

EDITED BY  
SOPHIE CHIARI

# THE CIRCULATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE



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Edited by

SOPHIE CHIARI

*Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand, France*

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# Textual Note

Unless otherwise specified, references to Shakespeare are to *The Complete Works*, eds Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 (2nd edition).

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# Foreword: Transgression and Transmission in the *Shrew* plays

Gordon McMullan

In Shakespeare's plays, the spectators of plays-within-the-play are, by and large, knowledgeable playgoers. Hamlet, his fellow royals and their courtiers have seen lots of plays before they sit down to watch *The Mousetrap*: they seem as thoroughly informed about plots and genres as so many members of Shakespeare's audiences must already, by 1600, have been (and at least four of them understand that drama can also be transgressive political allegory). Theseus and his wife and courtiers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, first performed a few years earlier, have an equally good understanding of dramatic plot and genre, and the Duke's responses to the options he is offered are based principally on avoiding the potential for discomfort in the audience's ability to read fictional narrative retrospectively in relation to history and biography, responding to the possibilities that accrue during the circulation of the script. Nor is such theatrical awareness an upper-class preserve: the *Dream*'s 'mechanical' amateurs know what makes an effective play even if they can't recreate the skills required, or at least only by accident. By a decade or so later, it seems you would have to have been brought up on an island, wholly cut off from the social world, to be uninitiated into the theatre's generic expectations.

This said, there is at least one Shakespearean character other than Miranda for whom spectatorship at a play is a wholly new experience – Christopher Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Theatre, for Sly, offers an initiation into spectatorship that is neither comfortable nor welcome. It is not Christopher who is sly, of course; it is the unappealing Lord who dupes him both into enacting his own rags-to-riches tale, a role of which he remains ignorant, and into being the primary audience member for the performance. In the process various boundaries are transgressed: gender boundaries, as Bartholomew the page becomes the play's only truly obedient wife; sumptuary boundaries, as Sly is dressed in clothing vastly more elevated than his class status would legally permit; and boundaries of taste, as the Lord unfeelingly overdoes the cross-class manipulation he clearly relishes.

I say 'one version of the play', and this provokes two thoughts about the complex circulation of *Shrews*: one, that *The Taming of a Shrew* is not necessarily or exactly a 'version' of *The Taming of the Shrew*; two, that *The Shrew* is a play with a particularly rich transmission history, in terms both of certain apparent omissions from the received text and of the sheer quantity of adaptations and renegotiations it has subsequently spawned, from Fletcher's *Tamer Tamed* to Garrick's *Catherine*



and *Petruchio* to Lacey's *Sauny the Scot* to Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* to Lutz, Smith and Junger's *Ten Things I Hate About You*. The obvious omission – or 'omission', depending on your view of the relationship between *A* and *The Shrew* – is the return to the Sly metanarrative that we find at the end of *A Shrew*:

*Slie.* *Sim* gis some more wine: what's all the  
 Players gon: am not I a Lord?  
*Tapster.* A Lord with a murrin: come, art thou  
 dronken still?  
*Slie.* Whose this? *Tapster*, oh Lord sirra, I have had  
 The bravest dreame to night, that ever thou  
 Hardest in all thy life.  
*Tapster.* I marry but you had best get you home,  
 For your wife will course you for dreaming here to night.  
*Slie* Will she? I know now how to tame a shrew,  
 I dreamt upon it all this night till now,  
 And thou hast wakt me out of the best dreame  
 That ever I had in my life, but Ile to my  
 Wife presently and tame her too  
 An if she anger me.  
*Tapster.* Nay tarry *Slie* for Ile go home with thee,  
 And heare the rest that thou hast dreamt to night.  
*Exeunt Omnes.*<sup>1</sup>

Productions of Shakespeare's play frequently include this brief vignette because it provides a closure unavailable to the Folio *Shrew* text, which ends with Lucentio's uncomfortable line 'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so' (5.2.195) – a conclusion that, if it is not, as in so many productions, smothered by the overhasty outbreak of a song-and-dance routine, leaves the audience with a sense that things may not be all they seem, that patriarchal control over women's transgression may not have been reasserted after all. Not that *A Shrew* is straightforward, either: productions sometimes get a laugh from the audience by implying that the tapster wants to go home with Sly only so as to have fun watching him fail to deploy the tactics that Ferando (*A Shrew*'s Petruccio) has successfully used in reducing Kate to pious recitation of Biblical anti-feminism and to the verbal expression of the apparently unironic stage direction 'She laies her hand under her husbands feete'.

The lines of transmission between *A Shrew* and *The Shrew* remain as unclear as the transgressive/recuperative implications of these endings. Critics have yet to determine for certain which came first, not least because of the length of time between the first performances of *The Shrew* and its appearance in the First Folio

<sup>1</sup> Anon., *A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called The taming of a shrew* (London, 1594), G2r-v. A facsimile of the Huntington Library quarto (the only surviving quarto) appears as Appendix 3 of William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Hodgdon ed. 2010), from which I cite *The Taming of the Shrew* here; see also *The Taming of a Shrew: the 1594 Quarto* (Miller ed. 1998).

of 1623. *A Shrew* was published shortly after those first performances, in 1594, and so substantially pre-dates the extant text of *The Shrew*. Barbara Hodgdon, in her excellent Arden edition, finds a neatly circular, agentless way to express the state of critical knowledge about the relationship of the two *Shrew* plays – ‘*A Shrew* and *The Shrew* obviously know one another’ (Hodgdon 2010, 395) – and she rightly refers to both of these texts and to Fletcher’s *Tamer Tamed* as ‘sister-plays’, thus acknowledging the group’s chronological fluidity. If critics and directors are right to see some element of hope for sustained self-assertion by Kate in *The Shrew* – where her final long speech is essentially *political* and thus, potentially, up for grabs – if not in *A Shrew* – where the equivalent speech is uniformly *theological* and thus much more difficult for early moderns to second-guess – then *The Tamer Tamed* offers both possibilities, suggesting on the one hand that Kate never was tamed –

For yet the bare remembrance of his first wife  
[ ... ] Will make him start in’s sleep, and very often  
Cry out for cudgels, cowl-staves, anything,  
Hiding his breeches, out of fear her ghost  
Should walk and wear ‘em yet

– and on the other that she failed in what she set out to achieve: ‘By the faith I have / In mine own noble will’, Maria announces,

[T]hat childish woman  
That lives a prisoner to her husband’s pleasure  
Has lost her making and becomes a beast  
Created for his use, not fellowship.  
*Livia* His first wife said as much.  
*Maria* She was a fool,  
And took a scurvy course; let her be named  
‘Mongst those that wish for things but dare not do ‘em.  
I have a new dance for him, and a mad one.

(Fletcher 2010, 1.1.31, 33–6; 1.2.137–44)

This necessarily provokes questions about the circulation of *Shrew* plays: what does the 1611 audience remember of *The* (or *A*) *Shrew*? Has the King’s company revived the earlier play, or are they depending on the audience’s memory, clear or otherwise, of a play they may not have seen for a decade and a half, if ever? Transmission is by no means always direct, of course, as the uncertain relationship between *A* and *The Shrew* continues to make clear.

The textual evidence of a given play’s transmission history can thus be focussed and sustained – a clear and precise renegotiation of a specific verbal legacy – and it can also insist on a tangible change of scale or direction that is as much the product of local circumstances as of imitation. Perhaps the most overt inheritance (apart, that is, from the impetus for the plot) from *The Shrew* to *The Tamer Tamed* is the falcon imagery they share. In *The Shrew*, obviously enough, the metaphor belongs to Petruccio –

Thus have a politicly begun my reign,  
 And 'tis my hope to end successfully.  
 My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,  
 And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged,  
 For then she never looks upon her lure.  
 Another way I have to man my haggard,  
 To make her come and know her keeper's call:  
 That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites  
 That bate, and beat, and will not be obedient [ ... ]  
 And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour.

(4.1.177–85, 198)

– and it expresses a methodology based directly on the language of falconry as it would have been known to Shakespeare and his audience from Turberville and other treatises.<sup>2</sup> In *The Tamer Tamed*, Maria develops, reverses and subverts this process, creating a vision of transgressive female behaviour, not only swopping the gender of the object of 'watching' and taming and wilfully quoting back at Petruccio his language of haggards and kites, keepers and lures, but also offering a powerful celebration of female sexuality which must have both shocked and amused the first audiences:

Hang those tame-hearted eyases, that no sooner  
 See the lure out, and hear their husbands' hallow,  
 But cry like kites upon 'em; the free haggard –  
 Which is that woman that has wing, and knows it,  
 Spirit and plume – will make a hundred checks  
 To show her freedom, sail in every air  
 And look out every pleasure, not regarding  
 Lure nor quarry, till her pitch command  
 What she desires, making her foundered keeper  
 Be glad to fling out trains, and golden ones,  
 To take her down again.

(1.2. 148–58)

Transmission – the inheritance and ongoing deployment and transformation of specific textual features – is here not only closely interwoven with transgression but also a calculated and direct response to the source.

But *The Tamer Tamed's* primary interest arguably lies in its renegotiation of the focus of transgression from the individual woman to a collective of women that is imaginary and yet tangible and also perhaps frightening (even as it is amusing). Initiation this is not – at least, not textually speaking. Maria may be a virgin ('a chaste witty lady', the dramatis personae tells us), but she has most certainly read *Lysistrata* and thus knows the best way to tame a man: 'Pardon me, yellow Hymen, that I mean / Thy offerings to protract, and to keep / Fasting

<sup>2</sup> George Turberville, *The Booke of Falconrie or Hawking* (1575, 1611).

my valiant bridegroom', she says, mock-reverently (1.2.94–6). Even Livia, in conversation with her amusingly hapless beloved Roland, makes it clear that she is no beginner in the business of self-assertion: 'No, Roland, no man shall make use of me; / My beauty was born free, and free I'll give it / To him that loves, not buys me' (1.2.36–8). But it is Maria's cousin Bianca who voices the clearest and most consistent determination to extend the action beyond the limited needs of the individual protagonists: 'All the several wrongs / Done by imperious husbands to their wives / These thousand years and upward strengthen thee!', she cries: 'Thou hast a brave cause' (1.2.122–5). Given that by the end – after Maria has forced Petruccio to 'die' (he pretends to be dead to try to force some sympathy from her) and be 'resurrected' as a Jacobean 'new man' (he accepts that he will never be able to tame her) – she appears surprisingly and perhaps disappointingly willing to accept a subordinate role in marriage, arguably the most transgressive moment of the play is the report of a degree of fulfilment for Bianca's dream of collective action, the evidence that different constituencies might work together for a common cause. This is the moment at which Jaques reports the arrival of an army of women led jointly by a Country Wife and a City Wife and describes the former in carnivalesque terms:

The forlorn hope's led by a tanner's wife.  
 I know her by her hide – a desperate woman;  
 She flayed her husband in her youth, and made  
 Reins of his hide to ride the parish. Her placket  
 Looks like the straits of Gibraltar, still wider  
 Down to the gulf; all sun-burned Barbary  
 Lies in her breech [ ... ]  
 They heave ye stool on stool, and fling many pot-lids  
 Like massy rocks, dart ladles, toasting-irons  
 And tongs like thunderbolts till, overlaid,  
 They fall beneath the weight, yet still aspiring  
 At those imperious cod's-heads that would tame 'em.  
 There's ne'er a one of these, the worst, and weakest –  
 Choose where you will – but dare attempt the raising,  
 Against the sovereign peace of Puritans,  
 A maypole or a morris, maugre mainly  
 Their zeals and dudgeon daggers, and – yet more –  
 Dares plant a stand of battering ale against 'em,  
 And drink 'em out o'th' parish.

(2.3.42–7; 56–67)

During the Midlands village revolts of 1607, a principal local underpinning for Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, one of the most significant events was the destruction by the townspeople of a scaffold in Leicester which had been erected as a deterrent, evidence of an unusual and, for the authorities, alarming sense of the circulation of

information, and thus solidarity, between city and country.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this not-so-distant history, Jaques's account of the flagrant transgression of expected norms of womanhood, the preference for pagan ritual over the sanctity of the church and above all the joining-forces of city and country women must have been very striking for the audience – and it may not just be a desire to limit the number of actors on stage at any given moment that requires the churchyard scene to be reported rather than represented.

What is fascinating here is the complexity of the deployment of carnivalesque language and of accounts of transgressive behaviour by women. Carnavalesque imagery here offers standard controlling expressions of gender inversion – the use of kitchen utensils as weapons, the equation of the otherness of women with that of 'sun-burned Barbary' – yet is also violent, disturbing, a less comfortable version of Carnival than the deracinated version that persists in Shakespearean criticism, one that is arguably closer to that outlined by Bakhtin in his *Rabelais* book, in which flaying is by no means always metaphoric (Bakhtin 1984, *passim*). Nearly 30 years have passed since Peter Stallybrass and Allon White published their ground-breaking *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), a book that retains its freshness to this day. Developments in the field over subsequent decades may have been less exciting than the heady initiating days of theory-driven analysis, but subsequent layers of revision and renegotiation of earlier, blunter accounts of transgression, combined with the deepening of our understanding of textual transmission that was provoked in part by the publication of *The Oxford Shakespeare* in the same year as Stallybrass and White's co-written monograph, enable us to read these processes not as distinct but as interactive.<sup>4</sup> It is not now the surprise it would have been back then to find that Peter Stallybrass has subsequently shifted his focus from critical theory to the history of the book, from transgression to transmission.<sup>5</sup>

The *Shrew* plays, assessed together, offer us valuable access to the ways in which initiation, transgression and transmission intertwined both during Shakespeare's lifetime and after, weaving together theology, local politics, rites of passage, violence, the crossing of gender boundaries and the complex processes through which theatre becomes text and text becomes theatre in an exemplary instance of the circulation of knowledge, of reality and representation and the dependence of the one on the other. This collection offers a series of intriguing case studies of this interweaving both in the Shakespeare canon and beyond, both in theatre and in other genres and forms, from the classical era to the sixteenth century to the present. In each case, a form of transgression, subtle or blatant, functions as a kind of initiating impetus, provoking varieties of transmission and suggesting that such textual histories move from innocence to experience with remarkable rapidity, that they are in a certain sense always already beyond innocence, that there is never an *ur*-point (or an *ur*-text), but rather that textual transmission is under way even before the object of textual focus can be shown actually to exist.

<sup>3</sup> On the village revolts, see Manning 1988, *passim*; McMullan 1994, 37–55.

<sup>4</sup> See Wells and Taylor (eds) 1986.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Stallybrass, Chartier, Mowery and Wolfe 2004, 379–419.

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# General Introduction

Sophie Chiari

In *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt reconsiders the early English modern world and shows how space, time and boundaries were then gradually transformed into fruitful abstractions as much by outsiders and innovative ideas as by 'a powerful ideology of inwardness' (1988, 85) associated with Protestantism. He contends that Shakespeare's vulnerable England was shaped by such modes of exchange as 'appropriation', 'purchase' and 'symbolic acquisition' (9–10) and that, broadly speaking, its fluctuating identity was refashioned by the circulation, the translation and the constant recycling of literature as well as by changing organizations of knowledge, faith and power.

In a period of religious and political instability, the gap between the spoken and the written word, the popular and the aristocratic culture, was slowly beginning to narrow. With the advent of the book trade, authorial names were quickly regarded as marketable and as such, they contributed to the emergence of a middle-class readership. As new 'corrupter[s] of words' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.1.35), books emphasized early modern anxieties and often reacted and responded to their immediate contexts, which partly accounts for their success at the time.

Yet, for all the changes it entailed in society, the increased circulation of literature in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England did not put an end to a culture essentially based on seclusion, opacity and privacy. Poets and playwrights kept providing readers and spectators with the illusion of secrecy by turning the page and the stage into sanctuaries, by disclosing so-called secrets to be carefully kept and by breaking intimate letters not to be divulged. Significantly, Hamlet's father bids his son to remember 'the secrets of [his] prison jouse' (1.5.14), a tale that the ghost is in fact forbidden to tell (1.5.13). According to William H. Sherman, '[w]hat is at stake in this rhetoric of solitude' characteristic of the era 'is the authenticity and validity of scholarly (and especially scientific) activity' (1995, 47). Yet, more and more men of letters and science 'traded in knowledge' (*ibid.*) and the very object of secrecy changed. Indeed, while dangerous forms of knowledge became (theoretically) accessible to the lower orders of society, those who produced potentially subversive ideas could now conceal themselves behind their (sometimes anonymous) texts. Paradoxically, writers became all the more mysterious as their writings were more widely circulated.

If, on the one hand, 'circulation amount[ed] to loss of chastity' (Kamps 1999, 25), on the other, it also enabled literary texts to survive in the absence of their authors and to resist against the pressure of the authorities. Early modern writers were thus constantly disembodied, turned into abstract entities and removed from their own texts in order to be digested, transmitted, reappropriated, reinterpreted.



Today, to a lesser degree, this kind of fictional transcendence continues to be celebrated. Granted, the early modern 'writer' and his/her collective dimension has been replaced by the 'author', characterized by his/her uniqueness, but the creative process of reappropriation remains essentially the same: bodies of texts still circulate in a wide social network while authors willingly try to remove themselves from the public scene in order to become pure objects of desire.

Early modern works did not simply circulate from one country to another. More importantly perhaps, they passed from writers to spectators and readers, and the other way round. In other terms, this means that if Shakespeare's contemporaries saw, heard and read puzzling plays, poems and prose fiction, they were also read by the dramatic and literary pieces they saw, heard and read. Such an interaction lies at the core of the present book which reassesses the seemingly unconstrained circulation of early modern literary texts by conjuring up three specific dimensions regarding the spreading of dramatic, poetic and fictional texts: transmission, initiation and, most importantly, transgression, because in the context of Elizabethan England, it already 'force[d] the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time)' (Foucault 1977, 'Preface to Transgression', 34). Yet, if revising, or transgressing, well-known literary texts and ideas was an obvious means to acknowledge their worth, it was also an efficient way of criticizing the past, leaving the present in abeyance and looking forward to new powerholders.

'Teach us, sweet madam, for our rude transgression / Some fair excuse' (5.2 431–2), the enamoured Ferdinand, King of Navarre, tells the French Princess in *Love's Labour's Lost* after the disastrous masque of Muscovites, as if making up for transgressive behaviour was something to be taught. Yet ultimately, as a way of making amends, Ferdinand and his lords will have to live away from the court for a year and a day in order to be initiated to serious authentic love. In fact, *Love's Labour's Lost* deals as much with the problematic nature of transmission (with the men's 'little academe') as with forms of transgression and initiation.

This is what the current volume proposes to analyze in the specific case of the literature and drama of early modern England. The theoretical assumptions behind the three terms of transmission, initiation and transgression could be summed up as follows: first, they were part of a broad social dynamics subtly conveyed in the dramatic and literary production of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England; second, these notions, underpinned by a number of creative tensions between the public and the private spheres, shaped one another in an interactive process whose various facets are being scrutinized in the book's 16 chapters; third, far from destabilizing the early modern subject, each process, reinforced by the other two, actively contributed to the 'self-fashioning' analyzed by Stephen Greenblatt apropos the English Renaissance.

As processes which were difficult for the local authorities to control and as effective means of resistance, transmission, initiation and transgression were then a real matter of concern. Unable to rely on the sole power of conscience to stop

the circulation of subversive literary texts, they had to cope with the increasing prestige of writers fully aware of their capacity to pass on incongruous ideas, initiate dissenting thoughts and transgress pre-established norms.

Beyond examining how transmission and initiation coexisted, *The Circulation of Knowledge in Early Modern English Literature* thus endeavours to show how transgression itself was transmitted, thereby asking us to consider how what was deemed 'transgressive' for one individual or social category was considered as simple transmission by another.

## An Early Modern Interplay: Transmission, Initiation and Transgression

Although deeply rooted in the past, transmission, initiation and transgression alike contributed to make the future excitingly attractive and allowed Shakespeare's contemporaries to cope with the present. As such, the words designating these notions were already in use at the beginning of the seventeenth century, if not earlier.

In 1611, John Florio translated for the first time the Italian word *transmissione* in *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (574). That very same year, in *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, the lexicographer Randle Cotgrave defined the term 'transmitted' as 'sent away, passed, giuen, let gog, posted ouer to another'.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, transmission would then be seen as some kind of transference, a gift or, at least, as a movement towards the other, regarded as the ultimate recipient. A similar altruistic movement characterizes the concept of initiation, first understood as 'the action of beginning, entering upon, or "starting" something' (*OED* 1). If this general meaning dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, initiation taken as a kind of 'formal introduction by preliminary instruction or initial ceremony into some position, office, or society, or to knowledge of or participation in some principles and observance' (*OED* 2) appears to have been more widely known in early modern England, as the *OED* somewhat ironically mentions its first known occurrence in the second part of Philip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses*, published in 1583. Initiation was therefore considered as part of the transmission of knowledge, whether sacred or not, and as such, it was given pride of place in a society where rituals continued to matter in spite of the Puritan attacks against them. To initiate someone did not merely mean to teach him/her the basic elements of a job or ritual. It also meant fashioning his/her personality, to raise his/her awareness regarding the value of knowledge and to disseminate ideas sometimes thought of as 'transgressive'. Now, against all odds, the term 'transgression' is the older of the three studied in this volume, since it already existed in the fifteenth century, even though one had to wait for Henry Cockeram's monolingual *English*

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<sup>1</sup> The 'transmitted' entry can be viewed online at <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/924.html>. Date accessed: October 12, 2013.

*Dictionarie*, published in 1623, for the word to be interpreted not only as a legal one (*OED* 1.a) but in a wider sense as ‘a passing or going over’.

Because of its central place in early modern literature, the question of transmission has already been addressed from many different perspectives, particularly in essays on the circulation of knowledge in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> These do not always focus on Shakespeare and early modern England, however, and they often engage with concerns regarding pedagogy,<sup>3</sup> whereas one of the main purposes of this volume is to show that, contrary to education which tended to reinforce prevailing norms through imitation and repetition, transmission was a far less regulated, but much more extensive process which allowed both the people and the elite to question a number of established values. Other studies such as *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, and David Cressy’s *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (2000), deal with the theoretical issue of transgression.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, only a limited number of recent books tackle the issue of initiation in early modern England.<sup>5</sup>

Now, the three concepts of initiation, transmission and transgression have invariably been studied separately in the past, and no monograph or collection of essays has yet been published on their interaction. Moreover, while existing books on transmission, transgression or initiation practices often focus on cultural perspectives and choose either theoretical or empirical methods, the present volume alternates theoretical analysis and specific readings. And while shedding new light on the wider cultural background of early modern England, it also foregrounds specifically literary instances.

According to Foucault, the role of transgression ‘is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that causes the limit to arise’ (Foucault 1977, ‘Preface to Transgression’, 35). While such a definition begs for further explanations, it must also be aligned with the two connected concepts of transmission and initiation. Indeed, all three terms are logically associated insofar as we can only transgress values or knowledge generally accepted as the norm. In the Renaissance, the fascination for ancient times was at the origin of Neo-Platonism and of the Humanist trend embodied by the likes of Juan Luis Vives (who visited England on several occasions), Thomas More and Erasmus. Driven by several, and sometimes contradictory motives such as the quest for respectability, the search for powerful patrons, the need for

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Grafton and Blair (eds) 1990; Kusukawa and Maclean (eds) 2006; Charry and Shahani (eds) 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Moncrief and Read McPherson 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Higginbotham’s monograph (2013) is specifically concerned with *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* but offers a useful parallel. As to Rory Loughnane’s and Edel Semple’s collection of essays, *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare’s England* (2013), it provides fresh insight into the staging of transgression but does not deal with early modern English literature in general.

<sup>5</sup> Most of them deal with apprenticeship; e.g. Ben-Amos 1994; Thornton Burnett 1997; O’Day 2000.

emulation, the desire to refashion England's identity or the pursuit of post-mortem glory, the *literati* looked back to the great figures of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, either misunderstanding or reconstructing them according to new political, cultural and literary imperatives. Religious writers in particular brought their literary sources to the fore in order to give literary credence to their writings. No wonder if a number of sixteenth-century Protestant theologians saw Dante as an important precursor of the Reformation in his sustained critique of papal power and corruption. The arguments of *De monarchia* (printed in 1559) were thus taken up by John Foxe in 1570 in his *Actes and Monuments*, also known as the *Book of Martyrs*.

The notorious 'Order of Conflagration', or so-called 'Bishop's Ban', of June 1, 1599, testifies to the new prominence of writers and, above all, to the rising power of plays and books which not only transmitted classical knowledge but also initiated spectators and readers to new and thus potentially transgressive ideas. Against all odds, because the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, and the Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, primarily intended to protect 'good' subjects from false doctrines and contentious issues, they did not particularly blame ribald writings. In fact, whether satirical, erotic, historical or political, the targeted texts generally ignored 'traditional boundaries', which made them all dangerously seductive (Bruster 2003, 70), and as such, they had to be burnt. As a consequence, a number of works by John Davies, Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, Everard Guilpin or John Marston, were all destroyed by the Stationers' Company. Many satirical tracts were published all the same, as official censors continued to allow notoriously transgressive pamphlets such as Thomas Middleton's *Black Book* (1604), for instance.

As a result, and in spite of the perceived need for regulation, there was an active resistance to control, and all kinds of ideas circulated in early modern England then – most of them not necessarily transgressive *per se*. The authority of Aristotle helped natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon to articulate new ideas, while Galen's theories survived in encyclopaedias. Similarly, Seneca furnished templates for the exploration of fury while Ovid permeated the narrative material of early modern writers. But Aristotle, Galen, Seneca and Ovid were also frequently used for the sake of contradiction. Moreover, if early modern readers quoted as much as they dismissed their predecessors' principles or ideas, this does not necessarily imply that they were familiar with primary texts. On the contrary, it seems that the acquisition of second-hand knowledge via translations and encyclopaedias like Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus linguae romanae et britannicae* (1565) or Thomas Thomas's *Dictionarium linguae latinae et anglicanae* (1587) was current practice at the time, and it was precisely this process which authorized multiple reinterpretations of the past. Moreover, the typically early modern use of commonplace books indicates that Shakespeare's contemporaries did not necessarily seek to learn and transmit entire classical works, tending instead to handle textual fragments. In other words, it was by de-contextualizing their

mesmerizing elders that they eventually managed to emulate and sometimes surpass them.

More than 20 years ago, Anthony Grafton acknowledged that '[i]n the realm of intellectual history [ ... ], the study of transmission has led us to see that the canon of texts now considered central to the intellectual history of the West does not include some of the most original and influential texts ever written' (Grafton 1990, 4–5). Indeed, texts relatively neglected or forgotten seem to have played a major part in the literary world of early modern England. Philip Stubbes's praise of his 19-year-old wife, Katherine, in *A Crystal Glass for Christian Women* (1591), is a case in point. If until the 1980s, scholars were mainly interested in *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) in the hope of learning more about the holiday celebrations so harshly criticized by the pamphleteer, only few of them paid attention to Stubbes's short biography, notwithstanding the fact that it was 'a chapbook classic' at the time (Humphrey Newcomb 2008, 155). Without the success of *A Crystal Glass for Christian Women*, Robert Greene would probably not have thought of capitalizing on sentimental repentance narratives. More importantly, Stubbes contributed to the emergence of a new type of discourse on early modern women which still praised their submissiveness while acknowledging their spiritual role. This shows that the study of early modern transmission channels does provide useful insights for a better understanding of early modern literature. Yet, as this volume proposes, the notions of initiation and transgression should also be taken into account in order to get a fuller picture of what was happening in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

## Knowledge Turned Upside Down

The 16 chapters of this volume deal with the complex issues linked to the circulation and appropriation of challenging ideas and with the ways in which the dominant cultural forms of the literature and drama of Shakespeare's time were being subverted.

Such dominant forms must be understood against a complex cultural background where, as already pointed out by Mikhail Bakhtin, '[t]he new social forces were most adequately expressed in the vernacular' (1984, 467), and where humanists gave pride of place to classical literature, thereby providing the innovative strength enabling educated men to loosen the hold of medieval scholasticism. As a consequence, the transmission of the cultural heritage of the Middle Ages, whether or not a 'retrospective invention' (Williams 2007, 31), proved fertile and problematic at the same time. On the one hand, 'Reformation superstition and prejudice [were] projected onto the medieval past' (*ibid.*, 36). By the end of the sixteenth century, many saints' days had been suppressed from the calendar and most medieval rites had been stripped out by the Church. Yet, Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* included a number of rites, and significantly, its 1552 version still allowed private baptism. Therefore, with its