of earlier authors. He identifies 'source' texts in this vague and

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5 Quotations from the forthcoming edition of the *Oxford Edition of the Works of John Marston.*

hand-waving manner because he, like the imagined readers of Pope's *Dunciad*, has not in fact read these Latin authors but wants it to look as though he has done so. And while drawing attention to the limitations of his critics Marston insists his own poetry is "free-bred" rather than being in the "vein" of these authors.

These examples may just indicate that the category of the pedant is a transhistorical one, or they may suggest the more specifically historical claim that the 'source-hunter' as a literary character emerges in tandem with the anxieties about plagiarism which were articulated in Elizabethan satire. But they also show more than that. According to the influential schema of types of imitation established by G.W. Pigman, Marston's satires might be said to combine "dissimulative" with "eclectic" imitation: that is, Pigman might say, Marston is indebted to Juvenal and Persius, but seeks to hide those debts (Pigman 1980). This, though, may be a slightly misleading view of the matter. Marston was not simply fusing together prior texts and seeking to occlude his relationship to them. Rather this passage combines an overt display of the possibility that he has used these authors with an explicit disavowal of such a connection. Implicitly this passage suggests that Marston's writing combines the "vein" of several earlier authors into a new and "free-bred poesy" in a way that makes attempts to identify his relationship with prior texts intrinsically foolish. That is, writers of satire might represent readers who find 'sources' as pedants or fools, and they did so in order to suggest that their works were founded on much reading and many books, but that none of those books could be identified. Marston does not root his poetic practice in eclectic or dissimulative imitation. Rather he claims a genealogical relationship ("veins") to earlier writing in a way that might tempt an ignorant reader to separate and identify each of those veins, but suggests that these "veins" are fused so inextricably together in his own work that attempting to prise them apart them is folly.

These rather niche representations of source hunting critics in the work of early modern dramatists are, *mutatis mutandis*, analogous to moments in which 'sources' in the form of physical books are presented on the Shakespearean stage. Several of these onstage books appear, not coincidentally, in satirical contexts. The most notorious example occurs when Polonius discovers Hamlet

with a book and asks him "What do you read, my Lord?". It is famously "words, words, words", or rather, as Hamlet goes on:

> Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber or plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for you yourself, sir, should be old as I am – if, like a crab, you could go backward. (2.2.198-205)[6]

The onstage book is a pretext for interpersonal exchange, and in some respects seems almost to be a *product* of that interpersonal exchange, or to be created to fit its role within the drama. Hamlet wants to tease and taunt, so the book becomes several books at once, all of them satirical: it could be Persius's satires, or Juvenal's or maybe Joseph Hall's or even John Marston's satires, none of which are kind to old men. Hamlet's book is an early modern 'source' in the sense of being a book that is not quite there, but which radiates possibilities. It is a text which is unidentifiable because it is so many books, both ancient and modern. The point of such a hybrid satirical book or omni-satire is that it can stab the person who is interfering with the person reading it. The pedantic Polonius is left unable to know exactly what the book is, so completely is it assimilated to Hamlet's particular "vein" of madness.

There is a similar effect in *Troilus and Cressida* when the learned Ulysses is asked by Achilles what he is reading. Ulysses says:

>   A strange fellow here
> Writes me: "That man
> . . .
> Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
> Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;
> As when his virtues shining upon others
> Heat them and they retort that heat again
> To the first giver."
> (3.3.90-101)

6 Quotations from Shakespeare 1986.

Achilles replies that he knows all that, and "nor doth the eye itself, / That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself".

This onstage book is also a natural perspective with multiple identities. Critics have sometimes argued that Ulysses is reading Cicero, or Plato, or Montaigne, or John Davies.[7] But the strangest thing about the onstage moment is that it is Achilles, who is not the one presented reading the onstage book, who seems to offer the clearest summary of the contents of the book which Ulysses is holding. Indeed it might have seemed to audiences of the play in the early seventeenth century that Achilles had not only been reading Cicero and/or Plato but also Thomas Nashe's dedicatory address prefixed to *The Unfortunate Traveller*, which was dedicated to Shakespeare's patron the Earl of the Southampton, in which Nashe says that "the eye that sees round itself sees not into itself".[8]

The theatrical richness of these visible onstage books, or 'sources' of conversations, may reflect a simple material fact. Playing companies probably owned a very small number of books (Wall-Randell 2020), hence a book which was actually a Bible might on different days play the part, as it were, of a volume of Galen or of Aristotle or Cicero or even the Koran. But the elusiveness of the onstage Shakespearean book, its unidentifiability, the way it evokes a wide range of prior texts, also reveals something about early modern attitudes to what are still usually called 'sources'. A book is not one simple site of one statement possessed of a single originating author; rather it can serve as the origin of a conversation, in the course of which it becomes several books, and perhaps too many for any single one to be identified.

This claim could be taken further. It is often taken for granted that when Iachimo spies on Imogen in 2.2 of *Cymbeline* she has been reading "the tale of Tereus" in a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and that this is the volume of which "the leaf's turned down / Where Philomel gave up" (2.2.45-6; e.g. Burrow 2013, 28). This assumption has a logic which is perhaps more Victorian than early modern: *Cymbeline* is set in the era of Roman Britain, so it must be Ovid that this Romano-British heroine is reading, the implied argument goes,

7 Details are in Shakespeare 1953: 411-15. See Burrow 2013: 29-30.
8 Nashe 1958, 2.201. First suggested in Shakespeare 1906.

and it would be anachronistic if the book were any other book.[9] But the onstage book in *Cymbeline*, like the sources of this play itself, is multiplex. Imogen may be imagined by her author and audience as an early-modern woman reading one of those collections of *novelle*, such as George Pettie's *Petite Palace of Pleasure* (1576), which were explicitly designed for and addressed "To the Gentlewomen Readers" (Pettie 1576, sig. Aii*r*). Pettie gives the tale of Philomela the title "Tereus and Progne", and if a reader were to "turn down the leaf" at the moment when "Philomel gave up" in the *Petite Palace of Pleasure* the story becomes not just the tale of Tereus but the tale of Tereus and Tereus, because the name of Tereus from the running titles would overlay that of Progne, and so appear twice over, thus:
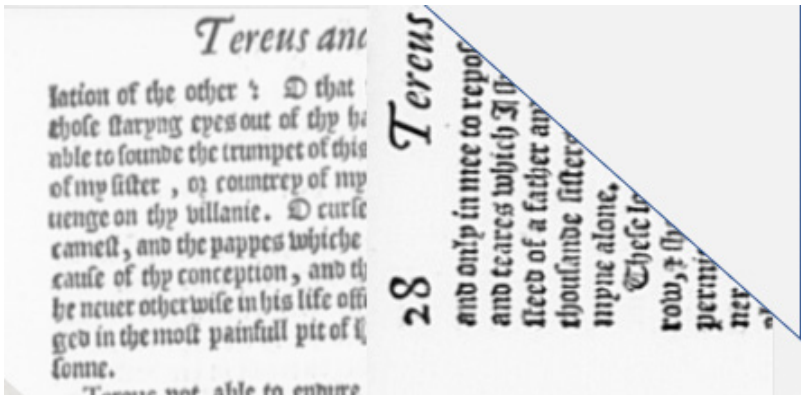
Figure 1: The leaf turned down in the tale of Tereus in *Pettie's Petite Palace of Pleasure* (1576).

This is not to make the pedantic pseudo-empirical claim that Imogen 'is' reading Pettie rather than Ovid in this scene. The 'source' for Imogen's book in Figure 1 is a digitally manipulated fiction rather than a scholarly discovery of a volume with the page turned down, or with Shakespeare's or Imogen's fingerprints on it. Early modern literary culture allowed for the idea of a 'narrative source' or even a physical book which was 'maybe Ovid, or maybe one of several other versions of the story of Tereus and Philomel'.

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9 On the anachronism of anachronism, see De Grazia 2021.

How might these representations of readers and source-hunters help us understand what an Elizabethan 'narrative source' was? Asking that question inevitably summons up a ghost. Enter stage left, in heavy clanking armour, the eight volumes of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Bullough 1957-1975). Bullough's collection is dominated by the vernacular texts he terms "narrative sources", and was the heir to a long tradition that goes back to Charlotte Lennox's collection of Shakespeare's sources called *Shakespear Illustrated* of 1753-1754. Lennox's collection was in turn founded on the belief that Shakespeare had small Latin and no Greek at all, but that he did enjoy and indeed steal plots from vernacular versions of Bandello and other Italian *novelle*. The influence of Lennox's collection on attitudes to Shakespeare's reading has been incalculable. Her focus on vernacular "narrative sources" assisted the emergence of the profoundly unhelpful critical polarization between, as it were, the T.W. Baldwins and the Geoffrey Bulloughs of the scholarly world, between those who want to prove Shakespeare's classical learning by tracing verbal allusions to classical texts in his works and those who emphasise a Shakespeare whose reading was dominated by vernacular "narrative sources" (Baldwin 1944). Binary oppositions are rarely helpful, but this one has been more than usually pernicious. Although the critical conversation has moved beyond the fruitlessly extreme versions of it (did Shakespeare warble his native woodnotes wild, or alternatively did he learnedly rehash his grammar school knowledge on the stage?), it is not entirely dead – as anyone who has given a paper about Shakespeare's relationship to classical literature to an audience of people principally interested in Shakespeare as a man of the theatre will know to their cost. Finally dissolving the antithesis between Shakespeare the native woodland warbler *vs* Shakespeare the humanist reader would be a small benefit to mankind. It could help us come a little closer towards understanding the range of ways in which early modern writers could use what they read and what they knew of past stories, and hence how they regarded what Bullough calls "narrative sources".

The first stage in dissolving this antithesis is not, perhaps, to put additional pressure on the word 'source', which has already been crushed almost to death, but to direct some pressure instead towards

that innocent-sounding word 'narrative'. What was a 'narrative' in this period? In the rhetorical tradition a *narratio* was part of a speech which offered a circumstantially plausible account of the facts designed to persuade a judge of the truth of one's case (Quintilian, *Institutio*, 4.2). A *narratio* took a 'fact', or a thing done, and might elaborate the 'circumstances' in which it occurred – the persons, the place, the time, the manner how, and so on. In *Circumstantial Shakespeare* Lorna Hutson (2015) has shown how the elaboration of these 'circumstances' could create the sense of thickly realised scene and character in Shakespearean drama. That brilliant insight into the rhetorical culture of the age might invite us, perhaps, to imagine its inverse. It might invite the question 'What would *un*-circumstantial Shakespeare look like?' What might an early modern 'fact' or thing done look like, if it were stripped bare of 'circumstantial' detail, or if the time when or the persons who acted were all changed, while the nature of the action remained the same?

In sixteenth-century vernacular rhetorical textbooks, narrations are often presented in the form of summaries of events which might provide students with an occasion for variation and elaboration. Richard Rainolde's *Foundation of Rhetoric* from 1563, for instance, gives several single paragraph examples of 'narrations'. It may simply be a coincidence, but several of these are stories of which Shakespeare was to compose highly circumstantial versions. So Rainolde gives "a narration historical upon King Richard the third, the cruel tyrant" (sig. D1*r*) as well as "A Narration Poetical Upon a Rose", which relates a story of how the rose became red as a result of the love of Venus for Adonis:

> Venus as a louer, ranne to helpe Adonis her louer, and by chaunce she fell into a Rose bushe, and pricked with it her foote, the blood then ran out of her tender foote, did colour the Rose redde: wherevpon the Rose beyng white before, is vpon that cause chaunged into redde. (D4*r*)

Neither 'narration' derives from a clear prior 'source' in the dominant sense of the word in Shakespeare studies, since 'sources' for such de-circumstantialised narrations are almost necessarily impossible to identify, and neither of them is a clear 'source' of Shakespeare in the sense of displaying verbal echoes with his

works on the same narrative subjects; but both are accounts of the 'facts' of a case – including in the version of the Adonis 'narration' a play on red and white to which early readers drew attention in Shakespeare's version of *Venus and Adonis* (Duncan-Jones 1993). If a 'source' is imagined not in the academic but in the geographical sense, however, as a small trickle in a hillside capable of gradually swelling and growing until it becomes the Vlatava as it roars through Prague, then this passage from Rainolde could be regarded as a 'source' of *Venus and Adonis*. It is a compressed origin, a 'narration' which represents the portable form of a potential poem in the form of a site for elaboration. The early-modern concept of a 'narration' positively encouraged a mode of elaborative retelling that took a bare summary of a story, and ornamented it with speeches and elaborately fashioned circumstances.

The printed European *novelle* collections which critics from Charlotte Lennox onwards have presented as Shakespeare's chief 'narrative sources' offered both the bare summary form of 'narration' and its circumstantially elaborated expansion. The tales of Matteo Bandello are relatively spare of detail: like those in Boccaccio's *Decameron* they are chiefly concerned with who does what to whom. When those tales were translated into French by François de Belleforest and Pierre Boaistuau they were frequently treated as material for rhetorical embellishment (Pruvost 1937). The French translators often added long speeches of persuasion or elaborated those which were already there. They were followed in this by the authors who are typically described as the English 'translators' of Bandello, including William Painter, Geoffrey Fenton, and George Pettie. Painter and Fenton generally worked from French versions of Bandello, and typically elaborated the French elaborations even further by expanding speeches, or writing fictional letters, or extending complaints. This process accelerated between Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* of 1566 and George Pettie's *Petite Palace* of 1576. Pettie, for all his claims to be petite, allows speeches and complaints and letters to expand so copiously that the 'source' in Bandello or Ovid or wherever it might be often all but vanishes. So his Admetus writes to Alcestis as follows:

I had rather live with you in most misery (if he may possibly be miserable that injoyeth such a jewel as you are) then here in most happinesse (which of me is not to bee had without you) therefore wayward fortune hath only left us this way, if it please you so mutch to dishonour your selfe, & to doo me so mutch honour, as meete me the tenth of this moneth at the Chappell of Diana, standing as you know six leagues from you [*sic*] fathers court. I will there God willing meete you, and a priest with mee to marrie us, which dooen, we will shift our selves into Pilgrimes apparel, and so disguised indure together sutch fortune as the fates shall assign us. And thus tyll then I bid you farewell. *Yours ever, or his owne never, Admetus.* (Pettie 1576, 88)

Pettie's 'narrative sources' often seem overwhelmed by his rhetorical elaboration of them, in much the same way that Ovid's story of Venus and Adonis seems overwhelmed by ornament and speeches in Shakespeare's version of the story. But the English *novelle* of the late sixteenth century (like their European counterparts) typically also prefixed their copiously ornamented narrations with summaries of the tales that followed. These were narrative 'sources' in the sense that they gave the bare facts of a tale. So Pettie prefixes the story of Admetus and Alcestis with the following summary:

Admetus sonne to *Atys* king of *Lybia*, falling in love with *Alcest*, daughter to *Lycabas* king of *Assur*, who recompenced him with semblable affection, are restrayned eche from other by their parents, but beeyng secretly married, wander in wildernesses like poore pilgrimes. *Atys* shortly after dieth, whereof *Admetus* being advertised, returneth with his wyfe, and is established in the kingdome. The destines graunt him a double date of life, if he can finde one to die for him, which *Alcest* her selfe performeth: for whose death *Admetus* most woefully lamenting, shee was eftsoones by *Proserpina* restoared to her life, and louer againe. (Pettie 1576, 82)

What early modern readers including Shakespeare 'knew' or remembered of the story of Alcestis may well have resembled this summary of 'facts', or things done in it, which anticipated the circumstantial elaboration of the story which was to follow, and, perhaps, implicitly encouraged readers to provide their own

circumstantial elaborations. Pettie's summary story of Alcestis presents the outline of a tragicomedy of love emerging from a two-part structure: a phase of elopement and disguise in the wilderness is followed by sacrifice and rebirth. Within the usual senses of the word 'source' Pettie's summary is not a 'source' for anything in Shakespeare, but its easy transpassage between the conventions of the *novella* (resistant parents, the opposition of the stars) and that of Greek tragedy (sacrifice, divine intervention) offers suggestive connections with *A Winter's Tale*. Sarah Dewar-Watson has argued, on the basis of verbal and dramaturgical parallels, that Shakespeare knew George Buchanan's Latin version of Euripides' *Alcestis*. In order to make that case (which I would not dispute) she briefly considers and then excludes the influence of Pettie, whose version of the story was the fullest version in English at this period (Dewar-Watson 2009). Certainly the relationship between Shakespeare and Pettie would be hard to prove in the forensic laboratory of source study, but that does not mean it is not there: Pettie drew the story of Alcestis into the ambit of the *novella*, and made it accommodate the wanderings and elopements, the conflicts between parents and children, the periods in the woods and wildernesses which were the staples of his version of the *novella*, and which also underpinned *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and, for that matter, *A Winter's Tale.* That the only extended English version of the Alcestis story in this period should create those structural and generic connections provides reasonable grounds for including it within, as it were, the large, loose volume called 'early modern Alcestis stories' which fed into Shakespeare's late romance. The processes of literary and cultural influence should be thought of as cumulative, rather than as either/or choices: it is not a matter of either Buchanan or Pettie. A text could make a reader think about another text, or establish a particular story as the kind of thing which could become a play. It could also establish a broad canon of the kinds of material which could be drawn on or elaborated.

Elizabethan *novella* collections did this. They were extremely eclectic in the texts on which they drew. Bandello and Boccaccio, which tend to grab the headlines in literary histories, are only two of the many sources of stories absorbed into this most voracious of literary forms. The first volume of Painter's *Palace* provides

the names of what would now be called the 'sources' of each tale
(these include Aulus Gellius, Xenophon, and Plutarch, as well as
Boccaccio and Bandello) in its prefatory summary of their contents
– and his Roman tales include that of Lucrece and of Coriolanus.
His second volume goes one step further, and is prefixed by a
list of what are termed "Authorities from whence these Novels
be collected: and in the same avouched" (Painter 1567, sig. ***v).
These 'authorities' include Homer, Xenophon, Plutarch, Ovid,
Livy, Bandello, Boccaccio, Horace. I have argued in the past for
reviving the word 'authorities' as a substitute for the contentious
word 'sources' when thinking about Shakespeare's relations to
his reading (Burrow 2016). The term has not caught on, probably
because it makes Shakespeare sound medieval, or because it might
seem to imply that Shakespeare was subservient to his "authorities",
or because it implicitly challenges the residual but still strong belief
that Shakespeare's imagination was so free and so original that
it was subservient to no one. John Drakakis (who rightly draws
attention to the role of oral culture and cultural memory in the
genesis of Shakespeare's plays) favours the suggestive alternative
term "resources", and that may have more life in it than "authorities"
(Drakakis 2021). The word "resources", however, was not used by
Shakespeare, and is first cited from usages in early seventeenth-
century translations from French, where it tends to mean "a new
spring", and hence a return from the earth, and hence, by the mid-
seventeenth century, "reserves of money". The word "authorities"
is free of these proto-capitalist associations, and as used by Painter
is anything but hierarchical, since in effect it means 'something
akin to these stories that are here circumstantially elaborated can
be found in the following prior works by writers of high standing'.
The "authorities" behind a text can encompass a wide amalgam of
prior books, akin to the volume in Hamlet's hand, or the fusion of
Pettie and Ovid that we might be invited to see in Imogen's hand, or
the work of the 'strange fellow' in Ulysses' hand, in which there is
something Greek and something Latin as well as a flavour of Nashe
and other European vernacular writing. "Authorities" of this kind
were not verbal sources which exerted power over their imitator:
in many respects they were the reverse. They included "narrative
sources" in the sense of outlines of tales which invited their readers

to equip them with circumstantial elaborations, and so bury them deep beneath new speeches and new rhetorical ornaments.

The collections of *novelle* which were among Shakespeare's "authorities" had cultural aspirations that extended both high and wide. As well as overtly addressing both male and female readers, they presented themselves as speaking to cultural elites. Geoffrey Fenton dedicated his collection of translations from Bandello and Boaistuau to Mary Sidney, the mother of Sir Philip. William Painter (who was Clerk to the Office of Ordinance) dedicated the first volume of the *Palace of Pleasure* to the Master of the Ordinance, the Earl of Warwick, who was the Earl of Leicester's brother and the uncle of Sir Philip Sidney. That association of *novelle* with the Leicester circle made it natural for culturally aspirational English writers in the 1590s to use these "authorities" to generate fictions which were Mediterranean in a broad geographical and historical sense – and made the *novelle*, indeed, by the time Sidney's *Arcadia* was first published in 1590, appear to be more closely assimilable to the Greek romances on which Sidney drew than literary historians often allow. The *novelle* provided invitations to fuse Greek, Latin, Italian and French writing together, and to elaborate on fictional circumstances provided by Bandello, or Plutarch, or Ovid, or Euripides, or Boccaccio. Shakespeare should be thought of – both in his choice of material and in the way he elaborated it – as belonging to that European *novella* culture.[10]

Where does that leave Greece? As Gordon Braden has noted, critics who search for traces of Greek learning in Shakespeare often present their case in a way that "has the feel of a detective story". A key textual fragment of evidence supports the overall argument for influence "like the tiny stain or partial fingerprint that clinches things in a crime lab procedural" (Braden 2016, 105), as the forensic critic seeks traces of Orestes' footprints in the graveyard in *Hamlet* or those of *Oedipus at Colonus* in *Lear*. Given the long history of denial that Shakespeare knew anything much at all, it is not surprising that critics want to 'prove' that Shakespeare knew at least some Greek tragedies in at least some form by identifying verbal echoes, as Louise Schleiner did when she argued that the "something too

10 Cf. the more limited claim made by Salingar 1974, 301-23.

much of this" with which Hamlet concludes his praise of Horatio echoes "nimium laudari" in Melanchthon's translation of Euripides' *Orestes* (Schleiner 1990).

I have no additional proofs of this kind to add, and would not seek to diminish the significance of those which have been found. But it is potentially restrictive to treat "narrative sources" as principally, or perhaps only, identifiable through verbal allusions or exact parallels. Doing so conflates the 'evidence' for influence with the thing itself. And indeed the evidence can at times seem to become the thing itself, as complex relationships are allowed to collapse into the reassuring simplicity of a verbal echo. This essay has attempted to blow a hole, ideally below the water-line, in the concept of a "narrative source" as presented by Bullough (see also Burrow 2015). I have argued that Elizabethans could think of books as hybrid entities, which (like the sammelbands into which shorter volumes were often bound in this period) appeared to contain multitudes of volumes and versions within. I have also suggested that Elizabethan satirists were very willing to mock those who attempted to pick apart the hybrid 'sources' of what they read. And I have argued that a "narrative source" is best thought of as a summary or digest of a tale which was ripe for rhetorical elaboration, and which might not come from a single origin, since "authorities" could be multiple. A text based on such a prior narration would not be expected to register a debt in the form of verbal echoes. It would be more like a remake or re-elaboration of the prior tale, which took the 'facts' or deeds of the case, and reclad them with speeches and new circumstances. The 'facts' of 'narrative sources' are therefore not the verbal reminiscences and echoes which critics have tended to produce with a triumphant flourish as the real 'facts' which prove influence: a narrative 'fact' is rather a set of things that were done, and which invites rhetorical elaboration in a new way; and that rhetorical elaboration might occlude any visible relationship with the authority from which it derives. We need not only to think differently about 'sources' when considering early modern writing, but we also need to think differently about what the word 'fact' in this period meant. This is of course a potentially anarchic set of claims. But it may be a little less anarchic than it might appear. If Shakespeare were thought of as a product of European *novella*

culture it would not be surprising that in him Greek and Latin and Italian and French were all in conversation with each other; nor would it be surprising that all and any of these languages could provide him with 'narrative sources' in the sense of a story, or a set of 'facts' or things done, which could be elaborated, ornamented, and embellished with new speeches. An early modern reader would regard a summary of a tale, like the entry for "Orestes" in Thomas Cooper's Latin Dictionary, as a 'narration' which was ripe for circumstantial rhetorical elaboration, as a 'fact' or an 'authority' which could be transformed into something new. Cooper's Orestes

> returnynge to Argos, with the consent of his sister Electra, in revengement of his fathers death, slue both his mother Clytemnestra, and the advoutrer Aegisthus. Afterwarde also he killed Pyrrhus in the temple of Apollo, for that he had maryed the lady Hermione that was before to him betrothed. For these murders Orestes was so cruelly tormented with furies, that he wandred madde in many countries, and never coulde be holpen, before that by sacrifice he purged his cruell dooynges at the aulter of Diana in Taurica. In all his troubles and adversities he had a faithfull friende named Pylades, that dyd always accompanie and helpe him, and loved him so entierly that he would have geven his lyfe for him. (Cooper 1565, N1*v*-N2*r*)

Thinking of this kind of text as a 'narrative source', or framework for elaboration, makes it natural, rather than a case that requires special pleading, to think of early modern playwrights in general as standing in a significant relation to Greek tragedy. The circumstances of place and person in the life of Orestes could be stripped away, leaving what Rainolde calls the "fact done" (sig. C4*v*), the action beneath, the matricide, the revenge, the true friend, which could then be reimagined using materials from other authorities. The figure of Orestes, mother-killer and father-avenger, could float like a ghost behind a drama recircumstanced in this way – transposed, say, to Denmark, in a play which had as one of its "authorities" the tale of Amleth in François de Belleforest's 1576 volume of *novelle*, *Histoires Tragiques*, an "authority" which was itself an elaboration of the 'facts' in Saxo Grammaticus's *Historia Danica* (See Gollancz 1926). Greek "authorities", Greek "narrative

sources", may have come to Shakespeare via Latin translations, or via Plutarch, or via plot summaries in dictionaries and *novelle*, or via extracts in rhetorical texts or prose works, or, more probably, via all those routes. But this does not mean that they came to Shakespeare in deficient forms which require the identification of verbal resemblances to prove that he 'really' knew about Greek tragedy, or that he knew a particular edition of a particular text. I would suggest, rather, that such abbreviated forms were the most potent forms in which a story could be transmitted: as "authorities" they presented bare facts which could be fed with elaborated circumstances. Thinking about inter-textual relationships in this way would enable us to recognise that Greek tragedies may have been among the most influential of the many invisible books on the early modern stage. The story of Alcestis encountered in an abstract or a *novella* could fuse with the conventions of Greek prose romance, and with a Latin translation of a Greek tragedy, and assist the genesis of *A Winter's Tale*; the tale of Orestes could blend with a *novella* about a Danish prince. These "authorities" could then all be overlayered with such copiously abundant speeches that they became truly invisible books.

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