John Drakakis. *Shakespeare's Resources.* **Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. 400 pp. ISBN 9781526157867. £85 hardback.**

What, exactly, is a source? This is a deceptively straightforward question, and one that continues to challenge scholars interested in the genealogy of literary and dramatic texts. We might be tempted to argue that a source is something, textual or otherwise, that has exerted a degree of influence upon a text that came after it. But that word too—*influence*—is knotty and somewhat elusive. Can we ever be absolutely certain about what an author encountered before, or during, the process of composition? How about the manner in which an encounter may have occurred? These questions become even more complicated when we are talking about a writer like William Shakespeare, who not only lived over four centuries ago but also left very few clues about his compositional practices.

John Drakakis grapples with these issues in *Shakespeare's Resources*, a stimulating and methodical new monograph of impressive scope. In his estimation, scholars interested in sources "have been reduced to identifying the traces of Shakespeare's inspiration in 'books' to which he is assumed to have had regular access" (30). This approach is apparently too narrow, as is the vocabulary with which it is traditionally described: "the simple nomenclature of 'source,'" Drakakis writes, "is restrictive and ideologically inflected" (34). He proposes instead the term "resource," which overrides the "linear trajectory" of conventional source study while also encompassing "non-literary resources, narratives and techniques that circulated" in the early modern period "as part of a communal cultural memory" (34-35).

On the whole, *Shakespeare's Resources* offers more in the way of theory than interpretation. Throughout the book, Drakakis quotes at length from other scholars—some block quotations occupy nearly an entire page—in order to demonstrate how

their approaches might be critiqued and refined. These critical resources date back as far as 1903, when H.R.D. Andes claimed that "originality is not creative production but novel combination" (1)—a formulation with which Drakakis begins, and which he sets out to refute. But it is Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, a monumental eight-volume compendium published between 1957 and 1974, that constitutes Drakakis's primary concern.

Bullough's aim, we learn in Drakakis's first chapter, is "to demonstrate what the dramatist encountered, or may have encountered, at particular moments in the creation of his plays" (42). "The over-riding *telos* of the project," Drakakis argues, "seems to have been to trace Shakespeare's own texts back to their 'sources' or origins in order to locate and clarify the permanent, trans-historical 'truths' that they embody" (55). Bullough is deemed largely responsible for the modern ideology of source study: "The linkage between 'source' and 'truth' savours of a kind of textual theology, designed to return the texts…to the moments of their creation" (55). This is an interesting stipulation, if perhaps somewhat overdetermined. Even if this was the intention (and effect) of Bullough's work a half-century ago, my sense is that most literary historians studying sources today are not participating in this sort of "quasi-religious quest for origins" (314), as Drakakis terms it in a later chapter.

The middle chapters of *Shakespeare's Resources* focus on subjects like intertextuality, context, and especially theatricality: Drakakis is rightly adamant that Shakespeare's plays were shaped not only by the books he read but also by the cultures of orality and performance in which they arose. Key to his argument throughout is the idea that source study wrongly minimizes the originality of Shakespeare's plays by insistently tracing their origins. As Drakakis observes in the introduction: "Shakespeare, it is often asserted, was not a literary or theatrical *inventor*," but rather "a *bricoleur*, one who assembled…a variety of recollected elements of other texts, and memories" (10, italics in original). Drakakis refutes this assertion throughout the book, arguing for "the playwright's role in adapting, appropriating, synthesizing and creatively transforming particular narratives and the forms in which they circulated" (277). Through a persuasive analysis of three plays in the penultimate chapter—Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* along with Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*—Drakakis concludes that we can see "dramatists working and reworking particular details," and that these "intertextual relations" and the "creative"

engagement they entail therefore show the insufficiency of terms like "source" and "influence" (314), which obscure the high levels of invention taking place.

Again, though, I'm moved to wonder against whom Drakakis is arguing. Would any twenty-first-century scholar really claim that Shakespeare is unoriginal because he borrowed from other literary and non-literary materials? And does the vocabulary of "source" and "influence" prevent us from seeing that innovation? Even straightforward imitation was considered an *active* exercise in the period, as any early modern schoolchild would have known, and so I'm not sure that any modern historian, literary or otherwise, would misconstrue Shakespeare's use of source material as a form of passive copying. "[T]his was not a mechanical 'cut-and-paste' culture" (364), Drakakis declares in the book's conclusion. This is, of course, a fair point, but I also wonder who would disagree.

One of the most compelling issues that *Shakespeare's Resources* raises is how source hunters have been too fixated upon Shakespeare himself. Bullough's project is about gaining "entry into the poet's mind," offering what Bullough himself calls a "glimpse [into] the creative process in action" (43). This has led, Drakakis argues, to a preoccupation with "the genesis of theatrical texts" (151) as well as a desire "to reconstruct the figure of the author" (165): objectives that we have little chance of achieving completely. Trying to recapture the moment of authorial composition, as Drakakis asserts at various moments throughout the book, is a nearly impossible task. "[W]e can only surmise," he observes, "about what attracted Shakespeare to the *Hamlet* story" (81). Even if we can locate various biographical puzzle pieces—the death of his son Hamnet; the drowning of a possible acquaintance named Katherine Hamlett; the family friends after whom Shakespeare's twins were named—it would be incredibly difficult to align them perfectly with the play. As Drakakis writes: "the connection between what we might call possible personal association and a range of more public stimuli is not easy to fathom" (192).

This leads to a significant question: why do we continue searching for (re)sources? At the beginning of his discussion of *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Drakakis quotes Bullough's own skepticism about certain claims of literary inheritance. "The cult of the Ph.D. thesis," Bullough wrote in his project's conclusion, "led to exaggerated claims for obscure and doubtful analogies; and the tendency to imagine that once a 'source' had been unearthed and its parallels noted all that was necessary had been done" (43). Drakakis picks up on the first point—

"'obscure and doubtful analogies'…continue to appear in Shakespeare Studies" (43), he writes—but he says little about the second, which is, to my mind, much more interesting. This is a caution against what we might call source-hunting: treating the unearthing of a source and the noting of its parallels as ends in themselves, rather than showing what those discoveries can teach us. Drakakis's primary concern is whether the term "source" gives shape to an adequate critical and theoretical concept, but I would have enjoyed further discussion of why we continue to be interested in sources, and what, even if such things are reimagined as "resources," we can learn from them.

In the book's final chapter, Drakakis considers how Shakespeare became, in a sense, a resource for Shakespeare—that is, how, as he learned the "theatrical devices" of his predecessors and contemporaries, he was able to draw on them "as dramatic and theatrical resources" (319). This is an intriguing idea, illustrated through two examples: in *Twelfth Night*, "Shakespeare returned to the device of using twin characters that he had previously used in *The Comedy of Errors*, and he returned to material he had used in *The Taming of the Shrew* in the later play *Much Ado About Nothing*" (319–20). In both *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*, Drakakis suggests, we witness precisely the kind of innovation that we might usually associate with other literary-historical materials to which Shakespeare may have had access. In this case, however, Shakespeare drew upon elements from his own earlier works and "creatively refashioned" (322) them.

Can an author's earlier works really be considered "resources" for that same author? Drakakis discusses the pairing of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, arguing that in the latter play we can see "Shakespeare innovating on material that he has used earlier" (326). In other works, too, Drakakis suggests that we can identify parallels: textual linkages as well as "various dramatic forms, situations, theatrical devices and rhetorical ploys" (350). But I remain curious about whether these kinds of connections show us Shakespeare drawing on resources, or if they simply show us the normal development of a professional writer displaying recognizable patterns over the course of a career. Finding shared features across an author's body of work can be illuminating, but the question of whether those features qualify as "resources," or whether we even need specific terminology to describe them, is a bit trickier.

The nature of this potential distinction encapsulates the issue that, for me, *Shakespeare's Resources* continues to raise: to what extent is Drakakis's proposed shift from "source" to "resource" merely semantic? The latter term allows the literary

historian to cast a wider net, accounting for more than just the specific texts that Shakespeare might have read or heard about. It also sheds some of the baggage of linearity and hierarchy that Drakakis persuasively identifies in its initial usage. But shifting away from the former term probably will not resolve the thornier issues involved: what sources are and why we continue to pursue them.

Nevertheless, as the many questions raised here will attest, *Shakespeare's Resources* is an exceedingly thought-provoking book, and a welcome contribution to the field. Discussions about the value of sources are very much ongoing, and this book promises not only to give them renewed attention, but also to add an important new perspective to this complex conversation.

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