

SHAKESPEARE'S SOURCES

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- In the entire canon of William Shakespeare's works, there are few original plots.
- Shakespeare was as gifted a borrower as he was a writer.
- Drawing from classical works, histories, and other literary sources, Shakespeare liberally adapted stories (sometimes lifting words and phrasing) in creating his plays.

- **Classical Sources:**
- Two of Shakespeare's greatest classical sources are **Plutarch and Ovid**.
- **Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*** provides the biographies of Greek and Roman rulers that Shakespeare used in creating *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*.

- Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which seems to have been Shakespeare's primary source for classical mythology, leaves its imprint on *Titus Andronicus* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- Shakespeare's early comedies lean on Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence for situational plots and character archetypes.
- And *Hamlet* derives at least in part from the tale of Amleth from the *Gesta Danorum* (Deeds of the Danes) by Saxo Grammaticus.

- **Historical Sources:**
- **Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*** was perhaps Shakespeare's greatest single source. All of the history plays show at least some influence of Holinshed's work, as do *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. The chronology, characters, and events given in the *Chronicles* are generally condensed to fit the dramatic narrative, but Shakespeare practically quotes Holinshed in places.

- Shakespeare also uses **Edward Halle's** *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* and **Samuel Daniel's** *The Civil Wars between the Two Houses of Lancaster and York* as source material for his plays dealing with the Wars of the Roses.

- **Literary Sources:**
- **Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* served as the source for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.**
- *Hamlet* owes a debt to **Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy***
- *The Merchant of Venice* can be seen as a reflection of Christopher **Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta***, and *King Lear* is a direct descendant of the anonymous ***True Chronicle History of King Leir***.

Biblical Influences:

- Shakespeare uses Biblical allusions more frequently than any other Elizabethan playwright.
- Shakespeare's three most likely sources were the Geneva Bible, the Bishop's Bible, and the Book of Common Prayer

- Shakespeare's works show a playwright with not only a gift for popular entertainment but a genuine zeal to absorb whatever he could from a wide variety of sources.

Thank You

