



## Shakespeare's Folktale Sources

By Charlotte Artese

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*Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* argues that seven plays—*The Taming of the Shrew*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well that End's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Cymbeline*—derive one or more of their plots directly from folktales. In most cases, scholars have accepted one literary version of the folktale as a source. Recognizing that the same story has circulated orally and occurs in other medieval and early modern written versions allows for new readings of the plays. By acknowledging that a play's source story circulated in multiple forms, we can see how the playwright was engaging his audience on common ground, retelling a story that may have been familiar to many of them, even the illiterate. We can also view the folktale play as a Shakespearean genre, defined by source as the chronicle histories are, that spans and traces the course of Shakespeare's career. The fact that Shakespeare reworked folktales so frequently also changes the way we see the history of the literary folk- or fairy-tale, which is usually thought to bypass England and move from Italian novella collections to eighteenth-century French salons. Each chapter concludes with a bibliography listing versions of each folktale source as a resource for further research and teaching.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

One central concern in Shakespeare scholarship is the playwright's place within his own time. Certainly, the Elizabethan era was a transitional period, straddling two very different ages and world views. Numerous recent investigations . . . seek to place the Bard more within the context of the early modern era. Artese turns her eye in the other direction. She wishes, as the title reveals, to unearth how folktales inform some of the plays in the canon (mostly, but not exclusively, comedies). Thus, she occupies a space somewhat similar to that of Ted Hughes in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), though her claims are more contained and far less extravagant than Hughes's. Other scholars have touched on Shakespeare's sources but none with the singular emphasis found here. Artese is at her strongest when examining how a number of playwrights of Shakespeare's time engage in a 'conversation' on the folklore. There is, for instance, a robust discussion of the interplay of Thomas Nashe, Thomas Dekker, and John Webster. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates and above. (CHOICE)

This study offers an innovative approach to plays by William Shakespeare that derive directly from variants of folktales. . . . *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* is an excellent contribution to the reconstruction of Shakespeare's tradition in that it carefully scrutinizes the network of intertextual elements in seven folktale plays. (*Horizons in Humanities and Social Sciences: An International Refereed Journal*)

[This is an] innovative new book. . . . Finally now in Charlotte Artese's work we have the application of all the tools of folkloristic comparisons and analysis expertly applied to the works of Shakespeare that were most influenced by folk tradition. (*Journal of Folklore Research*)

*Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* examines how Shakespeare adapted folktales for one or more plots in seven of his plays. When we acknowledge that Shakespeare constructed his plays from traditional stories with wide written and oral circulation, we can see how he used his folktale sources to engage his audience on common ground. Each chapter concludes with a bibliography listing versions of each folktale source as a resource for further research and teaching.

#### About the Author

**Charlotte Artese** is associate professor of English at Agnes Scott College. She has published articles on *The Faerie Queene* and *Utopia* as well as on Shakespeare's folktale sources.

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