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"The bees that sat upon the Grecian's lips": Classical Contaminations in Early Modern English Drama

Edited by Alessandro Grilli and Emanuel Stelzer

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Introduction

Alessandro Grilli and Emanuel Stelzer

1. Bees on Grecian Lips, Grecian Words in English Ears

The quotation used for the title of this volume is from the following passage in Thomas Lodge's play *The Wounds of Civil War* (ca. 1588). At the end of Act 4, a Captain asks his soldiers to behead the old orator Mark Antony (the grandfather of the famous triumvir of the same name). The context is that of the war between Gaius Marius and Sulla. Drawing on his sources – Appian and especially Plutarch,[1] whose works had recently been translated into English in 1578 and 1579 respectively – Lodge portrays Mark Antony using his eloquence to charm his assassins. One of them wonders: "Why, what enchanting terms of art are these?" (Lodge 1594, G4*v*);[2] the other exclaims: "His art doth draw my soul from out my lips". The orator states that only "a barbarous heart" could prompt them to "harm Roman Antony" (ibid.). He extols Roman civic virtues against tyranny and the soldiers refuse to kill him: the Captain must intervene. He stabs Mark Antony and asks the others to behead him. Once the deed is done, the two soldiers reminisce about their victim's Greek-inflected oratory, while (perhaps tastelessly) channelling the myth of Orpheus's decapitated head:

1 Lodge and his contemporaries could read in North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* that Mark Antony's "tongue was as sweet as a syren" (Plutarch 1998, 286).

2 Quotations from Lodge's play and other early modern texts have been silently modernised.

First Soldier Even in this head did all the Muses dwell:
The bees that sat upon the Grecian's lips
Distill'd their honey on his temper'd tongue.
Second Soldier The crystal dew of fair Castalian springs
With gentle floatings trickled on his brains;
The Graces kissed his kind and courteous brows,
Apollo gave the beauties of his harp,
And melodies unto his pliant speech.
(H1*r*)

Unmoved by this tableau, the Captain calls Mark Antony a "false orator" and asks his "countrymen" to consider the head as "guerdon fit for Marius' foe / Whom dread Apollo prosper in his rule" (ibid.). However, they are immediately told that Marius has died. The English play shows that Greeks and Romans may share their worship for Apollo but the pleasures which Greek art could give the Romans are shrouded in ambivalence. Claire Bardelmann (2010) interprets the "Grecian" referred to in the passage as Homer, as does Joel B. Altman, who highlights that Mark Antony's

> inability to persuade is conceived not so much as the failure of reasoning . . . as the failure of imaginative language . . . It comes as something of a shock to recall that it is one of the interlocutors of *De oratore* whom Lodge is comparing to Homer, until we realize that his words reflect the assimilation of rhetoric by poetic as the final decade of the sixteenth century was approaching. (1978, 286)

Of course, the motif of bees as 'birds of the Muses' lingering on an author's lips, especially in his/her infancy, can be found in multiple ancient texts and it is not just Homer who was said to have experienced this phenomenon: "These poets include Homer (Anthol. Pal. 2.342), Hesiod, Pindar, Sophocles, Plato, Menander (Anthol. Pal. 9.187)" as well as, in the Roman context, "Virgil, and Lucan" (Scheinberg 1979, 24). The vocabulary used by the University Wit Lodge seems to point to the anonymous epigram in praise of Menander collected in the Greek Anthology (9.187) which circulated widely ever since the 1494 princeps and the subsequent editions such as those by Aldus and Henri Estienne.[3] If this were

3 The epigram in question was rendered into Latin for instance by

the case, the dramatic situation proposed by Lodge carries a note of irony. Unlike the Greek poet's comforting assertion of Menander's enduring worth for Athens' glory, the praise here comes after the orator's death. Apollo's generosity has proved hollow:

> αὐταί σοι στομάτεσσιν ἀνηρείψαντο μέλισσαι
> ποικίλα Μουσάων ἄνθεα δρεψάμεναι:
> αὐταὶ καὶ Χάριτές σοι δωρήσαντο, Μένανδρε,
> στωμύλον εὐτυχίην δράμασιν ἐνθέμεναι.
> ζώεις εἰς αἰῶνα τὸ δὲ κλέος ἐστὶν Ἀθήναις
> ἐκ σέθεν οὐρανίων ἁπτόμενον νεφέων.
>
> [The bees themselves, culling the varied flowers of the Muses, bore off the honey to thy lips; the Graces themselves bestowed their gift on thee, Menander, endowing thy dramas with fluent felicity. Thou livest for ever, and Athens from thee derives glory that reacheth to the clouds of heaven. (Greek Anthology 1917, 98-9)]

In his *Defence of Poetry* (c. 1579, suppressed as soon as it was published), Lodge refers to Menander and expresses his envy that, while the Elizabethan satirists had to avoid critiquing the ruling classes, the Greek dramatists were allowed license to (at least in part) rail against corruption: "Menander dare not offend the Senate openly, yet wants he not a parasite to touch them privily" (Smith 1904, 82). It has been demonstrated that Lodge gleaned this information from Jodocus Badius's 1502 *Familiaria in Terentium Praenotamenta* (Ringler 1939). This mediation is not surprising since Menander's works were necessarily known only through fragments quoted by ancient authors until the archaeological discoveries made at the end of the nineteenth century. What is more significant is how questions of poetry and dramatic rhetoric are enmeshed in an ideologically fraught dramatic situation. In writing about the Roman civil wars, the Elizabethans were haunted by the memory of the Wars of the Roses. Even more topically, *The Wounds of Civil War* was written "as a response to the fear of religious war breaking out in England if the

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Vincent Obsopoeus in 1540, 155; see also Lubin 1603, 196. For the circulation of the Greek Anthology among Elizabethans, see Temple 2018, 56-8. Just one example may suffice: Shakespeare's sonnets 153 and 154 are based on a poem attributed to Marianus Scholasticus in the Anthology.

succession question was not resolved in a sensible way" (Hadfield 2005, 99); the play was "intended to inspire an English audience to make connections between the history of Rome and their own relatively recent past" (91). But, as can be appreciated, here it is not only the legacy of Rome which is interrogated: the Greek tradition is, as well. *The Wounds of Civil War* prompts its audience to reflect on the nature of the state, the civic values that should underpin a commonwealth, the role of art in society, and, ultimately, who should be in charge of socio-cultural life – questions inherited from Greek and Roman antiquity, reflected upon through the ages, and discussed anew in the Renaissance.

The bee metaphor employed in that passage of Lodge's play evokes one of the most frequently cited images through which authors in the Renaissance thought about intertextuality, encompassing ideas of imitation and *contaminatio*. As Jonathan Bate reminds us:

> Ever since antiquity, discourses on poetry and rhetoric had used the figure of the bee to represent not only verbal sweetness and flowing felicity, but also the successful art of assimilation. As a bee gathers pollen from many flowers and transforms them into its own honey, so the best writers emulate their sources but create works that are not servile to their origins. (2019, 59)

This is because "[b]ees illustrate not only transformative imitation, but non-transformative following, gathering, or borrowing" (Pigman 1980, 3; see, more in general, Burrow 2019). Ben Jonson privileged the former, inviting poets "to draw forth out the best, and choicest flowers, with the bee, and turn all into honey, work it into one relish and savour" (1954, 638), while Lodge himself was the first to translate all of Seneca's epistles to Lucilius into English, including the famous Letter 84 which leaves both interpretations open:

> We ought, as they say, to imitate bees, which wander up and down, and pick fit flowers to make honey: then whatsoever they have brought they dispose and place through their combs . . . Concerning them it is not apparent enough, whether they draw a moist substance from the flowers, which is presently honey; or whether that they change those things which they have gathered

> with a certain mixture and propriety of their breath, into this taste. For it pleaseth some, that not the knowledge of making honey, but of gathering it is unto them. (1614, 348)

The bees "upon the Grecian's lips" in Lodge's play point to divine inspiration, but can, at the same time, call to mind other processes: as Christopher V. Trinacty argues, Seneca's influential epistle "features a large number of similes and metaphors to describe the *contaminatio* of influences at play in any work of literature" (2014, 14). What authors wrote was the product of an engagement with different traditions, forms, and models, however much they wished for the Muses' inspiration.

These ways to think about intertextuality were much theorised and discussed in the Renaissance, and the multiplicity of notions and, especially in England, practices constituted "a joyful abundance" (Miola 2004, 23). On the Continent, "Aristotelian *imitatio* became more complicated owing to the more revolutionary concept of *contaminatio*, which made it possible to experiment with a subtler hybridism of dramatic structures and a combination of diverse theatregrams that were taken up by countless playwrights" (Marrapodi 2011, 2). Montaigne considered this cross-cultural, interlingual practice as something fashionably modern: "It hath often come unto my mind, how such as in our days give themselves to composing of comedies (as the Italians who are very happy in them) employ three or four arguments of Terence and Plautus to make up one of theirs" (1603, 237-8, in Florio's translation).

However, as Robert S. Miola cautions, such "[c]lassical constituents in Renaissance drama . . . are not always so easy to distinguish and assess . . . Sometimes they appear blended into subtle, complex, even subversive, new creations" (1994, 10). The transformations and mediations they underwent were driven by multiple factors. At times, they stemmed from the need to Christianise the pagan world of antiquity; at other times, they arose from a spirit of competition that rejected merely servile imitation. Samuel Daniel was one among many to advocate that the English language was ready and worthy enough to produce literary texts "not to be built by the square of Greece and Italy" (Alexander 2004, 216), and Richard Mulcaster, the most famous English pedagogue of

the period, was adamant that fanatical devotion to Greek or Latin would result in alienation: "where circumstance is prescription, it is no proof, because Plato praiseth it, because Aristotle alloweth it, because Cicero commends it, because Quintilian is acquainted with it . . . that therefore it is for us to use" (qtd in Nicholson 2014, 41; see also Hornback 2017).

At first glance, it would seem that the early modern English context did not welcome *contaminatio* particularly well. In the English language, according to the *OED*, the noun 'contamination' and the verb 'to contaminate' had a negative meaning throughout the era, and this is how Thomas Cooper defined the phrase contaminare fabulas in his bilingual dictionary, emphasising the link with corruption and pollution which was already operative in Latin: "To mangle comedies, and make or patch one out of two or three" (1578, Ec3). Thus, on a mere lexical level, one could be sceptical on the impact of *contaminatio*. However, authors would be familiar even from their schooldays with Terence's defence of *contaminatio* in his prologues, joining the plots of different Greek plays. One sees this especially in the prologue of his *Andria*, where Terence answers to the critics according to whom "Contaminari non decere fabulas" (16; plots should not be mixed up/'contaminated').[4] Significantly, recent studies have demonstrated that one can speak of a "contaminative dramaturgy" (see Harrison 2023 and Harrison 2024) at work in early modern English drama: a *contaminatio* not just of plots but "of structures" (Clubb 1989, 11). This process was made up of "theatrical elements that did not rely on the material record of a specific literary source but had become dramaturgical elements in play after play by virtue of their effectiveness in performance" (Harrison 2023, 22), hybridising vernacular forms and classical antecedents. For instance, in this volume, Tom Harrison investigates the pervasive influence of Plautine elements in academic dramas, focusing especially on Thomas Tomkis's *Albumazar* (1615, a direct translation of Della Porta's *Lo Astrologo*) and George Ruggle's *Ignoramus* (also 1615). Harrison demonstrates

4 Neither the c. 1520 anonymous translation printed in Paris (Terens in Englysh), nor Morris Kyffin's 1588 translation of *Andria* printed Terence's prologue, but Latin editions regularly featured it.

that Plautus – himself an adaptor of New Comedy – shaped English university drama not only through the use of textual references but also through stage action, a strategy that enabled playwrights to sidestep potential repercussions for their satirical attacks.

This contaminative dramaturgy, as William N. West insightfully argues in this volume, is evident in comedies set in Greece that exhibit a notably 'weak' sense of Greekness.[5] "[T]he English comedies' memory of an additional intermediate stratum of Roman cultural history and change" had the effect of positively "index[ing] a mingling and varying of cultures generally" (49). 'Classicising' English playwrights tapped into the tradition of cross-cultural *contaminatio*, while in many plays Greek "resources" (see Drakakis 2021) often linger obscurely in nearly imperceptible orientations, complicating traditional source study methodologies. We believe that this approach can provide a heuristic lens for all the essays included in this volume, including those which are not concerned with comedy. Across other genres as well, English playwrights engaged with classical models "with increasingly complex layers of *contaminatio*" (Pollard 2017, 160), although at times they resisted such 'contaminating' practices for several reasons, as shall be discussed below.

2. The Pleasures of (and Resistance to) Greek Contamination

Contaminatio necessarily brings to mind notions of purity and impurity. In early modern England, "[a]lthough the idea of Greek's purity was powerful, its reception was in practice characterized by many kinds of impurity" (Colley 2025, 11). In their edited volume *What Is a Greek Source on the Early English Stage? Fifteen New Essays* (2024), Silvia Bigliazzi and Tania Demetriou fruitfully invite us to shift our approach when it comes to considering the Greek sources of early modern English drama, building on recent scholarship (including Martindale 2017, Pollard 2017, and Orgel 2021). One should not look at sources without considering issues of

5 On Greeks on the early modern English stage, see Hopkins 2020, and Findlay and Markidou 2017 for a focus on Greek Shakespeare.

reception, ignoring the horizon of expectations in which those texts and ideas were received. Philological and archival research has been establishing which Greek texts were circulating in England: the crucial questions have now become "whether they *did have* an impact on the literary uses of English, and in turn, whether these afforded *new visions* of Greek works" (Bigliazzi 2024a, 26; author's emphasis). What did Greek antiquity mean to early modern English dramatists and the culture they reflected and shaped? And when it came to their notions of Greekness, could they possibly be 'un-Roman'? And how so, given Latin's pre-eminence in early modern cultural discourses? Through which sets of "confluences" (Smith 1988, 6) did such interactions come to fruition – confluences which complicate traditional, purely linear models of intertextuality? Does it make sense to speak of the English dramatists of the period producing "Greek effects" (Nuttall 2011, 215) in their plays? For instance, Nuttall argues that "Shakespeare never looks steadily at the Greeks, but he does, on occasion, look with Greek eyes" (220). What does this mean?

In the coda of this volume ("Less Greek? Readership, Scholarship, and Printing of Greek Books in Early Modern England"), Marco Duranti explains that early modern English "attempts to disseminate the knowledge of Greek had uncertain results" (298). Although Greek books were published in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, their printing remained strikingly limited in comparison with continental Europe. The paucity of scholarly editions, whether authored by English scholars or reissued from continental presses, points to a restricted readership capable of engaging with such works, and English contributions to classical philology were correspondingly modest. Greater energy was devoted to the editing of Christian texts within a programme of religious and linguistic instruction,[6] yet even here the number of editions was meagre. It often happened

6 "It was virtually impossible to read classical drama in the North without coming into contact with Wittenberg's teachings" (Lazarus 2020, 57). One should not underestimate the phenomenon of "Philellene Protestantism" in Renaissance Europe and, specifically, England: see Skretkowicz 2010. Considering Erasmus's legacy, Neil Rhodes puts it as follows: "Greek became the Trojan horse that spirited the vernacular into the Roman citadel" (2018, n. p.); see also Leo 2019.

that different fields came into contact following this programme: for example, as Carlo M. Bajetta signals also in this volume ("'More lines than is in the new map': Modern and Ptolemaic Cosmography in *Twelfth Night*"), John Norton, the stationer at whose instance the English translation of Ortelius was printed (maps which redefined cartography), worked on the publication of Sir Henry Savile's Greek edition of Chrysostom and, soon after James I's accession, became the King's printer of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

While translations into English were somewhat more numerous, their volume still fell far short of continental output, with England ranking behind French, Italian, and German vernacular traditions and surpassing only Spanish. These figures suggest that Greek culture exerted a comparatively limited influence on the English intellectual sphere; nevertheless, as Duranti argues, the profound impact of individual works, such as Plutarch's *Lives* on Shakespeare, illustrates how qualitative significance could counterbalance quantitative scarcity. Also, one should remember that it was Greek prose rather than the verse and drama to be particularly prominent in those decades: "while the modern reader will see the core of Greek literature as being represented by Homer and the great tragedians, a sixteenth-century reader would have been more familiar with Isocrates, Plutarch, Demosthenes, Xenophon and Lucian, either in an academic context (possibly with a parallel Latin [text])" or through English translation (Rhodes 2013, 205). However, as Tania Demetriou and Tanya Pollard point out in relation to the mediated circulation of Homer and the tragedians:

> Encountering these texts always necessarily meant encountering multiple, simultaneous versions. They complicated notions of originality and authenticity, and must similarly challenge our understanding of reception and how it works. Their intrinsic multiplicity requires recognition of co-existing, competing, and collaborative models, and alternative forms of authority, opening up an attendant freedom to select from alternative forms of response. To trace Greek texts in this period, then, is to confront the nature of reception in an unusually full complexity. (2017, 23-4)

Thus, Susanne Wofford's essay in the present volume ("Dismemberment and Bacchic sparagmos in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*") argues that

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* could channel and revisit the *sparagmoi* of Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* through a number of intertexts, including Seneca's *Phaedra*, Plutarch, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Such "classical intertexts . . . also gave him access to the Greek theatre", allowing us to "see here not only the intense metatheatricality of Euripides coming to dramatic fruition in Shakespeare, but also the complex ironic recognition of the power of the gods that takes place in his plays" (286).

Greekness, in whatever forms it was understood, enjoyed considerable prestige among Elizabethans and Jacobeans ("an aura of Greekness was marketable in Reformation England", Colley 2025, 202), but it was not without its critics. Its 'canonical' status fluctuated, conditioned by the shifting tides of religious and political circumstances (see Baldwin 1944, and more recently Dall'Olio 2024 and Colley 2025). The medieval tradition of the 'merry Greek' portrayal persisted: the heathen Greeks were "revellers, rogues, harlots, liars, cheats, deceivers, panders, drunkards, and parasites" (Hanna 1998, 108); Ben Jonson was sure that his audience would understand when Mosca says to Volpone: "Let's die like Romans, / Since we have lived like Grecians" (Jonson 1995, 3.8. 14-15). Alternatively, one could paint the Greeks and their legacy in a negative light if it served one's purposes: for instance, Francis Bacon stigmatised the Greeks' "philosophy of nature" has having "the foundations in words, in ostentation, in confutation, in sects, in auditories, in schools, in disputations", quoting from the *Timaeus*: "you Grecians, ever children" (2002, 35).[7] To the early moderns, Greece was "an enigma. It was the origin and idealized pinnacle of Western philosophy, tragedy, democracy, human endeavour and, at the same time, an example of decadence" (Findlay and Markidou 2017b, 1). In his essay in the present volume ("The Failure of the Classics in John Fletcher's *The Mad Lover*"), Domenico Lovascio shows that John Fletcher is one of those dramatists who took a distinctly sceptical attitude and detachment towards classical models. Many of his plays have the tendency to question and contaminate them with non-classical elements, as if the classical

7 Plato's *Timaeus* was known in the Renaissance often through Cicero's translation, on which see Sedley 2013.

past was no longer able to furnish viable models and examples to live by in Jacobean England.

The case of Fletcher reflects a transitional cultural moment, in which, for instance, the epic tradition was still valued, yet there emerged a simultaneous impulse to offer "alternatives, if not to say outright challenges, to the assumed models of epic or heroic behaviour" (Ganberg 2024, 177). There is the sense that Elizabethan and Jacobean plays chart both "the cultural and emotional power of Greek art" and literature and the realisation that "political power ha[d] . . . moved to very different geographical locations in which Greekness, when it is reproduced, must be reproduced with a difference" (Hopkins 2020, 80).

But even English plays set in Greece revolved around difference. As William N. West's essay "Comedy, *Contaminatio*, and Cosmopolitanism" argues, the evocation of Greece in the early modern comedies is deeply embedded in a classical tradition of comic adaptation that found its models in Roman comedy, wherein 'Greekness' became a vehicle for hybridity and transformation. In both Roman and Renaissance comedy, this Graecising interest facilitates the introduction of cultural alterity, gesturing towards a cosmopolitan ethos – one that embraces cross-cultural encounter as a site of generative transformation. West argues that the indirectness and imprecision of these connections enhance rather than limit their power. Greekness could prove beneficial to discuss current political problems: Evgeniia Ganberg's "Defining Deification: Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age*" in this volume shows how themes of tyrannicide and political power were addressed by Heywood through the use of the euhemerised mythography developed by William Caxton in *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (1473), employing the Graeco-Roman myths to show audiences how people could hold power over kings and poets alike.

The complexity of the receptions of Greek texts is reflected in the variety of the 'sources' used in early modern English drama which are not limited to tragic and comic texts. On the contrary, the freshly rediscovered Greek antiquity flowed into early modern English drama through the most diverse channels, presenting itself as a metamorphic and ever-resurfacing interlocutor. The early moderns could know about tragic heroines through novellas

(Burrow 2024 and Demetriou 2024) and accounts founds in mythographic compendia, besides reading Greek editions which often did not feature any relevant paratexts (Duranti 2021 and 2022), or Latin renditions which transformed the Greek text as much as the medieval mediations had. Matters grow even more intricate when Greek drama is considered: "[a]lthough theoretical writings on the continent were copious, the debate in England lagged behind and knowledge of classical plays was earned mainly through direct access to the texts of Greek and Latin drama". This knowledge "was conveyed through teaching syllabuses in schools, Universities and Inns of Court, where plays were also put on" (Bigliazzi 2021, 7; see also Bigliazzi 2026 on the chorus in early modern drama), and early modern performances and textual practices left their marks on stage productions of Greek and Latin scripts (Smith 1988, 7; see Bigliazzi 2024b and 2024c).

Historians such as Herodotus, Appian, and Plutarch (the last two authors were Greeks who were granted Roman citizenship), provided drama with material and characters, overcoming to some extent the well-known Aristotelian opposition between historiography and literature (*Poetics* 1451a36-8). Greek philosophers or moralists were also engaged in productive dialogue, as well as geographers (see Bajetta's contribution to this volume on geography in *Twelfth Night*). Other times the presence of Greek texts is subterranean: Thomas Nashe, in his *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (published in 1600), has Orion deliver a ca. 100-line-long speech in commendation of dogs modelled after a speech by Sextus Empiricus which he could apparently find in a no longer extant English translation of the *Pyrrhonianae Hypotyposes* (McKerrow 1910, 120) which flowed into *The Sceptic*, ascribed to Walter Ralegh and first published in 1651. Sextus Empiricus's was probably the most important text for the transmission of Pyrrhonian scepticism, a revolutionary doctrine, but Nashe used it in his play mainly to embellish a passage about hunting hounds.

Often, Elizabethans and Jacobeans relied on classical frameworks but refashioned them. In this volume, Francesco Dall'Olio ("'The seat of mighty conquerors': Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and the Influence of the Ancient Persian Empire") points out the narrative patterns in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* that strongly recall tales

contained in Herodotus's *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, but besides this identification, he problematises Marlowe's creative appropriation of them. He reimagines ancient narrative structures – cultural, ideological, and moral – to forge a theatrical epic that speaks simultaneously to Humanist discourses and mass theatrical appetites. The impact of Greek texts is thus not always easy to assess. Take, for instance, the case of the Hellenistic romances. According to Helen Moore, "works such as the *Aethiopica* . . . intrigue precisely because they appear in English contexts in obedience to logics other than that of strictly defined 'source' and 'text'" (2017, 223). In the present volume, Yves Peyré ("Proserpine's Daughters? On Shakespeare and the Greek Romances") re-examines the circulation of Greek prose fiction among the Elizabethans and Jacobeans and investigates how far they fed into Shakespeare's late plays. Importantly, the mediated reception of Greek romances played a significant role in transmitting themes drawn from classical Greek poetry and tragedy. Peyré explores how these classical elements were transformed when adapted into new aesthetic forms. While intertextual connections to Homer and the Greek tragedians were evident in Hellenistic romances – serving as part of a sophisticated literary game intended to delight readers – Shakespeare, in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and *The Winter's Tale*, intentionally prompts us to reflect on the "improbability of ancient narratives . . . set against resolutely innovative theatricality in an artistic form that straddles boldly ancient fiction and new creation" (175).

Even when influence appears as linear and explicit as traditional philological studies might wish, intertextual connections often prove more nuanced than expected. For instance, Francesco Morosi's essay "The Importance of Being Simple. Thomas Randolph, Ben Jonson and the Reception of *Clouds* in Early Modern English Drama" signals the difference in approach to Aristophanes which one can find when analysing Thomas Randolph's comedies. Whereas *Hey for Honesty Down with Knavery* can be safely regarded as a 'tradaptation' of Aristophanes' *Wealth*, *The Drinking Academy* (1620s) shows a very different approach, in that it shares an ideological consonance with Aristophanes' *Clouds*. It aligns itself with *Clouds* not necessarily on the level of dramaturgy, but more significantly, on the level of ideology: Randolph adopts from Aristophanes a didactic stance

which is exemplified in the stigmatisation of the moral decay brought by new, fashionable forms of culture. Ben Jonson himself (Randolph's 'poetical' father) went through different stages in his approach to Aristophanes. The stance of Jonson's early works, such as his 'comical satires' of the years 1598-1601, clearly displays his willingness to summon powerful authorities best known to him and to the happy few (as pointed out in Grilli and Morosi 2024). If in the first period of his production Jonson seems to exemplify a somewhat superficial and instrumental appropriation of Greek models (such as Aristophanes in relation to comic drama), his later work bears the mark of a closer and more thoughtful relationship with those same sources in terms of ideology and dramatic structure. That this gradual assimilation, still imperfect at the end of the sixteenth century, was fully accomplished before King James's death is confirmed by the sense of cohesion between the works of minor poets in Jonson's orbit, such as Thomas Randolph, and those of their mentor and model.

Thus, the reception of Greek texts in early modern England appears even less as a matter of transmission and more as a process of creative friction. Dramatists staged Greekness not as a fixed tradition but as a mutable and contested category, one that could at once confer authority, provoke scepticism, and enable cosmopolitan hybridity. In this sense, *contaminatio* is not merely a feature of textual history but a critical mode of understanding how Greek antiquity was reimagined on the early modern English stage – less a matter of preserving an intact legacy than of exposing the fractures, reconfigurations, and paradoxes through which cultural authority was both claimed and unsettled.

3. Conclusion

The chapters make it clear that notions of Greekness in early modern England developed less as a stable inheritance and more as a shifting constellation of contaminations and appropriations. Greekness implied a set of refractions and confluences through Roman adaptations, scholastic filters, religious anxieties, and vernacular experimentation. If imitation and *contaminatio* alike can

be recast as creative rather than corrupting practices, how might this prompt us to re-evaluate the value-laden binaries – original versus derivative, pure versus polluted, faithful versus distorted – that still govern much of our critical vocabulary? The interplay between reverence for the Greek past and scepticism about its adequacy as a model for a new age urges us to ask not only how the Elizabethans and Jacobeans saw the Greeks, but also how our own methodologies continue to reproduce or unsettle such ambivalences.

The questions posed in this volume speak to broader concerns about cultural transmission and the politics of reception. If the Greeks were simultaneously a source of prestige and an object of suspicion, what might this ambivalence reveal about the processes by which cultures authorise or marginalise certain legacies? To what extent do hybrid practices – whether in the form of contaminative dramaturgy, cross-cultural re-semantisations, or ironic refunctionings – signal a more cosmopolitan mode of cultural memory, one that privileges negotiation over purity, and invention over fidelity? Finally, might the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, in its restless reworkings of Greekness, invite us to reflect on the stakes of our own engagements with classical antiquity today? Rather than asking what is 'authentically' Greek, perhaps the more urgent task is to consider how 'Greekness' continues to serve as a generative site of questioning – about cultural identity, authority, and the politics of borrowing – that remains as pressing for us as it was for the early modern period.

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