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SHAKESPEARE'S BORROWINGS

The traditional picture of Renaissance literature as a product of spontaneous flowering of creative energy is still rather widespread, although this is a view directly contradicted both by the dominant critical theory of that time and by numerous Renaissance works, including the plays of Shakespeare himself. Few principles were emphasised so consistently and persistently in critical theory as the principle of imitation – not in the Aristotelian sense of the imitation of nature (*mimesis*), but in the Horatian sense of the imitation of other authors (*imitatio*). It was an idea built into the foundations of the humanist movement from its beginnings and it continued to be advocated – at least at the level of learned criticism and theory – throughout the Renaissance and well into the seventeenth century.

Several factors contributed to the establishment and lasting influence of that principle. The theory and practice of Latin literature, which was based largely on Greek precedents, was an authoritative example. The revival of the classical heritage, which was an essential part of the programme of humanist and Renaissance scholars, implied a careful study of classical works. The teaching in sixteenth-century schools was so oriented that it imbued the idea of great stylistic models into the minds of pupils from an early age. Some authors made even larger claims for this principle and maintained that the wish to imitate was innate in man, that it could not be curbed and that therefore each writer should imitate other authors (Bembo 1954: 40).

Although the principle itself was universally acknowledged, there were differences of opinion, especially in later stages, as to the exact importance imitation should have in a literary work. Some critics held extreme views and declared that originality should be eschewed: "Epithets... are an ornament of verse and should be taken from poets

rather than invented... for no one will find so apt, so suitable and so elegant ones as those in classical writers" (Parthenio 1560: 16). It is no wonder, therefore, that invention and originality were considered by some critics almost as a literary sin: "Those who do not want to imitate anybody and aspire to become famous not taking anything from anyone, lack energy and vigour in writing" (quoted in Sabbadini 1885: 39).

Not all critics, however, demanded such strict and slavish following of other authors. Some speak of another kind of imitation, which does not consist of mechanical inclusion of external elements from the works of other writers, but is a kind of literary education and assimilation of the spirit of great poets. Actually, this more general view of the role of models gained increasing currency as the sixteenth century advanced. Thus Du Bellay, writing in 1549, recommends the imitation of good writers – not only Greek and Latin, but also Italian, Spanish and others – but he says that in doing this, the author should always take care that what he takes from others should serve his own purpose and intention (Du Bellay 1904: 194). Giambattista Giraldis is also against close imitation and says that a literary work should always preserve a certain autonomy. In his opinion, imitation can be a channel for the transmission of inspiration to successive generations of writers. It frequently happens, he explains, that the same spirit which moved the poet to write begins to work upon the person who reads his work and kindles in him the flames of inspiration (Giraldis 1864: 34).

This view of imitation as a generative power is combined in some Renaissance theories with another important idea – the idea of emulation. Advocates of this view maintain that imitation should lead to the creation of a better work than its model. "And we ought to bear in mind", says a sixteenth century critic, "that we do not imitate to remain always inferior to the author we follow, but to surpass him." (Parthenio 1560: 107; cf. also Giraldis 1864: 178).

In general literary practice, the main effect of the principle of imitation was that it established an attitude which justified and prompted the adoption of borrowed matter – not only from classical authors, but also from mediaeval and contemporary, renowned and obscure writers. In this sense, it may be said that its main consequence was not so much to direct contemporary writers to classical models, as to give legitimacy and provide a favourable climate for the general practice of imitation and borrowing.

Shakespeare did not differ from his contemporaries in this respect. Like the majority of Elizabethan playwrights, he did not restrict himself to classical models. His plays are based on material borrowed from very diverse sources – Tudor chronicles, old legends, Italian *novelle*, classical historical texts, legendary histories, earlier English plays and narrative works of his predecessors.

Some of the fifty-odd works which have been suggested as Shakespeare's sources were not available in English translation at the time when he made use of them, and we do not know whether he read them in the original, or used some intermediary version, or again got to know them from oral communication.

What is important, however, is not so much the trajectory of a borrowing from one work to another as what happens in the final lap of that progress, when it passes through the creative mind of the appropriating author – and that is in fact a stage which is frequently ignored (cf. Whitaker 1941: 377). For a passage containing an imitated element can be a valuable source of information about the author, about his aims and purposes, and about the influence exercised upon him by his social and historical context. The choice of a borrowing may in itself be a record of the author's taste or of his perceptiveness for literary potential; an addition or a modification may provide a clue to his intentions, and an omission may be indicative of a critical principle at work.

When Shakespeare came to London, the most popular play in the public theatres was Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, a Senecan work that established the vogue of the so-called revenge play. It is no wonder, therefore, that the aspiring playwright turned to Kyd as his model when he began writing his first tragedy. The way he went about it shows that he held that imitation should be competitive. It also shows that he shared with some Elizabethan authors a specific view of this combination of imitation and emulation that may be called "quantitative" because it seems to have been based on the belief that the imitated model could be surpassed by the amplification or multiplication of the elements deemed contributory to its popularity or literary worth (cf. Kostić 1959: 72-73). In the case of style, for example, that view favoured the proliferation of epithets, the heightening of tone, or the intensification of imagery. The same tendency to augment is also apparent at the level of structure and characterization. The result is that some works look like comparatives of the models on which they are based, and this holds true for Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.

Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* revolves round the efforts of the Spanish court marshal Hieronimo to avenge the murder of his son Horatio, and it incorporates a number of elements that delighted the audiences in the London public theatres – suspense, outbursts of rage and passion and numerous sensational events. Another attraction was the fact that Kyd presented *coram populo*, the bloody events that make up a large part of the plot, and thus outdid his model Seneca, who had them reported by messengers. Before the grisly grand finale – which contains the exposition of a corpse, the biting off and spitting out of a tongue, three murders and two suicides – the spectators were treated to scenes showing a ghost, an allegorical figure, a hanging, preparations for a burning at the stake, a napkin soaked in blood, a letter written in blood and several outbursts of mental derangement.

Kyd's style, also modelled after Seneca, was another feature that delighted Elizabethan playgoers. His play is full of clashing rhetoric, heavily elaborated speeches, vehement and unusual images, anaphorae, epiphorae, parallelisms, oxymorons, alliteration and various other devices.

Shakespeare's wish was obviously to surpass Kyd. At this early stage, however, he did not have much discipline and critical judgment. What he seems to have lacked most was a sense of proportion and the skill to match style with the dramatic moment. This can be illustrated by a comparison of two similar speeches spoken by Kyd's Hieronimo and by Shakespeare's Titus. The first is Hieronimo's lament over the loss of his son:

Where shall I run to breath abroad my woes, --
My woes whose weight hath wearied the earth,
Or mine exclaims that haue surcharged the aire
With ceasles plaints for my deceased sonne?
The blustering winds, conspiring with my words,
At my lament haue moued to leaueless trees,
Disroabde the medowes of their flowred greene,
Made mountains marsh with spring-tides of my teares,
And broken through the brazen gates of hell;
Yet still tormented is my tortured soule
With broken sighes and restles passions,
That, winged, mount, and houering in the aire,
Beat at the windowes of the brightest heauens,
Soliciting for iustice and reuenge.
But they are plac't in those imperiall heights,
Where, countermurde with walles of diamond,

I finde the place impregnable, and they
Resist my woes and giue my words no way.

(III.7.1 ff.)

The other is Titus's reply to his brother's advice that he should use his reason and try to suppress his anguish and despair:

If there were reason for these miseries,
Then into limits could I bind my woes:
When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
Threat'ning the welkin with his big-swoln face?
And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?
I am the sea; hark, how her sighs doth blow!
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth:
Then must my sea be movéd with her sighs,
Then must my earth with her continual tears
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned:
For why? my bowel cannot hide her woes,
But like a drunkard must I vomit them.

(3.1.220-232)

The emulation is obvious, but it can hardly be called successful. Kyd's images, hyperbolic enough, have become absurdly overblown in Shakespeare's version, or even, as in the case of the last one, downright repellent. What we have here is obviously a misguided application of the "quantitative" conception of imitation, and the attempts of some apologetic critics to explain such passages as only partly Shakespeare's, or as parodic, or even as the Bard's secret gibe at the coarse taste of his public (Bloom 1999: 60; Dover Wilson 1964: xxxii) are understandable, but do not seem convincing.

Shakespeare made much better use of his model in his early *Comedy of Errors*. The basic story of that play is taken from Plautus' *Menaechmi*, in which the comic situations are spun out of the mistaken identities of a pair of twins. True to the "quantitative" conception of imitation, Shakespeare added another pair of identical twins to his plot, thus doubling the number of characters who cause comic misunderstandings, which begin much earlier, are more numerous and culminate in general befuddlement at the end.

But Shakespeare did not merely increase the comic potential of Plautus' story. Another important alteration was that he added a serious, almost tragic frame to his comic plot, and thus imparted a considerably greater range to his play. This frame is provided by the story of the impending execution of old Aegeon with which the play begins and ends. Other changes, such as the increased role of women, the consequent introduction of romantic interests, and the praise of marriage as the full spiritual and physical union, extend still further the emotional and psychological scope of the Plautine material.

The question whether Shakespeare created the English history play or followed the example of Marlowe's *Edward II* must remain open until more reliable evidence of the chronological relationship between Shakespeare's chronicles and Marlowe's play is discovered. In any case, the process itself of shaping historical events into a dramatic plot unquestionably posed a great challenge to the young playwright. In dealing with it, Shakespeare showed a sure grasp of dramatic architecture. From the very beginning he adapted quite successfully the amorphous material culled from the hefty Tudor chronicles and made it suit his dramatic purpose. He condenses incidents, adds fictional characters or situations, gathers up chronologically distinct moments into dramatic focal points, articulates disparate historical developments into integrated dramatic segments and invests them with a verbal garb that suggests the general and timeless significance of the staged relations and events. As we follow the chronological sequence in which he wrote his history plays, we can see how he gradually discards the plodding style, weighed down with drawn-out comparisons, far-fetched images and crowded formal ornaments, characteristic of the *Henry VI* trilogy, and begins to adjust his phrasing more closely to the character or the situation. This was a slow process, and as late as *Richard III*, his fourth chronicle, natural utterances, expressive of the individual characteristics of the speaker, alternate with passages of highly formalized rhetoric or ritual-like incantation.

The matter borrowed from the Tudor chronicles did not offer much opportunity for a variety of tone and mood. Developments bearing upon the fate of the state or its ruler demanded a serious tone, and their agents came from the highest segment of society. Their interest was political, and their actions were set in palaces of the great or on battlefields on which issues of great dynastic moment were decided. Comical elements could be introduced only occasionally, mostly in the form of interpolated episodes.

In the meantime, in writing plays belonging to other genres, where constraints of the subject were not so severe, Shakespeare was

learning how to deepen the meaning of his dramas and make them emotionally richer and generally roomier by interweaving borrowings from several sources or by introducing new characters into a borrowed story. His tragedy from that period, *Romeo and Juliet*, is based mostly on a single source, a novella by Matteo Bandello in Arthur Brooke's translation, but his modifications of it are, as might be expected, much freer than is the case of his historical dramas. These alterations are not merely the result of his endeavour to shape a narrative into a drama; they transmute considerably the basic tenor of the borrowed plot. Moreover, they introduce new characters or fully fleshed-out versions of secondary characters barely sketched in Bandello, who advance their individual points of view and thus broaden the social, emotional and psychological compass of the staged story.

The presentation of multiple points of view, which is one of the most outstanding features of Shakespeare's mature art, becomes even more apparent when the borrowed matter is derived from more than one author. An early example is *Love's Labour's Lost*, whose main plot cannot be ascribed to a single source, incorporates deposits of a number of individual modes of speech known from various works fashionable or popular at that time. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another comedy written at about that time, the basic plot is also devised by Shakespeare himself, but the characters appearing in it are convened from such diverse domains as classical literature, French romance, Celtic legends and earlier English works and traditions. As a result of the skilful interweaving of these distinct filaments, the central theme of love is presented in a multiplicity of contexts and exhibited in a number of aspects, from the grotesque to the menacing.

This new skill in combining borrowings from different sources was put to excellent use when Shakespeare came to write the two Henry IV plays. They differ markedly from the earlier chronicles in that they are not focused mainly, like the Henry VI trilogy or *Richard II*, on the aristocratic world and the problems of high politics. Although likewise based on the material taken from the Tudor chronicles, they also incorporate material from a primitive anonymous play, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, which deals with the dissolute life of Prince Hal and his companions from the Elizabethan underworld. As a result, the Henry IV plays range socially from thieves and prostitutes to the monarch; tonally from flippancy to gravity; morally from robbery to heroic idealism – and yet they remain faithful to the gist, and sometimes even to the details, of their historical sources.

The sketch of Shakespeare's use of borrowed material in the early phase of his career offered here should not be taken to imply that it is

possible to trace a clear line of development in his treatment of sources – a consistent movement from the concentration on one model at the beginning to the use of an increasing number of sources in the later years of his career. The chronology of Shakespeare's works does not support such an assumption. Of the mature tragedies, *Othello* and *Macbeth* are based mainly on a single source; the Roman plays do not deviate much, as far as the plot is concerned, from Plutarch's *Lives*. No change of method is noticeable in this respect in Shakespeare's final period either. The entire plot of *The Winter's Tale* is borrowed from R. Greene's *Pandosto; Pericles* and *Cymbeline* combine material from several sources; and the *Tempest* belongs to the few plays by Shakespeare with an original main plot, although it contains muted echoes from other works – ideas or characters suggested by the memory of, reaction to, or association with something familiar remembered from an earlier work¹.

We can obtain a better glimpse of Shakespeare at work if we explore his modifications of the borrowed matter, regardless of its origin in a single or several works. If we analyze his dramatic practice from this angle, we may say that the most characteristic and most consistent feature of his method is the elaboration of the borrowed material. It may involve several procedures, but the two most important ones are interiorization and the introduction of problematical issues that elicit complex responses. This implies a convincing rendering of inner emotional and mental processes and the presentation of distinct individual attitudes to the staged events.

The case of *Hamlet* illustrates this approach most clearly. As mentioned before, this play and the early *Titus Andronicus* belong to the tragedies of revenge. According to the established pattern, the tragedy of revenge had two focal points – the crime of the negative hero and the punishment of the crime by the avenger. This logical causal structure imposes, however, considerable dramatic difficulties. Between the initial focal point, the murder which demands revenge, and the final scene, in which vengeance is wreaked, there is a gap which is difficult to fill in a satisfactory way. Much depended on how many attention-riveting events the author succeeded in building into that interval. In the earlier plays of this type the gap was filled with an accumulation of sensational scenes. In Shakespeare's own *Titus Andronicus*, for example, Titus's daughter Lavinia walks on to the stage moments after she was raped, her tongue torn out, and her hands cut off. And that happens fairly early in the play (II.4).

¹ Cf. E.g. the discussion of the complicated web of humanist ideas woven into this play in Stanivuković (2006).

The horrors continue to pile up. According to a critic, who counted them (Hulse 1979: 19), the play has "14 killings, 9 of them on stage, 6 severed members, 1 rape, 1 live burial, 1 case of insanity, and 1 of cannibalism—an average of 5.2 atrocities per act, or one for every 97 lines."

When Shakespeare undertook, about ten years later, to write *Hamlet*, his second tragedy of revenge, the way he used the inherited dramatic pattern clearly showed how much his art had progressed in the meantime. The advance is apparent in all the elements of the play, from the style, which bears no trace of the earlier straining after overblown rhetorical effect, to characterization, variety of moods and breadth of moral and philosophical vision. Shakespeare also brilliantly solved the most important structural problem of the revenge play by interiorizing the delay of the vengeance and making it directly dependent on the character of the avenger (Kostić 1982: 17 ff.). The gap between the two focal points is not filled with crowded external happenings or by outbursts of thundering rhetoric, but by the even more absorbing inner conflicts of the hero. Hamlet's dilemmas are presented with so much dramatic power and psychological insight that the spectator or reader is constantly engrossed in them. As J.R. Brown rightly remarks: "We are interested in the hero's inner consciousness at least as keenly as we await the fulfilling of barbarous revenge" (Brown 1992: 17).

The shift of emphasis from external events and relations to the inner domain leads to similar, though less far-reaching modifications of the borrowed matter in *Macbeth*. Here Shakespeare uses elements of two episodes from his main source, Holinshed's *Chronicle* – the murder of Duncan by Macbeth and the murder of Duff by Donwald.² It is immediately apparent that in adapting these episodes Shakespeare reduces the importance of the social context in order to bring into sharper focus Macbeth's individual anguish as his soul dissolves under the pressure of the committed crimes. In both episodes, as related by Holinshed, the murderer has some grounds for his acts and he is helped by accomplices and supporters. The murder of Duncan is the result of a conspiracy initiated not only by Macbeth but also by a number of his supporters, by whom he is proclaimed king later. The murder of Duff, on the other hand, is executed by four servants sent by Donwald. In Shakespeare's version,

²The relevant passages from Holinshed are reprinted in Bullough (1957-75), Vol. III. Excerpts used by Shakespeare are also available on the internet - <http://www.clicknotes.com/macbeth/Holinshed/welcome.html>

Macbeth has no outward cause for the murder of Duncan: he is moved by his ambition only, and he has no accomplices apart from his wife.

The influence of the murderer's wife is a detail which is found in both episodes in Holinshed and which is also of great importance in the early scenes of Shakespeare's play. It is, however, the relationship of Shakespeare's hero with his wife that demonstrates most clearly the isolating power that the interiorization of the plot entails. At the beginning, Macbeth and his wife are very close. The murder of Duncan is their plan, jointly made and jointly carried out. But this act causes profound changes in their minds, and their mutual relationship is destroyed. When Macbeth plans his second murder – the assassination of Banquo – he says nothing to his wife, and before his third murder he confers with the witches, not with her. In fact, after the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the feast, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are never seen together again. They continue their progress into spiritual emptiness separately, and that progress is illuminated by their self-absorbed and searching soliloquies rather than by external events or by their relations with each other.

Interiorization is also responsible for a certain discrepancy between plot and character observable in Shakespeare's plays that make use of time-honoured fairy-tale motifs that had floated for generations in folk literature, traditional stories and legendary lore. Once such motifs gained currency, they were freely used in later variants, and their probability was not called into question. In some plays by Shakespeare, however, the inner reality of character seems disconcertingly at odds with such conventional motifs, and one has the impression that rational and true-to-life human beings have been made victims of irrational or improbable narrative structures. Would any level-headed and wise girl like Portia, one may justly ask, consent to be put up as the prize in a lottery such as the choice of the right casket? Or how is one to believe that the sensitive and discrete Helena, who is portrayed with so much human warmth and psychological insight in the first part of *All's Well that Ends Well*, could propose such a stratagem as the bed-trick?

Another remarkable general feature of Shakespeare's treatment of his sources is the enhancement of the female element. The effect of this intensification is manifold: besides expanding the emotional range of the play, it humanizes the action and provides for a greater variety of attitudes. In *1 Henry IV* the interludes with Mortimer and his wife (who appears in Shakespeare's source only as "the daughter of the said Owen"), or with Percy and his wife (all that Holinshed has to say about her is that she was the lady whom "the lord Henry Persie had married") introduce

tones of romance, of touching tenderness and of teasing playfulness into the grave world of political intrigues and contentions. In Plutarch's life of Coriolanus, the protagonist's wife Vergilia is mentioned briefly and only once; Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, though a very masculine play, has an important scene featuring female characters only, which not only sheds important light on the character of the absent hero, but also contains such an exquisite portrayal of Vergilia that it made John Ruskin proclaim her "the most lovely of Shakespeare's heroines" (Ruskin 1906:105). Again, in the crucial scene under the walls of Rome, the tender words with which Coriolanus greets Valeria, who gets only a passing mention in Plutarch, is one of the most poetic passages in the play.

Interesting indirect evidence of the author's artistic intentions is also provided by the characters who are not merely more developed and individualized than their models in the sources, but who are Shakespeare's own additions. In the *Comedy of Errors*, Adriana's sister Luciana, who has no counterpart in Plautus, is largely responsible for the diffusion of a mood of lyricism, of respect and idealization of women, which is wholly alien to Roman comedy. The introduction of new characters may complement or call into question the values and attitudes of the borrowed plot in other respects, too. Lodge's *Rosalynd*, the source of *As You Like It*, is a conventional pastoral romance which glorifies the Arcadian ideal, quotes Latin *dicta* and makes allusions to classical heroes and heroines. Its atmosphere is unrealistic, its characters are stereotyped, and its speeches are artificial. The new characters whom Shakespeare introduces into this bookish world – Jacques, Touchstone, William and Audrey – in fact undermine the sentimentalism of Greene's story. Their speeches, behaviour or mere presence establish individual dissenting or desentimentalizing perspectives on pastoralism and love – the two basis themes in the play. Moreover, each of these perspectives is shown as acceptable at a certain level and to a certain degree.

Similarly, the main plot in *Much Ado About Nothing* is based on a story retold, among others, by L. Ariosto, M. Bandello, E. Spenser and G. Whetstone. Yet Shakespeare's version is chiefly valuable, as has been observed (Lewis 1964: 82), for the characters of Benedick and Beatrice, and Dogberry and his fellows, who are his own additions to the borrowed story. This gallery of amplified or completely new characters who impart additional verve, vitality or depth to the borrowed matter includes numerous other picturesque or well-known inhabitants of Shakespeare's dramatic world – Falstaff, Mrs. Quickly, Doll Tearsheet, Bottom and his companions, the Fool in *King Lear*, Laertes in *Hamlet* and many others.

In addition to new characters, Shakespeare often incorporated new episodes into the plots he borrowed. They are sometimes mere comic interludes included for no other reason but to provide an opportunity for the comedian of the company to show his skill, but more often they are built into the structure of the play and contribute to the better portrayal of character or fuller statement of the central theme. Sometimes these added scenes are among the most memorable moments of the play – the soliloquy of Brutus before the assassination of Caesar; Lady Macbeth's invocation of the evil spirits, her sleep-walking, or the knocking at the gate of Macbeth's castle; the coming to life of the statue in *The Winter's Tale*; the account of Falstaff's death and the comic episodes with Fluellen and other captains in *Henry V*; the play within the play, Ophelia's madness and the gravediggers scene in *Hamlet*; the death of Talbot and his son in the *First Part of Henry VI*, a scene which brought tears, as Thomas Nashe tells us³, to the eyes of thousands of spectators in Elizabethan London, etc. – the list could be greatly extended.

Shakespeare's borrowings also testify to his extraordinary ability to perceive the latent dramatic potential in a text. One can frequently watch the plain seed from an earlier narrative work coming to luxuriant flower in his play. The plot of *The Winter's Tale* follows quite closely Greene's *Pandosto*. In one passage, Greene mentions a rural festivity in which Fawnia (Shakespeare's Perdita) also took part:

It happened not long after this, that there was a meeting of all the Farmers daughters in Sycilia, whither Fawnia was also bidden as the Mistresse of the feast, who hauing attired herselfe in her best garments, went among the rest of her companions to the merrie meeting: there spending the day in such homely pastimes as shepheard's vse.⁴

It is from these few lines, which apparently do not stand out in any respect in Greene's rather plodding and vapid narrative, that there sprouted

³ "How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, he should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding" – Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Diuell* (1592) (quoted in Schoenbaum 1987: 160).

⁴ The text of *Pandosto* is reprinted in Pafford 1963, 181 ff. The quoted passage is from p. 202.

the famous sheep-shearing scene, one of the longest in Shakespeare, full of varied interest, rich in poetry and imbued with symbolism.

In dramatizing Holinshed's account of Henry V's French campaign, Shakespeare transformed the chronicler's simple comment on the siege of Harfleur: "And daily was the town attacked" into the stirring hortative speech, known today to every English schoolboy, beginning "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more..." (III,1). Similarly, few would disagree that the orations of Brutus and Mark Antony above the dead body of Caesar (III,2) mark one of the great dramatic moments not only in *Julius Caesar*, but also in the whole of Shakespeare's work. And yet, Shakespeare found the inspiration for this great scene in a couple of desultory remarks in Plutarch, who mentions that Brutus used a cogent Lacedaemonian style, while Antony tended to express himself in a florid, "Asiatic" manner (Kostić 1994: II, 129).

Finally, we can mention instances in which Shakespeare does not develop or add to a borrowing, but uses an idea of another author in a changed stylistic garb. In such cases one can often see how a simple phrase, even when closely followed, gains unexpected vividness and forcefulness by the use of a striking image or crisp phrasing. Examples could be quoted at length. In Lodge's *Rosalynd* the heroine advises the conventionally disdainful shepherdess that she should requite the love of the shepherd Montanus. Her admonition is couched in neatly balanced and highly artificial euphuistic prose:

What, Shepherdess, so fair and so cruel? ...Because thou art beautiful, be not so coy: as there is nothing more fair, so there is nothing more fading... be ruled by me, while thou art young, lest thou be disdained when thou art old. Beauty nor time cannot be recalled, and if thou love, like of Montanus: for as his desires are many, so his deserts are great.

Shakespeare rephrases this passage thus (III, 5):

Who might be your mother,
That you insult, exult and all at once
Over the wretched? What, though you have no beauty –
As, by my faith, I see no more in you
Than without candle may go dark to bed
Must you be therefore proud and pitiless?...
But, mistress, know yourself: down on your knees,
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love!

For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
Sell when you can, you are not for all markets.

One of the frequently anthologized passages from *The Tempest* are Prospero's words after the disappearance of his magic vision (IV, 1):

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

In this case, too, we can point to the passage which stirred Shakespeare's imagination. It occurs in *Darius*, an obscure verse drama written by William Alexander, the first earl of Stirling (1570-1640), a few years before Shakespeare's romance:

Let greatnesse of her glascie sceptres vaunt;
Not scepters , no, but reeds, soone brus'd, soone broken:
And let this worldie pomp our wits inchant,
All fades, and scarcie leaves behind a token.
Those golden pallasces, those gorgeous halles,
With furniture superfluouslie faire!
Those statelie courts, those sky-encountering walles
Evanish up like vapours in the aire.⁵

Sometimes the difference between Shakespeare's lines and a possible source is so abysmal that one hesitates to suggest even a remote connection. In George Gascoigne's tragedy *Jocasta* (1587) Antigone, broken by grief because of the death of her brothers and the suicide of her mother, declares:

⁵ The passage (from the 1603 edition of Alexander's play) is quoted in Furness 1892: 284.

In these affrightes this frozen heart of mine,
By feare of death meinteynes my dying life.⁶

Although the similarity of these lines to Hamlet's musings on suicide in Shakespeare's best-known soliloquy is very slight, the possibility that they provided a spark which kindled Shakespeare's imagination should not be ruled out.

In his life of Mark Antony, Plutarch writes that Caesar Octavius sent a messenger to Cleopatra asking her to leave Antony. She received the messenger very kindly, which aroused Antony's wrath. Whereupon,

Antonius caused him to be taken and well favouredly whipped, and so sent him unto Caesar: and bad him tell him that he made him angrie with him, bicause he shewed him selfe prowde and disdainfull towards him, and now specially when he was easie to be angered, by reason of his present miserie.⁷

Taking over this passage from North's translation of Plutarch, Shakespeare expresses the same sentiment, and even uses some identical phrasing, but his verses let a deeper shaft of light into the inner state from which Antony's utterance wells up:

Get thee back to Caesar,
Tell him thy entertainment: look thou say
He makes me angry with him, for he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am,
Not what he knew I was: he makes me angry;
And at this time most easy 'tis to do't,
When my good stars, that were my former guides,
Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires
Into the abysm of hell. (III.13.139-147)

One can go thus from passage to passage in this play and note how Shakespeare enhances the nobility and vigour of the style of North's Plutarch, making it more meaningful and associating individual speeches with the thematic coordinates of the play. Perhaps the most illustrative in this respect are Plutarch's and Shakespeare's accounts of Cleopatra's

⁶ Child 1848:245.

⁷ The relevant parts of North's translation of Plutarch are reprinted in Ridley 1954: Appendix V. The above passage is on p. 279.

sailing down the Cydnus to meet Antony, too long to quote here, in which it is possible to observe, almost line by line, how great prose is transmuted into great poetry.⁸

The concluding part of this tragedy, and particularly the scene of Cleopatra's death, has always been greatly admired. John Masefield is particularly eloquent in his praise of it (Masefield 1931: 207):

Her death is not the greatest, nor the most terrible, but it is
the most beautiful scene in all tragedies. The words –

Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,
And we are for the dark.

and those most marvellous words, written at one golden
time, in a gush of the spirit, when the man must have been
trembling –

O eastern star!
Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That milks the nurse asleep?

are among the most beautiful things ever written by man.

This rhapsodic eulogy of Shakespeare's spontaneous outburst of inspiration was written in 1911. It was only several decades later that the plain grains of sand round which this precious poetic pearl was secreted became known. In 1952 attention was called to two passages which Shakespeare probably remembered when writing these lines. One occurs in G. Peele's play *Edward I* (1593), in which Queen Elinor kills the mayor's wife by applying a snake to her breast and saying:

Why, so; now she is a nurse – Suck on, sweet babe.

The other is a sentence from Thomas Nashe's *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593-94):

At thy breasts (as at Cleopatraes) aspisses shall be put out
to nurse.⁹

⁸ *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.2.190-218. Plutarch's description is reprinted in Ridley 1954: 262.

⁹ Ribner 1952: 244-246; Reeves 1952: 441; Reeves 1952: 441. Cf. Ridley 1954: 231 (note on 5.2.308-310).

Although it has not been possible within the scope of this paper to attempt an exhaustive treatment of the subject and offer sufficient illustrative evidence, some general conclusions regarding Shakespeare's treatment of his sources may be attempted. One is that at the beginning he was impressed by the highly rhetorical plays of Marlowe and Kyd, and sought to emulate them by giving even greater emphasis to the most salient features of their style. The result was not particularly fortunate, and he gradually abandoned such extravagances of dramatic diction and began to incorporate borrowings from other writers with a surer creative instinct and a greater sense of purpose. The changes he made in the borrowed matter can therefore provide valuable indirect evidence of his artistic intentions. One modification which is almost always observable is elaboration and the introduction of problematic issues which require interpretation beyond the obvious content of the story. A similar approach can be seen in his fashioning of the major characters taken over from earlier writers. Under his pen they acquire a rich, but perplexing inner life; they behave with absolute psychological clarity and credibility in concrete situations, but certain aspects of their general nature are deliberately left indeterminate, equivocal or doubtful. We are never at a loss with Saxo Grammaticus' Amleth as we are with Shakespeare's Danish prince; the Ensign in Giraldi's story "Un capitano moro" is a transparent and uncomplicated villain: "the motive-hunting" of Iago's malignity is still going on. In the case of both plot and character, Shakespeare's creative treatment of the borrowed matter contributed to a quality which is one of the most essential features of his art and which we never find in his sources: the amazing hospitality to a variety of interpretations.

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