

## Abstracts

### *Romeo before Romeo: Notes on Shakespeare Source Study*

SILVIA BIGLIAZZI

The article examines a peculiar case of discontinuity in the linear transmission of the story of Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare. Firmly situating the discussion within recent debates on source study, it argues for the interpretation of Shakespeare's sources as products of a broad and multilayered intertextuality, identifying different ways in which linearity may give way to complex processes of textual transformation. In refashioning gender issues with a particular focus on Romeo's ambiguous masculinity, the novellas suggest alternative genetic dynamics, prompting study of how the authors in the source-chain read their own sources and were being read in turn. The discussion challenges orthodox genetic views while inviting further reflection on the idea itself of source.

**Keywords:** Romeo and Juliet, Source study, Masculinity, Intertextuality, Novellas

### *The Global Popularity of William Shakespeare in 303 Wikipedias*

JACOB BLAKESLEY

There are no reliable figures on contemporary Shakespeare reception around the world. However, we can provide such figures by analysing which of the 303 global Wikipedias (in about as many languages) have Shakespeare entries and how often these entries have been viewed. These statistics enable us to concretely identify which works are the most viewed in different contexts around the world. We will see, for instance, which cultures are more interested in Shakespeare's tragedies, comedies, histories, and poetry. We will find out which single plays are preferred in different cultures, and which plays, instead, are practically ignored abroad. In short, we can distinguish different levels of popularity of his works in different settings. Thus, we will discover that for a plurality of Wikipedias, almost fifty, *Romeo and Juliet* is number one in pageviews, while in many, but fewer others, it is *Hamlet*. In

seven Wikipedias, on the other hand, *Macbeth* is number one, while *Julius Caesar* is first in still several others. *Othello*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are the only other rare leaders in specific Wikipedias. In short, this article will present the basic popular global reception information about all of Shakespeare's works, filling a lacuna in critical research; this will allow researchers to pursue more detailed levels of investigation of Shakespeare's canonicity in different contexts across the globe.

**Keywords:** World literature, Canon, Shakespeare reception, Wikipedia, Sociology of literature, Digital humanities

### *Imbalanced Friendship and Gendered Bonds in Timon of Athens*

TOMMASO CONTINISIO

This article aims to investigate the polymorphic nature of Shakespeare's and Middleton's *Timon of Athens*, with an attempt to show how the remarkable complexity of this play, namely its systematic refractions and mirrorings, and the subsequent crack in communication, are the result of a crisis of signification and of different epistemic systems which overlap each other. This study is set against the backdrop of classical inquiries into amity as well as the early modern performance of utilitarian friendship that help read Timon's misanthropic tirade through the lens of homosocial dynamics triggered by perverted enactments of male friendship.

**Keywords:** *Timon of Athens*, Refractions, Friendship, Gift, Homosociality

### *Poisonous Language: Timon of Athens and the Scope of Invective*

DAVIDE DEL BELLO

Recent research on Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* has addressed mainly the nexus between usury, gold and excess within an aristocratic system of patronage that was fostered in early modern England by the emerging paradigms of commercialism. While the issues of money and debt are certainly relevant, I would shift focus on the titular theme of misanthropy, by reflecting on vituperation as a key element in the rhetorical and dramatic economy of the play. Rhetorical invective, rooted in the tradition of argumentative *exclamatio*, was kept alive in late-medieval manuals of rhetoric and in the educational setting of Shakespeare's time. Yet, by the second half of the sixteenth century, the scope of invective was being seriously challenged by Elizabethan and Jacobean legislation against libel. I submit that *Timon of Athens* should also be read as a theatrical response to this fraught rhetorical and political juncture. Its staging of unregulated

invective is the dramatization of emotion, a radicalized instance of *ecphonesis*, the figure 'of vehement affection or passion', ill-fitted to the cultural priorities of efficiency and analytical thinking on the rise at the time.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Rhetoric, Vituperation, *Ecphonesis*, Late plays, Romance

### *Anti-Comedy in The Two Noble Kinsmen*

ROGER HOLDSWORTH

This essay takes further the view of recent critics that *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a late collaboration between Shakespeare and John Fletcher, differs in fundamental ways from the other comedies of the period, including those of its two authors. The departures from the conventions of romantic comedy are deliberate, radical, and systematic, and bring the play closer to the satirical tragedies of John Webster, performed just a few years earlier, than to anything resembling Shakespeare's standard comic practice. The authors reject the optimism and festive atmosphere of comedy in favour of a bleaker vision, in which human beings are at the mercy of chance, and incapable of understanding themselves or making sense of the world around them.

**Keywords:** Comedy, Tragicomedy, Fletcher, Collaboration, Romances

### *A Bitter Comedy of a Midsummer Night*

MARISA SESTITO

"The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe", the play the workers are going to perform to celebrate the nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta, has many significant functions in the dramatic architecture of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Most of all it raises questions on the relation of comic and tragic modes, being the 'comedy' a tragic story interpreted by a clumsy group of would-be actors on a festive occasion. The clowns strangely honour the triple wedding of the Athenian characters and the happy conclusion of the *Dream* with a performance ending on the double suicide of the lovers – as it were comically revisiting the tragic end of *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Keywords:** Ovid, Metatheatre, Tragicomedy, Contradiction, Change, Silence

## The Tamer Tamed: *Dating Fletcher's Interactions with Shakespeare*

GARY TAYLOR

Although the date of *The Tamer Tamed; or, The Woman's Prize* affects interpretation of the play and its relationship to Fletcher's career and Shakespeare's, there has been no full-length analysis of the evidence since 1938. This essay connects the play not only to *The Taming of the Shrew* and Jonson's *The Silent Woman; or, Epicene*, but also to transatlantic voyages, political events in Ireland, France and the Netherlands, the East India Company, Midlands riots, plague outbreaks and food shortages. It concludes that the play was written in 1609 or the first months of 1610 for the boys company at Whitefriars, that the King's Men did not acquire it till after Shakespeare's death, and that both Fletcher's play and Shakespeare's may have been retrospectively altered to market the two plays as a diptych.

**Keywords:** *Tamer Tamed*, Fletcher, Shakespeare, Jonson, Chronology

## *Shakespeare the Presider*

MARIA VALENTINI

This brief paper aims at indicating the essential points of contact between Shakespeare and Keats in order to try to understand what kind of relationship the romantic poet established with the Elizabethan playwright. In 1987 Robert White wrote the book *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare*, which remains, in my view, the most exhaustive study on the topic, and this definition seems to me the most appropriate way to define this connection since Keats appears to be primarily a 'reader', a reader who is powerfully affected and inspired by his contact with Shakespeare's works, rather than a scholar who interprets. This does not mean that Keats does not offer what we could define as critical comments in his letters, in reviews or even in some of the annotations on his own copy of Shakespeare's plays, but he is not a Hazlitt or even a Coleridge; I think we could speak of reactions rather than analyses. In this light the paper attempts at examining the Shakespearean 'traces' present in Keats' works.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Keats, Hazlitt, Influence, Harold Bloom