

“Perhaps him and her, sir. What have you to do?” and “Damnable both-sides rogue!”:
classical microsources and queer dramatic textures in *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *The Taming of the Shrew*

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microsources

“mentions of names or historical figures that provide context for the play’s narratives but are not direct sources for its action. Unlike traditional source study, which often concentrates on the specific antecedents of the action of a play, microsources acknowledge the broad repository of cultural knowledge from which a play’s narrative is created ...

‘Microsource’ is an attempt to describe the small glimpses of alternative plots or histories that flicker in Shakespeare’s plays before being discarded in favor of dominant narratives. They function both as shorthand communication between author and audience and as a means by which to call attention to subsumed or even marginalized narrative potentialities”.

Meredith Beales, “Traces of Knowledge: Microsource Study in *Cymbeline* and *King Lear*” in Denis Autin Britton and Melissa Walter (eds.), *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study: Audiences, Authors, and Digital Technologies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 127-141 (127).





All's Well That Ends Well

PAROLLES. Yet I am thankful. If my heart were great,
'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more,
But I will eat and drink and sleep as soft
As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
Shall make me live. Who knows himself a braggart,
Let him fear this; for it shall come to pass
That every braggart shall be found an ass.
Rust sword, cool blushes, and Paroles live
Safest in shame. Being fooled, by fool'ry thrive.
There's place and means for every man alive.
I'll after them. (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 4.3.321-331).



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We tend to think of ‘character’ as something psychologically coherent or consistent, something that has a sub-text. Shakespeare doesn’t seem to think of ‘characters’ like this. And you (actor, reader or audience) shouldn’t make any prejudgement about what a ‘character’ is, whether she’s one thing or another, brave/not brave, generous/not generous, virtuous/not virtuous. What you need to do is to understand her, get behind her, using the text as your only clue.

...

You then play each scene or each beat, however contradictory, or however incompatible it seems with what has gone before or comes after. You play the moment for its integrity, for what it is. Then, by the end of the play, the character is an accumulation of all those separate moments.

Harriet Walter quoted in Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare’s Women Today*, ed. Faith Evans (London: Women’s Press, 1988), pp.76-7.



“vicious in his tastes, a cowardly braggart with sufficient craft to pass among the more simple of the frequenters of the court as a valiant soldier and a wit”

William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. W. G. Boswell-Stone, with an introduction by F. W. Clarke (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p.ix.



Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, ll.1104-1115

Pyrgopolynices. qui tu scis eas adesse?

Palaestrio. quia oculis meis
uidi hic sororem esse eius.

Pyr. conuenitne eam?

Pal. conuenit.

Pyr. ecquid fortis uisa est?

Pal. omnia
uis optinere.

Pyr. ubi matrem esse aiebat soror?

Pal. cubare in nauis lippam atque oculis turgidis
naucerus dixit, qui illas aduexit, mihi.
is ad hos naucerus hospitio deuortitur.

Pyr. quid is? ecquid fortis?

Pal. abi sis hinc, nam tu quidem
ad equas fuisti scitus ammissarius,
qui consecrare qua maris qua feminas.
hoc age nunc.

Pyr. istuc quod das consilium mihi,
te cum illa uerba facere de ista re uolo. [...]

Pyrgopolynices. How do you know they are here?

Palaestrio. Because I've seen
her sister here with my own eyes.

Pyr. Did she meet her?

Pal. Yes, she did.

Pyr. Did she seem like a hottie?

Pal. You want to
get your hands on everything!

Pyr. Where did the sister say their mother was?

Pal. The captain who brought them here told me that
she is in bed on the ship, with swollen and bleary eyes.
The captain is staying with them.

Pyr. How about him? Is he a hottie?

Pal. Oh, get out of here! You would have
made a fine stud horse, the way you chase after males as well
as females.
Now pay attention.

Pyr. As far as that advice you gave me is concerned,
I want you to talk to her about that [...]



Terence, *Eunuchus*, ll.419-426

Thraso. quid illud, Gnatho?
quo pacto Rhodium tetigerim in convivio,
nunquam tibi dixi?

Gnatho. Nunquam; sed narra, obsecro.
plus miliens audivi.

Thr. una in convivio
erat hic quem dico Rhodius adulescentus.
forte habui scortum. Coepit ad id alludere
et me irridere. “quid ais”, inquam, “homo impudens?”
lepus tute’s: pulpamentum quaeris?

Gna. hahahae!

Thraso. What about that other
time, Gnatho? When I scored a hit on the
Rhodian at a dinner party? Have I never told you?

Gnatho. Never. But please tell me.
(aside) I’ve heard this more than a thousand times!

Thr. This young Rhodian man
I’m talking about was with me at a dinner party.
I had an “escort” along with me, as it happened.
The Rhodian began to flirt with them and make
fun of me. “What are you saying”, said I, “you
impudent man? Are you on the prowl for a piece
of meat when you’re a hare yourself?”

Gna. Ha ha ha!



Terence, *Eunuchus*, 1.479

Thraso. ego illum eunuchum, si opus sit, vel sobrius —

Thraso. Hmm. That eunuch... If it came to it, even sober I'd —

1 SOLDIER [*reads*]. *Dian, the count's a fool, and full of gold.*

PAROLLES. That is not the Duke's letter, sir. That is an advertisement to a proper maid in Florence, one Diana, to take heed of the allurements of one Count Roussillon, a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish. I pray you, sir, put it up again.

1 SOLDIER. Nay, I'll read it first, by your favour.

PAROLLES. My meaning in't, I protest, was very honest in the behalf of the maid. For I knew the young count to be a dangerous and lascivious boy, who is a whale to virginity, and devours up all the fry it finds.

BERTRAM (aside). Damnable both-sides rogue!

1 SOLDIER [*reads the*] *letter.*

When he swears oaths, bid him drop gold, and take it.

After he scores, he never pays the score.

Half-won is match well made; match, and well make it.

He ne'er pays after-debts; take it before.

And say a soldier, Dian, told thee this:

Men are to mell with, boys are not to kiss.

For count of this, the count's a fool. I know it,

Who pays before, but not when he does owe it.

Thine, as he vowed to thee in thine ear,

Parolles.

BERTRAM. He shall be whipped through the army with this rhyme in's forehead.

LORD E. This is your devoted friend, sir, the manifold linguist and the armipotent soldier.

BERTRAM. I could endure anything before but a cat, and now he's a cat to me. (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 4.3.207-234).



Steevens and Malone disputed whether this word possessed an indelicate meaning; N.E.D. 'mell' vb.5 leaves no doubt.

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The Taming of the Shrew

PLAUTUS MOSTELLARIA

TRANIO. Gentlemen, God save you. If I may be bold, tell me, I beseech you, which is the readiest way to the house of Signor Baptista Minola?

BIONDELLO. He that has the two fair daughters — is't he you mean?

TRANIO. Even he, Biondello.

GREMIO. Hark you, sir, you mean not her to —

TRANIO. Perhaps him and her, sir: what have you to do?

PETRUCCIO. Not her that chides, sir, at any hand, I pray.

TRANIO. I love no chiders, sir: Biondello, let's away.

(The Taming of the Shrew, 1.2.217-26)



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