Shakespeare & His Sources


During the second half of the 16th century, Geneva, Switzerland was the center of the Protestant world. John Knox was preaching to the English congregation in Geneva, forced into exile by the accession of Mary Tudor; Calvin was in Geneva writing commentaries; and Theodore Beza, one of the most prominent Biblical scholars of the time, was there studying the Greek text. The text of the Geneva Bible was translated into English in 1560. This translation greatly influenced the theology, literary expression, and consciousness of the Elizabethan world. The English translation of the Geneva Bible was the version used by Shakespeare.

Bible. English. Geneva-Tomson. 1598. *The Bible: that is, the Holy Scriptures conteined in the Olde and New Testament: : translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languages. With most profitable annotations vpon all the hard places, and other things of great importance.* Imprinted at London: by the deputies of Christopher Barker, printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, Anno 1598. [Breeches Bible]


Cruikshank’s series of pictures illustrate the prominent events in the imaginary life of Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare’s most humorous character. The artist carefully depicts 15th century localities mentioned by Shakespeare. The costumes, weapons, and furniture are authentic details.

Castiglione, Baldassarre. *Il cortegiano.* In Vinegia: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari e fratelli, 1551.


D’Avenant, William, Sir. *The works of Sr William D’avenant Kt consisting of those which were formerly printed, and those which he design’d for the press: now published out of the authors originall copies.* [Ornament] London: Printed by T. N. for Henry Herringman, at the Sign of the Blew Anchor in the Lower Walk of the New Exchange. 1673.
SpC.822.6 G241yd

David Garrick (1717-79) dominated the English stage from the 1740s until 1776. Garrick alternated between the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres, until in 1747 he became joint manager of Drury Lane, a position he held until he retired in 1776. As an actor, he played an extremely wide range of characters, although he was considered best as Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet. Garrick seemed to grasp the complexities of each role, and gave fully rounded portrayals of the characters. He was also a careful and devoted director, and an innovative theatre manager.

SpC.792.0973 D921h.

Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* was the first play performed in America. The play was performed on September 5, 1752 at Williamsburg, Virginia.

SpC. 272.0922 F795a1583 v.1

SpC. 792.0942 G327s 10 vols.

SpC. 853.4 G516h1608

SpC.941.04 H175u.

Edward Halle was an English chronicler, lawyer, and historian. In the 16th century, there was an increased interest in English history. Halle abandoned the simple chronicle form and wrote a narrative of events full of drama. Shakespeare used Halle’s *Chronicles* as source material for his history plays.

SpC. 813 H399G
(Contents: Grandfather’s chair.--The man who was like Shakespeare.--A sequel to that.)

SpC. 792.09 H622a1941

SpC. 941.101 H732cs1587

Holinshed’s *Chronicles* are often a close paraphrase, if not an exact copy of Halle’s *Chronicles*. Shakespeare read both Halle and Holinshed for the periods he treated in his plays. Holinshed’s *Chronicles* formed the basis of Shakespeare’s *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*.

Hughes, Langston. *Shakespeare in Harlem* / by Langston Hughes, with drawings by E. McKnight Kauffer. [1st ed.]. New York : Knopf, 1942. SpC. 811.5 H893s1942


After Shakespeare, Ben Jonson (1572-1637) is considered the finest Elizabethan playwright. His plays include *Every Man in his Humour, Sejanus, Volpone, The Alchemist*, and many others.


Kyd was the author of the most popular play on the early Elizabethan stage, *The Spanish Tragedie*, printed in 1594. *The Spanish Tragedie* is a sensational story of murder and revenge, and closely resembles Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.


*The Modern Standard Drama; A Collection of the Most Popular Acting Plays, with Critical Remarks, also the Stage Business, Costumes, etc.* Edited by Epes Sargent. New York, S. French [18--] SpC. 808.82 M689 no. 35. King John, by William Shakespeare


Although scholars have debated the extent to which Shakespeare is indebted to Montaigne, Florio’s translation of Montaigne influenced both the thought and vocabulary of Shakespeare’s later plays. Parallels between *The Tempest* and Montaigne’s essay, “Of the Caniballes,” are particularly convincing of Shakespeare’s use of Montaigne.


Ovid. *Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz’d, And Represented in Figures. An Essay to the Translation of Virgil’s Æneis. By G. S.* Imprinted at Oxford by John Lichfield, 1632. SpC. 873.01 O96M
Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* was one of Shakespeare’s main sources of information about classical mythology. Ovid’s original account of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, the lovers whispering through a hole in the wall, is reflected in Shakespeare’s scene in *Midsummer-Night’s Dream.*


Shakespeare found the subject matter of Plutarch’s *Lives* a rich source for tragedy. Plutarch’s lives are really character studies, and Shakespeare selected and adapted Plutarch’s material in order to produce the effect he wanted. The main sources of *Julius Caesar* were Plutarch’s lives of Brutus, Caesar, and Antonius in North’s translation.


Rymer, Thomas. *The tragedies of the last age: consider’d and examin’d by the practice of the ancients and by the common sense of all ages in a letter to Fleetwood Shephard, esq. / by Mr. Rymer ...* : part I. 2nd ed. London : Printed and are to be sold by Richard Baldwin ..., 1692.


The 18th and 19th centuries produced many illustrated editions of Shakespeare’s plays, with portraits of Shakespearean actors in notable roles. The illustrated edition produced by John and Josiah Boydell in 1802 was the most ambitious of these. The Boydells established the Shakespeare Gallery in 1789 and invited England’s prominent painters to make illustrations for Shakespeare’s plays. The paintings were then cut into metal by various engravers. Two volumes of these engravings were issued by the Boydells in 1802 in two enormous elephant folio volumes, which together with the general edition cost the Boydells over $1,000,000. The venture proved too ambitious and the Boydells went broke.

SpC. 822.33 Dr128L1923

SpC. 822.33 P7h1908

SpC.822.33 MN277p

---. *Shakespeare’s Household Words: A Selection from the Wise Saws* / of the immortal bard. London: Griffith & Farrau, [1859]
SpC. 822.33 Hs527h1859

SpC. 822.33 Y7s1766

SpC. 822.33 Y7s1913

---. *The Tempest* / by William Shakespeare; with illustrations in colour by Paul Woodroffe; and songs by Joseph Moorat. London: Chapman & Hall, 1908.
SpC. 822.33 Q5w1908

SpC. 822.33 Q5o1914

SpC.822.33 Q7c

SpC. 828 S569XT

SpCR. 872.01 T316c1635

SpC.873.1 V816d
Shakespeare was familiar with Virgil’s writings, although he made less use of Virgil than he did of Ovid. His knowledge of Virgil seems to correspond to the customary study of Latin authors in the schools of his time.