

Shakespeare and Italian Comedy

by Kevin Gilvary

A Talk given to the De Vere Society, 2003. Reprinted from *Great Oxford*, (ed. Richard Malim), 2004

In an essay entitled ‘Shakespeare’s Italy: The Law of Diminishing Returns’, Manfred Pfister observed that with books and articles of the genre *Shakespeare and . . .* “one often learns much about the second term and very little about the first, that is about Shakespeare and his work” (1993: 295) Pfister especially cites Levith (1989) and McPherson (1990) for sifting and compiling “what is to be known about the Elizabethan’s knowledge of Italy” but they fail to bring this knowledge to fruition when considering the plays. Pfister’s criticism can be extended to Shakespearean biography. If any writer, whether an Elizabethan dramatist or a contemporary novelist, can be shown to draw on particular material, knowledge or traditions, then the literary biography must explain *how* these sources were known to the writer and *how* and *why* they were used. This is the purpose of literary biography. There can be no argument about this.

This paper follows Salinger’s chapter of the same title in his scholarly study *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (1974). I wish to pursue two lines of investigation: **firstly**: to consider Shakespeare’s plays in the light of Italian Comedy, especially the *commedia dell’arte*, whose characteristic improvisation by its very nature means that we cannot recover texts of actual performances, and **secondly**, to consider how Shakespeare the author might have gained access to Italian Comedy, and to review recent biographies of Shakespeare to see their explanations for the link between the author and the tradition of Classical and Italian Comedy. In other words, to see what attempt has been made to explain Pfister’s first term in ‘Shakespeare and Italian Comedy’.

commedia erudita

Recent attempts to assess Shakespeare's Reading has not only considered the actual texts he must have read, the books on the desk, but also the "traditions, those inherited strategies and expectations about character and action." So wrote Robert Miola in *Shakespeare's Reading* (2000: 15). He explains:

Then as now, playwrights did not write plays simply by reading books and adapting language; instead they imitated rhetoric, image, structure, rhythm and idea . . . and they manipulated familiar traditions, the rich and capricious treasury of dramatic resources created by writers from antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance.

This idea is not new. Geoffrey Bullough, in his monumental eight volume *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957-75), distinguished probable and possible sources from 'analogues', which would suggest that the Shakespearean text in question sprang from the same tradition. In more recent times, this has become genre analysis. Miola indicates the principal traditions behind Shakespeare's works as follows:

Tradition	Works of Shakespeare
Italian Love Poetry	Poems; sonnets; <i>Romeo & Juliet</i>
The Vice Figure	Histories: <i>R3</i> , <i>1H4</i>
Senecan Revenge	Tragedies: <i>TA</i> , <i>Hamlet</i>
Pastoral Genre	Romances: <i>As You Like It</i> ; <i>Tempest</i>
Classical Conflict: Father v Lovers	Comedies: <i>MND</i> ; <i>All's Well</i> ; <i>Othello</i>

A quick glance will confirm that four of these are concerned with Italian literature, and the fifth, the Vice Figure is realised in one of Shakespeare's Italian plays as Iago. In this paper, I wish to concentrate on one tradition, Miola's Classical Conflict, known to the Elizabethans from the Roman Comedy of Plautus and Terence and from Italian Comedy.

Two forms of Italian Comedy are normally distinguished: *commedia erudita* or Learned Comedy and the *commedia dell'arte*, which loosely approximate to high and low theatre. *Commedia erudita* emerged in the early sixteenth century as a distinct art form and was composed in the Tuscan dialect of Italian as used in and around Florence. Louisa Clubb (1997: 115) describes the courtly and aristocratic nature of the participants from writers through actors to audiences. The actors, who were no more than enthusiastic and often

aristocratic amateurs, were known as dilettanti. *Commedia erudita* relied on a tradition, which went back to the Roman Comic playwrights, Plautus and Terence.

Various plays of Plautus were known in the Italian Renaissance and to the Elizabethans. Two comedies especially, the *Menaechmi* (not translated by Warner until 1595) and the *Amphytruo* (not translated until 1893), which Chambers (1930: i. 311) acknowledges had a direct or indirect on *The Comedy of Errors*. Another play by Plautus, the *Miles Gloriosus* or Braggart Soldier, clearly influenced Shakespeare for the character of Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Falstaff in *Merry Wives of Windsor* and both parts of *Henry IV* and the lower class soldiers in *Henry V* (as noted by Andrews 1991: 31). Although the structure of both *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* resemble Terence's play *Andria (The Woman from Andros)*, in general Shakespeare's debt is more towards Plautus than to Terence.

Miola says that when Shakespeare came to write comedies, he found at his disposal

familiar characters in familiar contexts but with a rich history of adaptation from writers of prose fiction such as Boccaccio and Bandello and contemporary playwrights in Italy, France, Spain and England.

We can now look at these briefly (although Thomas Parrott, 1949, 37-52 gives a fuller account). The earliest writer of comic prose fiction in the vernacular Italian language was **Boccaccio**, (Florence, 1313 – 1375) whose collection of tales known as *The Decameron* (1358, translated into French in 1485 and again in 1545) was the main source (either directly, or indirectly through Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, 1575) for various stories in Shakespeare, e.g. Beltramo and Giletta who become Bertram and Helen in *All's Well*, and for the episode of Posthumus' wagering on Imogen's fidelity in *Cymbeline*. More generally, and for our purposes more relevantly, the *Decameron* is littered with cuckolded husbands, a recurring theme in Shakespeare. It seems our poet was well acquainted with Boccaccio.

Bandello, (Milan, [Paris after 1525] 1480 – 1562) wrote 214 novellas (part of a translation into French by Belleforest in 1580 as *Histoires Tragiques*). Bandello's novellas greatly influenced Shakespeare (again either directly or indirectly) for example Tembreo and Fenicia become Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado*, but also the lovers are adopted in *Romeo & Juliet*, Silla and Appolonius become Viola and Orsino in *Twelfth Night*.

Bibbiena's Calandria is said to be the first modern play produced in Italy. It was presented before the Pope in 1513 and is very similar to Plautus' *Menaechmi* and thus a possible source for *The Comedy of Errors*.

Arisoto (Ferrara, 1474 – 1533) is said to have made the first attempt to up-date or modernise the plays of ancient Rome with *La Cassaria* (1508) and *Gli Suppositi* (c 1509), which was performed (about 1519?) for the Duke of Ferrara's court. The play involves a student from Sicily, who exchanges identities with his servant so as to become a student of love. Gascoigne's translation, *The Supposes*, 1566, was performed at Gray's Inn and Trinity College, Cambridge; it seems to have influenced both *Comedy of Errors* and the Bianca scenes in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (c 1516) was translated by Harington in 1591 and seems also to have influenced *Much Ado* and *Othello*.

At about the same time (c 1513) in Florence, **Machiavelli**, who had been arrested and tortured for conspiracy against the restored Medici, was apparently very interested in the inherent possibilities of political satire in comedy. He produced his *Mandragola*, which seems to be an attempt to update the Attic comedy of Aristophanes and use it for satirical purposes. This play involves the use of the mandrake drug so that adultery can triumph to the satisfaction of the parasite, the corrupt friar, the lover, the wife and the cuckolded husband. Shakespeare is referring to Macchiavelli's play when Iago says *Othello* III. iii 335: 'Not poppy nor mandragora, / Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to that sleep / Which thou owedst yesterday.' The comparisons have been developed by Lorch, 1991.

Other influences on Shakespeare's comedies were: firstly Pietro **Aretino**, (1492-1557). His sonnets and five plays won (and in some cases lost) him the favour of Pope Leo X, Francis I and Charles V. Aretino's influence on *The Comedy of Errors* has been described by Salinger (1974: 206-8) and Cairns (1991: 130-4). Aretino's braggart soldier seems also to have influenced *Twelfth Night*. Secondly, **Castiglioni**, whose *Il Cortegiano* ('The Courtier') serves as a guide to the art of courtesy. The precepts there are faithfully reflected, as Bradbrook (1991: 171-178) describes, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

The *commedia erudita* was not only performed in all the major cities of northern and central Italy, especially Florence, Urbina, Ferrara and Rome but it was also studied. Rudlin & Craik (2001: 3) write:

Since the nobility were excluded from the public platforms of theatres and politics. They found consolation in attending the closed literary academies, of which there were nearly 700 [in Northern Italy alone]. There they would compare classical manuscripts, suggest new readings and interpretations.

Another major centre for Commedia was Siena, where plays are attested as early as the late 1520s or 1530s. The theatre in Siena was institutionalised by the Congrega dei Rozzi (1531) and the Accademia degli Intronati ('The Stunned') in 1532, which produced and published plays such as *Gli Ingannati* ('The Deceived') in 1537. Another city, Padua, had its own theatre guild, the Accademia degli Infiammati, founded soon afterwards.

Shakespeare and the commedia erudita

Shakespeare's debt to the traditions and perhaps even identifiable texts of the *commedia erudita* is well-established (Arthos, 1972: 44). He seems to have drawn on Boccaccio, Ariosto, Bandello, Machiavelli and Aretino. We might also mention his use of Fiorentino's collection of short stories, *Il Pecorone* (1558, Milan), which provided many details for the plot in *The Merchant of Venice*. In addition, Shakespeare used Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* or *Hundred Tales* (1565, Venice) which supplied the main plots of *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*. Richmond (1991) details even further influence on Shakespeare from Cinthio and Boccaccio. Shakespeare certainly had access to Italian literature that had not been translated into English by 1590.

That Shakespeare was known by contemporaries to have used Italian Comedy is clear from Maningham, who described in his diary in 1602 the play *Twelfth Night* as

much like the comedy of errors or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*.

This Italian play 'The Deceits' was an adaptation published in 1562 of the play *Ingannati*, ('The Deceived'), which had been produced and published in Siena in the 1530s and translated into French in 1543. The same plot appears as a prose story by Bandello, translated by Belleforest and picked up by Barnaby Riche 'Apolonius and Silla' in his *Farewell to the Militarie Profession*, 1581. As this story of deception was traditional i.e. adapted many times, it is impossible to say now which version Shakespeare used, despite Maningham's observation that it was similar to *The Comedy of Errors*, the *Menaechmi* and the *Inganni*.

Plays in the *commedia erudita* tend to have a single setting, usually a street with a named house and designated exits to various parts of town. For this reason, Alan Nelson (1997: 66) believes that *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew* belong to the tradition of academic comedy as played at Trinity College, Cambridge. Other, perhaps later Shakespearean comedy, he notes, adopts the dynamic stage setting of the Rose and the Globe, where the stage might change its identity at any time. Shakespearean Comedy

and plays in other genres, such as pastoral and tragedy owe much to the tradition of Classical and learned Italian Comedy.

Commedia dell'Arte

In examining the influence of “traditions, those inherited strategies and expectations about character and action,” the *commedia dell'arte* is likely to be more instructive as the plays were not written down but depended on actors’ improvisation around a set of stock characters and situations. The *commedia dell'arte* or the *commedia all'improvviso* as it was known at the time was the vernacular or common form of entertainment. The Art in the title refers to the performers and not the author or director. It is first attested in the city of Padua in 1546. Thus the street entertainment of the *commedia dell'arte* emerged slightly later than the *commedia erudita* was being performed for aristocratic audiences in much the same area. One troupe, the Gelosi, (the Jealous or perhaps the Zealous) performed at Mantua and resisted the patronage of the Duke. Troupes thus remained independent, professional and itinerant. They played in Milan, Ferrara and other Italian cities. As they were so diverse in their abilities, Rudlin believes that Polonius’ introduction of the players as “the best for tragedy, comedy, historical, pastoral” . . . “might almost have been to them [the Gelosi]” (Rudlin and Craik, 2001: 14). Their acting members came from Padua, Bologna, Verona and Bergamo. Troupes of street performers began making international ventures to France, Germany and Spain in the 1560s and briefly to England in the 1570s.

Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the *commedia dell'arte* was part of a continuous tradition from classical times or whether it grew as an offshoot from *commedia erudita*. Either way its appeal to the masses stemmed from public criticism of the governors and the highlighting of abuses. Such opportunities for subversion were not lost on the city authorities, which tried to impose rigorous control on the acting troupes. It seems that when an acting troupe arrived in town they would ask the good burghers about current events and weave topical references into their stories. This is much the same as happens with the players in *Hamlet* of course. In time, the troupes resorted to cleverer and more sophisticated means of appealing to their audiences by airing their grievances, rather like Calypso songs at Carnival in Trinidad.

The language of the *commedia dell'arte*, as it comes down in written texts, indicates a wide range of traditions and performances. Music was an essential element of *commedia dell'arte*, with the servants, or zanni, regularly carrying musical instruments and lapsing into

tunes or songs at a moment's notice. Instantly recognisable masks and costumes were worn to indicate the stock characters. The appeal lay in the variation and improvisation around these stock characters.

Stock Characters

Much of our knowledge of the stock situations and characters of the *commedia dell'arte* derives from the publication in 1613 of Flaminio Scala's *Teatro delle Favole Rappresentive* (*The Theatre of Stage Plots*), which describes 50 scenarios and the roles played by the characters. One scenario, translated in Bullough (1957, i 257-260) lasts to just over three pages. Bullough cites Scala's work as an analogue since it was not published until 1611, presumably sprung from the same tradition.

Even with parody and exaggeration, most stock characters are clearly related to figures in the *commedia erudita*, but the Zanni or Madcap Servants seem to be a distinctive feature. It seems that these scenarios were never intended for more than ten or twelve characters, so individual members of the troupe did not have to double parts. The same characters could appear in different scenarios, which might well be inconstant. Consistency in transtextuality does not seem to have been uppermost in the minds of the troupes. Only one comedy of Shakespeare has transtextual characters, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where various characters from the history plays were transferred to a most Italian comedy (on the orders of the Queen if we are to believe a tradition from 1702. It is possible to argue that *Merry Wives* is the earlier play.)

The Stock Characters of the *commedia dell'arte* included:

Vecchi: (Elderly Men or guardian types) at least two including **Pantalone**, a Venetian merchant or magnifico, who is pompous, tyrannical and prone to sententious speeches. Baptista in *Taming of the Shrew*, while Lucentio, thinking of Gremio, tells Bianca that he is disguised to 'beguile the old pantaloon' (*Taming* 3, 1, 37). Similar figures appear as Antonio in *TGV*; Egeus in *MND*; Shylock in *MV*; Brabantio in *Oth*; Polonius in *Hamlet*. In the famous ages of man speech, Jacques says:

The sixth age slips into the lean and slippered pantaloon with spectacles on nose. (*As You Like It* 2, 7, 157)

Another elderly guardian type is **Dottore Gratiano**, a lawyer, often from Bologna or Padua, who is gullible, lecherous and prone to malapropisms. The name occurs as a minor character in *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. A secondary old man counter-balancing the first, occurs

frequently in Shakespeare e.g. the father of Proteus and the Duke in *TGV*, Vicentio, father to Lucentio in *Taming*, the Duke to Egeon in *Comedy*, Capulet to Montague *R&J*, Theseus to Egeus *MND*, Brabantio to the Duke in *Othello*.

Pair(s) of Lovers: At least one will be the child of one of the Vecchi. Their love will be forbidden e.g. due of an imbalance of status or an ancient family enmity. (e.g. *TGV*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *MV*, *R&J*, *Othello*). The lovers were not developed, more caricati – caricatures. They behaved predictably, spoke in the elevated Tuscan dialect of Italian, and wore no masks. There were often two or more pairs, thus allowing for comic interplay and confusion (e.g. *TGV*, *Taming*, *Comedy*, *LLL*, *MND*, *TN*). As with the old man, Jacques seems aware of this stock character as well:

And then the Lover
Sighing like furnace with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistres' eyebrow. (*As You Like It* 2, 7, 147-9)

One aspect of Italian Comedy that seems outside Shakespeare conception of the possible or perhaps the seemly is that the female lover was often of inferior birth, a courtesan or a maidservant (sometimes all three). This seems to surface in *Comedy of Errors* with the courtesan, but she is not characterised – indeed she is not named, and when she receives the ring at the end, no mention is made of how things turn out for her – she is just a courtesan. The apparently innocent exchange in *Twelfth Night* hides a question of huge importance:

OLIVIA What is your parentage?
VIOLA Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.
 I am a gentleman.

Olivia is not just falling for Cesario but considering possible marriage.

Two zanni (madcap servants to the young men): The Zanni were the folk element of *commedia dell'arte*. These seem to have been the distinguishing element of the *commedia dell'arte* so it is worth looking at them in detail. The word derives as a shortening of Giovanni and gives us zany in English. A zanni spoke in Bergamasco, the dialect of Bergamo, a town about 25 miles NE of Milan that was the easternmost city of the Venetian land empire. Many poor Bergamaschi went to Venice to seek their fortune so the comic rustic used his wits to get on. In *commedia dell'arte*, each zanni is allowed to address the audience directly and his main role is to contribute to the confusion of the plot. Zanni are the lowest in society and usually serve the Vecchi. A typical zanni is stupid, always falls asleep on the job, steals food, or is

caught daydreaming. Their drive is sex and hunger. They assist by confusing matters with whatever task they are assigned. But they do save the show from boredom by providing slapstick comedy, lazzi, when they encounter each other, as with the Dromio twins in *Comedy of Errors*, Speed and Launce in *TGV*, Petruccio's servants, Grumio and Curtis, in *Taming*; Gobbo in *Merchant of Venice*; Bottom and the mechanicals in *MND*.

Shakespeare's servants are slightly more reliable. The Dromio twins in *Comedy of Errors* are loyal and trustworthy; both the sea-captain and Antonio in *Twelfth Night* give unswerving support to their masters; perhaps the best variation on this aspect of a zanni, but not especially close, is Iago who tricks Roderigo in *Oth*. That Shakespeare is aware of the tradition is clear from *Twelfth Night* 1, 5, 85/6 when Malvolio complains about Feste:

I protest I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of fools, no better than the fools' zanies.

Similarly at *LLL* 5, 2, 460-5, Biron (Berowne) gracefully accepts his being deceived:

Here was a consent,
Knowing aforehand of our merriment
To dash it like a Christmas comedy
Some carry-tale, some please-man, some slight zany,
Some mumble-news, some trecher-knight, some Dick
That smiles his cheeks in years & knows the trick
To make my lady laugh when she's disposed.

The principal zanni was **Arlecchino** or Harlequin, usually the first servant who could be witty and clever, often capricious, heartless or parasitical. His development from the simple comic rustic, the zanni Bergamasco, has been ascribed to an actor from Mantua, Tristano Martinelli. Arlecchino's patchwork costume arises from his need to make clothes from any discarded pieces of cloth, and so he readily adopts disguises. This was later developed into the more recognisable Harlequin of later ages. According to Mario Apollonio (1938), the masks and costumes remained unchanged precisely so that performers could satirise public figures with impunity in the performance. If anyone complained, they could always say, "If the cap fits . . ." or rather, "If the mask fits, . . ."

Arlecchino is therefore the main satirical character. He was instantly recognised from his Bergamese cattle stick or battocchio which he used alternately as a phallic symbol or as a weapon. He often needed physical agility to escape his lies and thefts and was at the centre of

the sub-plots. There are many plays in which Shakespeare seems to have drawn upon the stock character of Arlecchino. In *Taming of the Shrew*, Grumio is Petrucchio's servant; he shows more insight in realising that his master is fortune hunting. He is 'a very monster in apparel' at the wedding (III. ii) and later tantalises Katherine with his description of tasty dishes (IV. iii). In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed is a clownish servant to Valentine. He delivers a letter from Proteus to Julia (although in fact he has given it to her maid, Lucetta. He gently but clearly satirises his master's love for Silvia (II, i). Proteus' servant Panthino is similarly deceptive. Arlecchino is also clearly visible in Puck in *MND*, Dogberry in *Much Ado* and Autolycus in *Winter's Tale*. Indeed, Bottom offers a Bergamask dance in *MND* (5.1.347), a reference which has never been explained, yet seems clearly linked to the *commedia dell'arte*.

The second major zanni was **Brighella**: sometimes another servant, or perhaps a servant who has become something e.g. an inn-keeper. He still serves others, ie the Vecchi. He is cunning, witty, often coarse, and plays jokes at other's expense. He plots to double-cross his master, Pantalone, usually successfully. One example of a Brighella is Petrucchio's servant, Curtis, in *Taming of the Shrew*, who prepares his master's house for the arrival of the newly-weds. Another example (gone astray) is Iago to Othello. Other zanni characters included Scapino, who was less scheming and more of a bumbler, but often witty. More devoted to singing and playing music, cf Feste in *Twelfth Night*. For some reason, Shakespeare usually gives the zanni an English name, perhaps to imitate the origins of the zanni from Bergamo on stage with Pantalone and the lovers.

Richard Tarlton is one leading zanni at Elizabeth's court. His improvisational comedy is frequently cited in contemporary references, including his sloppy costumes and big stick. He performed for the Queen's Men from 1583 until his death in 1588. Will Kempe is another leading zanni in late Elizabethan drama. He is thought to have played the clowning parts of Peter in *Romeo and Juliet* and Dogberry in *Much Ado*, following the improvisational clowning tradition of Tarlton (Wiles, 1987).

Other Characters in *commedia dell'arte* which are used by Shakespeare include: **Maids to the lady lovers**, cf Lucetta in *TGV*, Juliet's nurse, Narissa in *MV*, Maria in *TN*). **Capitano**, the boastful soldier, who runs away at the slightest smell of danger and may also be the lover (cf Armado in *LLL*; Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *TN*; Falstaff in *MWW & Henry IV* or Bardolph, Pistol & Nym in *Henry V*). Again Jacques seems aware of this caricature:

Then a soldier

Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the canon's mouth. (*As You Like It* 2, 7, 149-153)

Pulchinello can be an employer or employee but is no respecter of people. He has a hunchback and may have originated from Naples. **Coviello** is either a jumped-up zanni from Naples or a low-life Captain. He has the musical and acrobatic talents of Arlecchino and the pomposity of the dottore (perhaps Stephano & Trinculo in *Tempest*). The **Humanistic pedant** Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* is derided for his pedantry, which Yates (1934: 209-10) accepts as an attack but dismisses the identification with John Florio as 'quite untenable.' Others have seen Holofernes as a caricature of Richard Mulcaster. (Lea, 1934: 393). Other satirical portraits of the pedant include the schoolmaster from Mantua in *Taming* and Sir Hugh Evans in *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Other characters in *commedia dell'arte*, who feature less in Shakespeare include a frisky wife, a charlatan alchemist and cut-throat enemies, e.g. Moors, Turks and Ragusans. Ragusa was the Italian name for Dubrovnik, an important maritime rival in the Adriatic Sea to Venice. In *Measure for Measure*, Ragusino, the pirate, is imprisoned and executed offstage. Piracy is also mentioned in *Twelfth Night*, but Antonio denies the charge. Mothers and children tend not to appear; they distract from the here and now of the performance by suggesting a past or a future. Stock Situations

The Stock Situations of the *commedia dell'arte* can be seen in the translation of Scala's scenarios (Salerno, 1967). Based on conflicts between the stock characters, they resemble the plots of *commedia erudita*, with the main difference on the emphasis on the confusion caused by the zanni. The stock situations of Italian Comedy occur so frequently in Shakespeare that the reader will readily add their own examples:

- Parents – grown-up children (*MND, TGV, Lear, Hamlet*)
- Masters – servants (*Cymbeline, Winter's Tale*)
- Age - Youth – with the older man often thwarted (*MND, AYLI*)
- Money and status - Love and wit (*Taming of Shrew, TN, MV*)
- crossed love, [*Romeo & Juliet, MND, Othello*]
- mistaken identities, [*Comedy of Errors, Twelfth Night*]

- women dressed as men [*TGV, As You Like It, All's Well, TN*]
- nobles dressed as paupers [*Twelfth Night, Henry V*]
- feigned madness, [*Hamlet, King Lear*]
- apparent death, [*Romeo & Juliet, Cymbeline, Winter's Tale*]
- reunited families, [*Comedy of Errors, Cymbeline, Winter's Tale*]

Andrews (1991: 35-6) shows how repetition in the *commedia dell'arte* was used partly to add to the humour, but mainly to end by making an important point emphatically. Although infrequent in the texts of Shakespeare's plays, This repetition might cover:

- a list of suitors (Portia and Narissa in *MV*; Julia and Lucetta in *TGV*)
- writing a love letter (*Love's Labour's Lost*.)
- the sources of pleasure in life
- the virtues in a bride / husband (Olivia and Viola/Cesario in *TN*)

Some stock situations of the *commedia dell'arte*, however, occur less often in the plays of Shakespeare:

- ridicule of lustful old men: Falstaff in *MWW*
- men dressed as women (obviously this applies to the boy actors on stage but is not portrayed on stage); Falstaff is dressed against his dignity as a woman in *MWW*.
- servants dressing as masters: Tranio as Lucentio in *A Taming of The Shrew* (also Christopher Sly is dressed up a noble in the Induction)
- ridicule of jealous husbands, (rare – perhaps Othello or Leontes in *W Tale*)
- runaway wives
- servants mocking masters (rare - perhaps Speed in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* II, i).

Such omissions must indicate the taste and preferences of the author and perhaps the audiences, especially if prepared for court or aristocratic performances. *The Comedy of Errors* was performed at Gray's Inn in 1594 and *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple in 1602.

Shakespeare and Italian Comedy II

In this section, I wish to explore how the author gained the extensive knowledge of Italian Comedy which allowed him to write such Italianate plays as *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Comedy of Errors* early in his career. As we noted in part I of this study, Shakespearean Comedy does indeed follow in the traditions of Roman and Italian Comedy. For his knowledge of the *commedia erudita*, he read Italian authors extensively, including Ariosto, Cinthio, Bandello and Fiorentino not all of whom were available in translation. He set the greatest number of his works in and around Italy and composed more plays in the comedy-pastoral genres than any other. His knowledge of Italian comedy extended to the improvised non-text based *commedia dell'arte*. Kathleen Lea observes (1934: 405):

With the exception of Grumio who is imported into the *Taming of the Shrew* from the plot of *Supposes*, the sources of other Shakespearean comedies hardly suffice to account for the likeness between the Zanni and the group of Italianate clowns, the Dromios, the Gobbos, Launce and Speed, Stephano and Trinculo.

She notes (431-446) that various Shakespeare plays can be traced back to *commedia erudita* (*TN*, *MV*, *TS*, *R&J*, *M for M*, and *All's Well*). However, she argues that *commedia dell'arte* were the main influence on three of Shakespeare's plays: *Comedy of Errors*, *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Tempest*. In *Comedy of Errors*, she notes the following features: the framework of Duke, Aegeon and the abbess; the confidence between Luciana and Adriana; a wife for Amphipolus; twin slaves; the lost purse; the rope-end; the unpaid-for chain. In *Merry Wives*, the stories of a cuckolded husband who receives the lover's confidences is very much *commedia dell'arte*.

Both Lea (1934: ii 444) and Nicoll (1963: 119) regard a scenario from the *commedia dell'arte* as the principal source for the plot of *The Tempest*. This scenario, in Neri (1913), is called *Arcadia Incantada* (*The Enchanted Arcadia*). The plot remains broadly the same in five variations, which Neri transcribed from manuscripts in Rome and Naples. Many others await transcription. The main scenario involves Pulchinella entering from one side of the stage describing a shipwreck and the loss of all his ship's company. Then Coviello enters from the other side and says and does the same. The characters then see each other, making the lazzi of fear. They end by recognising each other. The plot then moves through a magician who controls the island through spirits, which offer and then remove food from the starving companions. Various lovers among the shepherds and nymphs are confused. Eventually, the

magician is able to right old wrongs, lead the survivors away from the island and abandon his art. The suggestion that this scenario is the source of *The Tempest* has been largely ignored (e.g. by Bullough, 1975, vol viii, who states that the main source has been lost), but has been accepted as possible by the editors of the Arden³ edition (Vaughan and Vaughan, 1999: 12).

Italian Comedy in Elizabethan Drama before 1590

Why do we say 1590? In *The Oxford Shakespeare*, Wells and Taylor (1988) put *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as the earliest play, which they date to 1590-1. Honan (1998: 116) also puts *TGV* as his earliest play, but considers any date between 1588-91 possible. Leech (1967), in his Arden 2 edition, argues for different phases of composition in 1592-3. Holden (1999: 101) agrees that *TGV* is likely to be the earliest play as it shows the least sophistication and must have been performed by the early 1590s. If *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is the earliest play, it has a special curiosity in that, as Melchiori (1993: 102) points out, Shakespeare wrote an Italian comedy from material that is not Italian. He notes that the plot, themes and situations derived from other sources (Chaucer, *Knight's Tale*, Elyot, *The Governour*, 1531, Montemayor, *Diana*), but were placed in the contemporary setting of an Italian Comedy.

Wells and Taylor (1988) put the same date of 1590-1 for *The Taming of the Shrew*, which they believe pre-dates the anonymously published *A Taming of A Shrew* (1594). After a sequence of historical plays, they place *Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1594. In fact, *The Comedy of Errors* has the earliest external date, a performance at Gray's Inn on 28 December, 1594 (Schoenbaum, 1977: 185). If this is accepted as close to the composition date and if it is his first Italian Comedy, then the author must have been very busy to compose five more comedies by the time of Meres' comment in 1598. Chambers places *The Comedy of Errors* as Shakespeare's fifth play and his first comedy in 1592 with *Taming of the Shrew* in the following year. Thus, although the year 1590 is somewhat arbitrary, most commentators agree on 1590 as the start of Shakespeare's professional writing career, and for our purposes the date by which he must have obtained much of his knowledge of Italian Comedy.

Lea (1934: 387) reports a pamphlet in Mantuan Archives which records for 24 April 1586:

One of the foremost gentlemen of the city, where comedies are produced with particular excellence and expense, arranged for a comedy to be performed in the great hall of his mansion in mockery of the catholic faith . . . Among the other interludes was to be one presenting a Magnifico dressed as a priest, and a zanni as a cleric.

In 1582, Stephen Gosson had complained about contemporary playwrights' use of foreign literature:

I may boldly say it because I have seen it that *The Palace of Pleasure*, *The Golden Ass*, *The Ethiopian History*, *Amadis of France*, *The Round Table*, bawdy comedies in Latin, French, Italian and Spanish have been thoroughly ransacked to furnish the playhouses in London.

Of his contemporaries, only Munday (1584) can be identified as writing new Italian comedies before 1590. Furthermore, it seems that Shakespeare was the greatest ransacker of foreign literature of them all. He even makes Falstaff (*Henry IV II 4, 1, 161*) call for a play 'extempore'. Let us look at what was available from Gosson's list in the Elizabethan period.

Translations of commedia erudita

In surveying the traditions of Comedy in Elizabethan drama before 1590, more details can be found in the survey made by Wilson (1969) and in Salinger (1974). The earliest translation of an Italian work was by Sir Thomas Hoby (1561) of *Il Cortegiano*. This work as we have seen influenced *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. One of Bandello's *Novello* was translated into French in 1554 and into English by Arthur Brooke in 1562 as *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus & Juliet*. This poem, over 3,000 lines long, greatly influenced Shakespeare's version of the star-crossed lovers. The earliest Italian comedy to be translated was Arisoto's *Suppositi*, by George Gascoigne in 1566 as *The Supposes* and may have been performed at Oxford University. Other novellas by Bandello and Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* were translated and expanded by Sir Geoffrey Fenton in *Certain Tragical Discourses* (1567). They were further adapted in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (also 1566-7). Anthony Munday (1560-1633) who was praised by Meres for his comedies in 1598, was also a major translator of French and Spanish romances. He is credited with translating (and adapting) most of Pasqualigo's play *Il Fedele* (1576) as *Two Italian Gentlemen: Fedele and Fortunio*, a court comedy dated to about 1584. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which influenced *Much Ado* and *Othello*, was translated by Harington in 1591. Montemayor's *Diana Enamorada*, which influenced *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, had apparently been translated by 1582 by Bartholomew Young but the manuscript was not published until 1598.

Some other works from different genres which influenced Shakespeare were translated as follows: *Amadis de Gaulte* (which greatly influenced *A Winter's Tale*) was translated from Spanish to French (1540-1615), the relevant section was published in a French translation by Colet in 1577. Plautus' *Menaechmi* was not translated by Warner until 1595, Terence not until

1598. Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* was translated in 1566 by Adlington. *The Ethiopian History* of Heliodorus was translated by Underdown c 1569, *Amadis of France* by Munday.

Some translations had been made before 1590, but key works (Plautus, Montemayor, which influenced *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Taming of the Shrew*) had not been published in translation. Aretino's *Quattro Commedie* were published in London in 1588 in Italian.

Adaptation

How far was Italian Comedy imitated and adapted in England before 1590? This is a difficult topic as there are gaps in the record. In general it seems that there was some form of Italian Comedy in English before 1590, but not very much. Although the title of a play may be recorded, that is not always enough to indicate genre. The names of 35 comedies have come down, about half survive. That is there seems to have been on average about one comedy a year. The earliest English comedies *Jack Juggler*, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Ralph Roister Doister* probably date to the 1550s All follow a tripartite structure spread over five acts, apparently modelled on Terence and Plautus.

George Gascoigne's *The Glass of Government* (1575) has the form of a Roman comedy, but there is no indication of any early performance. John Lyly (1554? – 1606) has been described as the biggest influence on Shakespearean Comedy. Lyly wrote many plays for court entertainment e.g. *Campaspe* (early 1580s), *Galathea*, 1584, *Endimion* (1585?), *Midas* (1588-9) and so on. His prologues indicate the development of the genre; that is to say he publicly refuses to follow tradition slavishly. The emphasis is on wit and sophistication, rather than on plot or character. Gosson himself wrote *Plays Confuted in Five Acts* (1582) including one called *The Comedy of Captain Mario*. Two plays known only by their titles from 1579 seem to indicate their origins in Italian Comedy: *Three Sisters of Mantua* and *Duke of Milan and Marquis of Mantua* (Wilson, 1969: 118-20).

Another Italian Comedy, *Il Fedele* by the Count Pasqualigo, published in Venice in 1576, was issued as a translation under the title *The Two Italian Gentleman: Fedele and Fortunio*. The English version, which is thought to be by Munday, covers the plot of a commedia erudita and includes the usual situations of cross-wooings, letters, false messages, street fights, incantations and mock terrors. Its characters include a young noble woman, her would-be lovers, and a comic pedant. There are contrasting evaluations of Munday's adaptation. Bradbrook (1991: 172) laments that Munday's adaptation contains the usual ingredients of Italian Comedy but lacks the wit and sophistication of Shakespearean works such as *Two*

Gentlemen of Verona. Melchiori (1993: 103) identifies key elements of romantic comedy in the adaptation: the heroine Vittoria is a married woman in the original who manages a number of lovers. In the adaptation, she is an eligible young lady. In Paschaligo, there are a number of minor characters and many sub-plots; in Munday, the number of characters and sub-plots is reduced. For Melchiori, Munday's adaptation is a major influence on the romantic comedies of Shakespeare and other, later dramatists. Otherwise, as Wilson notes (1969: 113), there is very little by way of romantic comedy in English literature before Shakespeare.

This seems to be all that is known for sure about Italian Comedy in England before 1590. Contemporary English writers who used Italian style in other genres include: George Peele's combination of a debate with pastoral play, *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584?), which was performed before the Queen; two prose romances, Greene's *Pandosto*, 1588; Lodge's *Rosalynde* 1590 (which provided the plots for *A Winter's Tale* and *As You Like It*); and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* 1590.

Daniell (1986) demonstrates that Shakespeare was very much in the tradition of Italian Comedy. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is perhaps most in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, containing Vecchi, two pairs of lovers and their crossed love as well as two servants Speed and Launce, whose role is more like the zanni than other servants in other plays, e.g. in Speed's gentle taunting of Valentine (II, i) and Launce's direct address to the audience about how his dog seems unaffected by his impending departure (II, iii). Similarly, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are also in the same tradition.

Many commentators place *Two Gentlemen of Verona* as the earliest comedy or even the earliest play. Wells and Taylor, 1988, who give a date of 1590-1 and place it slightly before *The Taming of the Shrew* (which they believe pre-dates the anonymous *The Taming of A Shrew* (printed in 1594).

Shakespeare's earliest comedies are clearly in the style of Italian Comedy with some displaying the distinguishing characteristics of the *commedia dell'arte*. He did not keep the erudita separate from the vernacular; in other words he mixed high and low. Additionally, Shakespeare mixed his genre. Shakespeare's Italian tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, might be said to be comedies gone wrong. Daniel then goes on to analyse 16 plays in terms of Italian comedy. Other critics suggest that there are even more plays of Shakespeare showing the influence of Italian Comedy.

In conclusion, Italian Comedy had been translated and imitated in English poetry before 1590, but Shakespeare is the author who most seems to draw on the traditions of Italian Comedy.

Italian Troupes in England

Could Shakespeare have seen troupes of Italian actors in England? This was suggested rather vaguely by Thomas Parrott (1949: 393), who failed to check the relevant dates. The answer to this question on present evidence seems to be no. Only a few visits are recorded, the first in 1546. According to Chambers (1923, ii 261-5), the only provincial payment to Italian players was at Nottingham in 1573. The following year, Italian players are mentioned in the Revel's accounts as playing before the Queen at Windsor and at Reading. Their props suggest a pastoral rather than purely comic performance. Two years later on 27 February 1576, another troupe performed at court and another in 1578, whose leader Drousinano was given dispensation to play during Lent. Drousinano was linked to the famous troupe, Gelosi, from Mantua. Chambers believes that these troupes are more likely to have improvised mime performances of scenarios from the *commedia dell'arte* rather than follow an Italian text in an alien land.

Allardyce Nicoll punctuates his *The World of Harlequin: a Critical Study of the commedia dell'arte* with frequent examples from a variety of Shakespeare plays. He concludes by saying (1963: 223):

Whether Shakespeare actually witnessed any performances given by the Italians, we cannot say with certainty, but we can declare that the inner spirit of his early comedies closely approaches that of Scala's plays.

Others, e.g. Bullough (1957, i 256), cite Scala's work as an analogue, presumably sprung from the same tradition, since Scala's work was not published until 1611. So how did Shakespeare gain his knowledge of Italian Comedy? Was it through direct contact by actually watching some plays and/or reading the texts or was it through some secondary contact such as accounts from travellers or merchants?

Did Shakespeare Travel in Italy?

One explanation was aired by Ernesto Grillo, professor of Italian at Glasgow University in his lectures, published posthumously by his students without references as *Shakespeare and Italy* (1949). Grillo calls attention to Shakespeare's extensive knowledge of lesser known

Italian authors e.g. Sannazzaro, Vita and Francastoro. His conclusion is that the author must have had first-hand knowledge of Italy. Taking this further, Paolo Viganò (1948) said that Shakespeare was really an Italian who emigrated to England, an idea that was recently revived in Sicily by Martino Iuvare as reported in *The Times* (of London) on 12 April 2000. In general, however, biographers have found it impossible to put William of Stratford in front of a performance of *commedia dell'arte* by Italian performers. This means that the knowledge would have to be second hand from travellers or merchants.

Second hand knowledge of Italian Comedy

English travellers to Italy in this period included Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) who toured Europe, with a stay in Italy in the early 1570s. As a poet, he would have undoubtedly provided many detailed insights into Italian culture, but he left England in 1585 and died of wounds received in battle in 1586. It is unlikely therefore that he can have been known personally to Shakespeare. Another traveller to northern Italy was Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), known as a playwright and a patron of players and writers. Anthony Munday (? 1553-1633) travelled around Italy in the late 1570's and early 1580s under the immunity of a troupe of travelling actors. He was collecting information about English papists, which he was passing back to the government. He was said to 'play extempore' (Lea, 1934, 383). Other travellers to Italy, e.g. Thomas Coryat, whose *Coryat's Crudities* was published in 1611, were too late to influence Shakespeare.

Some famous comic actors may well have had an influence on Shakespeare. Richard Tarlton (d 1588), was a famous jester at Elizabeth's court. His improvisational comedic techniques seem to indicate his direct knowledge of the *commedia dell'arte*, perhaps from the visits of the Italian troupes in the mid 1570s. Another actor with a direct link to Shakespeare was Will Kempe (died c 1603), a member of Lord Strange's Men in 1592 and the Lord Chamberlain's Men 1594-5. He was an original shareholder in the Globe. He had travelled as a jester with the earl of Leicester in the Netherlands 1585-6. So it is supposed that he came into contact with *commedia* players and influenced Jonson and obviously Shakespeare (Wiles, 1987). He is said to have entertained crowds in Venice (Lea, 1934, 382). The question remains for us: Did Shakespeare know Kemp before 1590 and would the acquaintance have given the author such insights into Italian Comedy as are evident in *TGV*, *LLL* and *Taming* ?

Parker (1991: 99) believes that Jonson gained his knowledge of the *commedia dell'arte* as witnessed in *Volpone* II. iii (c 1605) partly from Kempe, but also "from Florio and Ferrabasco

(whose father had actually written music for it).” Alfonso Ferrabasco was about three when his father returned to Bologna in 1578, so it is unlikely that at the age of 15 he can have had much to say to influence Shakespeare’s use of comedy. Most modern biographers put Shakespeare’s knowledge of Italian down to John Florio.

John Florio (1553 ? – 1625)

John Florio’s father, Michael Angelo Florio (1515 ? – 1566 ?) was born in Siena and became an evangelising protestant in about 1541. He was imprisoned in Rome in 1547, escaped in 1550 and travelled to England. There he settled and was known for his intellect and his vigorous anti-papist sermons. He was Italian Master to the Lady Jane Grey and probably also to the Princess Elizabeth. He seems to have been supported by Sir William Cecil, then a junior minister at court, but incurred Cecil’s displeasure for some unnamed ‘moral lapse’ (Yates, 1534: 6-7). He left London in March 1554, soon after the accession of Mary, and with his ‘little family’ he says that he travelled through Antwerp into Germany. This seems to be a reference to his wife (‘probably English’ according to Yates) and his son, John, who was said to have been born in London. The family settled in the Swiss Alps at Soglio, with other Italian refugees. John seems to have been sent for education at Tübingen in 1563 and after his father’s death he made for London by 1571. Yates (1934: 21-6) believes that John Florio never visited Italy and that any knowledge of Italian literature came from second-hand study at Tübingen. Whatever knowledge Florio had of the *commedia dell’arte* would therefore also have been second-hand.

In London, John Florio wrote a series of manuals for the study of Italian: *First Fruits* (1578), *Second Fruits* (1591) and a collection of proverbs *Giardino di Ricreatione* (also 1591). He seems to have had access to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and perhaps also to the earls of Leicester and Oxford, both literary patrons. He was recorded at the Earl of Southampton’s Family seat at Titchfield, Hampshire, on 12 October (o.s.) 1594 (Yates, 1934: 125). Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essays* in 1603 has been said to have been used for *The Tempest*. Would a connection with John Florio have provided a young author with enough opportunity to learn about Italian Comedy, both erudite and improvised, so as to write Italian style comedies by 1592 or earlier ?

Any Florio-Southampton-Shakespeare Connection unlikely before 1594

Florio dedicated his Italian-English dictionary to the Earl of Southampton 'in whose paie and patronage I have lived some years'. Florio's Italian-English Dictionary *Worlde of Wordes* was entered to the Stationers Register in 1596 but not published until 1598 (Yates, 1934: 188; Akrigg, 1968: 53). This dedication has been the base for speculation over a Florio-Southampton-Shakespeare connection. Florio was a member of the Earl's household, presumably as his Italian tutor; Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* to the earl in 1593 and *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594. From this, it is often asserted that Shakespeare too was a member of the earl's household and would have known Florio, either at the earl's townhouse in Holburn or at his country retreat at Titchfield, Hampshire. Florio is not known, however, to have been with Southampton before October 1594, when he is involved in the Danvers' case. There is some suspicion that Burghley sent Florio to Titchfield in October 1594 (Yates, 1934: 126, 218) soon after the earl came of age. Florio would have been a protestant informer who reported back on the young earl, a known catholic sympathizer.

A Florio-Southampton-Shakespeare connection has been assumed by Stopes (1922), Yates (1934: 335), Rowse (1965) and Akrigg (1967). Yet there are serious problems in assuming a connection to explain Shakespeare's earliest comedies. Firstly, the earl of Southampton (1573-1624) was a minor from the age of eight and in no position until he came of age on 6 October 1594 to patronise anyone. The estates of under-age nobles, e.g. the Earls of Oxford, Essex & Rutland, Southampton's estates were managed until the minor reached his majority by another noble. In Southampton's case, Charles Howard (1536-1624), Lord Effingham, later Earl of Nottingham, had bought the wardship for £1,000. In 1588, Southampton was dismayed enough to ask his brother-in-law the Earl of Arundel, to petition Burghley for funds to arrest the decay of another country house at Beaulieu, Hampshire (Stopes, 1922: 33). When the earl did attain his majority, his first action was to 'sue for his livery' ie pay a large fee for the transfer of his estates back to himself and secondly to pay a fine of £5,000 (almost twice his annual income) for refusing to marry Burghley's grand-daughter, Lady Elizabeth Vere (Akrigg, 1967: 39). Even after he reached his majority, Southampton does not seem to have been a generous patron. Writers such as Nashe, who dedicated *The Unfortunate Traveller* to Southampton in 1593, seem to have been frustrated in their hope of patronage, since as few writers repeated their dedication.

Secondly, as a minor, the earl was not master of his own house until he came of age. He himself was under the tutelage of William Cecil, Lord Burghley and like other young nobles,

he attended Cambridge University until 1589 and then Gray's Inn. Thus Southampton cannot be said to have had his own household in which to patronise the arts before October 1594. His first actions as an earl in his own right was to protect the Danvers after they had committed murder (Stopes, 1922: 69-70). Although it is clear that Shakespeare knew the works of Florio, Florio's could not have been the main source of knowledge about Italian Comedy as seen in the plays. Moreover, a Florio-Southampton connection cannot explain Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian drama before he wrote his first Italianate play c 1590. A Florio-Burghley connection is more plausible, but there is nothing in Burghley's extensive records to support this. Florio seems to have called on Burghley but was not employed in his household. Only Richard Dutton (1989) among modern commentators realises that any Shakespeare-Southampton-Florio connection would be too late for the earlier comedies.

The Southampton-Florio connection in Shakespeare biographies

Shakespeare's debt to Florio has been argued by Mario Praz (1958), who believes that Southampton and Shakespeare travelled to Italy in 1593. Schoenbaum (1977: 169) calls it "a pleasant hypothesis" that Shakespeare may have travelled to Italy. He prefers to think that he obtained his knowledge (of travel and customs in Italy) from returning travellers and Italian merchants, perhaps at the Oliphant on Bankside. He seems to suggest that John Florio, who was engaged as tutor to the earl of Southampton, may also have informed him. Levi (1988) assumes that Shakespeare knew Florio before 1591 and that he gained his knowledge of Italian from him. Bradbrook (1991: 171) believes that when the playhouses were closed in 1593-4, Shakespeare retreated to Titchfield, the country seat of the Earl of Southampton, and there "would have enjoyed the company of John Florio, the Earl's tutor and the most celebrated Italian teacher of his time."

Knowledge of Italian drama ignored in Shakespeare biographies

Kay (1991) ignores the Italian connection altogether. Wells (1995) seems to ignore the need for the author to know any Italian, as does Matus (1999). Honan (1998: 99) refers vaguely to poets and actors coming to know Italy through merchants in the city. Holden (1999: 43) dismisses as a daydream Schoenbaum's suggestion that Florio taught Shakespeare the language, literature and customs of Italy. Instead Holden refers to a few mistakes by Shakespeare e.g. making ports of Milan and Verona (which in fact they were) and thereafter ignores the Italian connection. Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001) does not mention John Florio, any knowledge of Italian or any use of Italian sources.

Those biographers who place the ‘lost years’ in Lancashire attach little or no significance to Italian Comedy but great significance to Thomas Hoghton’s will of 1581, which recommended that one of his heirs, Sir Thomas Hesketh, ‘be friendly unto Fulk Gillom and William Shakeshafte, now dwelling with me’. It seems that Hoghton Towers and Rufford Old Hall, near Blackburn, Lancashire, were the centre of a Catholic study group. By identifying the testamentary Shakeshafte with Shakespeare the dramatist, the lost years have been explained. Furthermore, Shakespeare the actor could have joined Lord Strange’s Men (based at nearby Lathom Castle and Knowsley Hall) c 1585 and travelled to London. Honigmann (1985: 128) believes that the Shakespeare’s earliest Italian Comedies (*TGV*, *Taming*, *Comedy of Errors*) were performed in the 1587-9. He mentions (151) that William Stanley (Lord Strange and from 1594 Earl of Derby) had travelled to Italy, but does not develop a possible literary connection. Otherwise, there is no attempt to explain the Bard’s knowledge of Italian Comedy. No satisfactory explanation for the depth of Shakespeare’s knowledge of Italian Comedy emerges from traditional biography.

Concluding Remarks

1. Italian Comedy had been translated and imitated in English poetry to a small extent before 1590.
2. Shakespearean Comedy is in tradition of Classical and Italian Comedy, both *erudita*, and *commedia dell’arte*
3. Shakespeare is the English author most influenced by Italian Comedy
4. No satisfactory explanation for the depth of Shakespeare’s knowledge of Italian Comedy emerges from the traditional biography.

All these problems are resolved by taking Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford, as the true author of Shakespeare’s works. Oxford was highly educated at Cecil House under his guardian, William Cecil, later Lord Burghley. Oxford travelled extensively in Italy in 1575-6, especially in northern cities such as Verona, Mantua and Padua. He lived in Venice and also visited Sicily. Upon his return to England, he was known as the “Italianate Earl”, ran companies of actors, both men and boys, and was famous for writing comedies. By 1589, when George Puttenham published *The Arte of English Poesie*, Edward de Vere enjoyed outstanding prestige amongst his contemporaries:

And in her Majesties time that now is are sprong up an other crew of Courtly makers Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties owne servantes, who have written excellently well as it would appeare if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest, of which number is first that noble Gentleman Edward Earle of Oxford.

References: commedia dell'arte

- Andrews, R (1991) 'Scripted Theatre and the *commedia dell'arte*' in Mulryne and Shewring (eds) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 21-54.
- Apollonio, M (1938) *Storia del teatro italiano*. Firenze.
- Cairns, C (1991) 'Aretino's Comedies and the Italian Erasmian Connection in Shakespeare and Jonson' in Mulryne and Shewring (eds) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 113-137.
- Chambers, E K, (1923) *The Elizabethan Stage* 4 vols. Oxford, Clarendon.
- Chambers, E K, (1930) *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. 2 vols. Oxford, Clarendon.
- Clubb, L G (1989) *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*. New Haven, Conn.
- Clubb, L G (1997) 'Italian Renaissance Theatre' in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*. Ed J Brown. Oxford, OUP. pp 107 –141
- Duchartre, P (1929, trans. 1966 R T Weaver) *The Italian Comedy*. London, Harrap.
- Lea, K M (1934) *Italian Popular Comedy: A Study in the commedia dell'arte 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the English Stage*. 2 vols Oxford, OUP
- Mulryne, J S & M Shewring (1991) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance*. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Nelson, A H (1993) 'The Universities: Early Staging in Cambridge' pp 59-67 in Cox, J D and D S Kastan (edd) *A New History of Early English Drama*. New York, Columbia UP.
- Neri, F (1913) *Scenari delle maschere in Arcadia*.
- Nicoll, Allardyce (1963) *The World of Harlequin*. Cambridge, CUP
- Parker, B (1991) 'Jonson's Venice' in Mulryne and Shewring *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 95 - 112.
- Rudlin, J (1994) *commedia dell'arte: An Actor's Handbook*. London, Routledge.

- Rudlin, J and O Crick (2001) *commedia dell'arte: A Handbook for Troupes*. London, Routledge.
- Salerno, H trans. (1967) *Flaminio Scala's Scenarios of the commedia dell'arte*. New York, NYU.
- Shewring, M & J R Mulryne, (ed) (1989) *War, Literature and the Arts in Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan

References: Shakespeare

- Akrigg (1968) *Shakespeare and the Third Earl of Southampton*. London, Hamish Hamilton.
- Arthos, J (1972) *Shakespeare: The Early Writings*. London, Bowes & Bowes.
- Bradbrook, M C (1961) *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy*. London.
- Bradbrook, M C (1991) 'Courtier and Courtesy Castiglioni, Lyly and Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*' in Mulryne and Shewring (edd) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 161- 178.
- Bullough, G (1957-75) *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. 8 vols. London, Routledge.
- Richmond, H M (1991) 'Shakespeare's Verisimo and the Italian Popular Tradition' in Mulryne and Shewring (eds) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 179-203.
- Daniell, D (1986) 'Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy' pp 101-122 in Wells, S Ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Cambridge, CUP.
- Duncan-Jones, K (2001) *Ungentle Shakespeare*. London, Arden.
- Dutton, R (1989) *William Shakespeare, A Literary Life*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Grillo, E (1949) *Shakespeare and Italy*. Glasgow, GUP.
- Honigman, E A J (1985) *Shakespeare, the Lost Years*. Manchester, MUP.
- Kay, D (1991) *Shakespeare: His Life, Work and Era*. London, Sidgwick and Jackson.
- Holden, A (1999) *William Shakespeare: His Life and Work*. London, Little, Brown & Company.
- Honan, P (1998) *Shakespeare: A Life*. Oxford, OUP.
- Leech, C (ed) (1967) *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Arden 2. London, Methuen.
- Levi, P (1988) *The Life and Times of William Shakespeare*. London, Basingstoke.

- Levith, M J (1989) *Shakespeare's Italian settings and plays*. London, St. Martin's Press.
- Lorch, M (1991) 'Honest Iago and the Lusty Moor: the Humanistic Drama of Honestas/Voluptas in a Shakespearean Context' in Mulryne and Shewring (eds) *Theatre of the Italian and English Renaissance* pp 204-220
- McPherson, D C, (1990) *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the myth of Venice*. University of Delaware Press.
- McWilliam, G H (1974) *Shakespeare's Italy Revisited*. Inaugural Lecture. Leicester, LUP.
- Marrapodi, M, A J Hoenselaars, M Capuzzo & L Falzon Santucci (eds) (1993) *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian locations in Renaissance drama*. Manchester, MUP.
- Melchiori, G (1993) 'In fair Verona: commedia erudita into romantic comedy' in Marrapodi, M (Ed) *Shakespeare's Italy*. pp 100 – 111.
- Matus, I (1999) *Shakespeare: IN FACT*. New York, Continuum.
- Miola, R (2000) *Shakespeare's Reading*. Oxford, OUP
- Parrott, T M (1949) *Shakespearean Comedy*. New York, Russell & Russell.
- Pfister, M (1993) 'Shakespeare's Italy: The Law of Diminishing Returns.' in Marrapodi, M (Ed) *Shakespeare's Italy*. pp 295 - 304.
- Praz, M (1954) 'Shakespeare's Italy' *Shakespeare Survey*, 7, 1954, pp 54-106
- Praz, M (1958) 'Ben Jonson's Italy' in Praz, M. *The Flaming Heart*. pp 168-185.
- Rowse, A L (1965) *Shakespeare's Southampton: Patron of Virginia*. London, Macmillan.
- Salinger, L G (1974) *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*. Cambridge, CUP.
- Schoenbaum, S (1977) *A Compact Documentary Life*. Oxford, OUP.
- Stopes, C C (1922) *The Life of Henry, Third Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's Patron*. Cambridge, CUP.
- Vaughan V M and A T Vaughan (1999) *The Tempest*. Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames, Nelson.
- Vigano, P (1948) *Shakespeare Genio Italiano*. Treviso.
- Wells, S (1995) *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama*. London, Norton.
- Wells, S and G Taylor (eds) (1988) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Oxford, OUP.
- Wiles, D (1987) *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, F P (1969) *The English Drama 1485-1585*. Oxford History of English Literature. Oxford, Clarendon.

Yates, F A (1934) *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*. New York, Octagon.