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## Review: Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre. Janet Clare.

Kelly Stage

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*Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre.* Janet Clare.

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*Shakespeare's Stage Traffic* is a fit title for Janet Clare's investigation of Shakespeare and his theatrical environment. While her subtitle outlines the key practices that underpin her readings of Shakespeare's plays, their co-texts, and their competition, the idea of traffic best encapsulates the complexity of the relationships that Clare charts. As she writes, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic* may enable "a more conjoined critical study of the plays of the early modern stage — one that will take into account the networks of influence, exchange, and competition of stage traffic that make up the matrix essential for talent to flourish" (267). Her language here includes the multivalences of traffic at once, and the book is a compelling call for her integrated critical approach. She challenges traditional source study — as have many others in recent years — and brings forth a solid methodology that unites literary-critical reading and theater history.

Clare calls attention to the ways in which her approach can illuminate what Stephen Greenblatt called the "half-hidden cultural transactions" (266) that cultural poetics

aimed to uncover thirty years ago. Avoiding the tendency of the New Historicism to pull Shakespeare plays from their theatrical context even with this goal in mind, her approach offers sustained readings of Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' plays together. She blends theories of Renaissance poetics and politics with elegant readings across texts, which attend to language and literary qualities but also to performance practices and dramaturgical echoes.

Clare clearly articulates the history of editorial conventions that have often led to prescriptions of Shakespeare's texts as favored over their supposed sources. She identifies a tendency to stick with a preconceived notion of the Shakespearean text as the master text, which leads to readings that ignore some of the uncertainties in dating texts and performances. She counters such tendencies with her discussion of borrowings, adaptations, and dramaturgical reinventions, which provide ways to see Shakespeare in parallel with rather than above other playwrights. The book is still about what it means to be Shakespearean; yet, being Shakespearean is not all that matters. Chapters 1 and 2, for example, focus on a few of Shakespeare's history plays — *King John*, *Richard III*, *Richard II* — along with the Queen's Men's history plays (especially *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and *The True Tragedy of Richard III*) and Marlowe's *Edward II*, as well as *The Mirror for Magistrates* and chronicle accounts. While these intertexts may not be surprising, Clare uses them in provocative readings. For example, she shows how Shakespeare incorporates and steps away from the Tudor politics of the Queen's Men in *King John*. *Richard III* becomes an example of adaptation, as Clare argues that Shakespeare takes a history play and shapes it through conventions of revenge tragedy.

Subsequent chapters discuss several of Shakespeare's plays with pairings that are sometimes obvious but enlightening in Clare's hands — *Henry V* with *The Famous Victories of Henry V*; *The Taming of the Shrew* with *The Taming of a Shrew*; *Hamlet* with *Hamlet Q1*, *Hamlet Q2*, and the *Spanish Tragedy*; *The Merchant of Venice* with Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. Sometimes the co-texts are more unexpected and provide interesting results: *Twelfth Night* with Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *The Comedy of Errors* with the 1594 Gray's Inn Revels' *Gesta Grayorum* and the *Menaechmi*, and *Measure for Measure* with George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*. A fascinating series of readings considering the crossing of Shakespeare's tragicomedies with the work of Fletcher leads to a culminating discussion of *Cymbeline* with Fletcher's *Philaster* and of *Henry VIII* as a genre defying history-play-cum-romance.

Clare's ability to isolate nexus points in theatrical traffic makes what could be an overwhelming excess of information into a tightly controlled, well-guided discussion. Each chapter zeroes in on Shakespeare but also reinvigorates intertexts — and even genres — by reconsidering the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and the texts often considered their sources, bad copies, or imitations. Clare peels back assumptions to locate Shakespeare in a theatrical environment and, in so doing, she shows Shakespeare challenge conventional boundaries as well as imitate, adapt, and react to his contemporaries in innovative ways.

Kelly J. Stage, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*