

The Tempest

as an Italian Pastoral Comedy

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This paper considers the basis for taking *The Tempest* to be an Italian Comedy, especially a pastoral comedy derived from the *commedia dell'arte*. There has been widespread agreement that there is no known source for the plot; some believe that Shakespeare invented the plot himself, others assert that the plot is derived from a wide variety of similar folk tales. However, there are many Italian plays which are close to the story of Prospero; it is clear Shakespeare was fully conversant with Italian plays, especially plots from pastoral scenarios in the *commedia dell'arte*. These sources, transcribed and published in 1913 by Ferdinando Neri, were used as outline plots by travelling troupes of players in Italy and were written down in manuscripts c. 1620. All the elements for the plot from *The Tempest* can be seen in each of three particular scenarios from Italian pastoral comedy, any one which would make a very close source for the play. However, Shakespeare shifts the focus from the shipwrecked mariners to the magician, giving him a personal history and motive for revenge, thus giving an insight into Shakespeare's own preoccupations.

To state that Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* is an Italian Comedy might appear at first sight unnecessary: it can be considered Italian because most (possibly all) of the named characters have Italian names;¹ most have Italian backgrounds;² *The Tempest* can be considered a comedy as it appears at the top of the list of Comedies in the First Folio; the action takes place in a remote location; nothing seriously bad happens in the play; the action concludes when old wrongs are righted, lovers are united and we all leave the theatre happy with life.

That *The Tempest* is an Italian Comedy seems therefore to be stating the obvious. We would not need to proceed further but for the strange reason that *The Tempest* has never been classed alongside *Much Ado* or *Two Gentleman of Verona* as an Italian Comedy. Apparently since the time

of Coleridge, *The Tempest* has been called a Romance rather than a comedy;³ in looking for a source, scholars have searched earnestly among the early English colonists in the Americas. Thus both the Italian and comedic elements in the classification of the play have been overlooked.

In this paper, I wish to demonstrate that the sources for the play have indeed been accurately identified by Ferdinando Neri and by Kathleen Lea as scenarios in Italian Comedy but that these sources have been neglected by mainstream scholars.

1 Usual sources for the plot of *The Tempest*

The plot of *the Tempest* has been summarised as follows by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen for the theatre goes at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon:

Twelve years ago Prospero, the Duke of Milan, was usurped by his brother, Antonio, with the help of Alonso, King of Naples, and the King's brother Sebastian. Prospero and his baby daughter Miranda were put to sea and landed on a distant island where ever since, by the use of his magic art, he has ruled over the spirit Ariel and the savage Caliban.

He uses his powers to raise a storm which shipwrecks his enemies on the island. Alonso searches for his son, Ferdinand, although fearing him to be drowned. Sebastian plots to kill Alonso and seize the crown. The drunken butler, Stephano, and the jester, Trinculo, encounter Caliban and are persuaded by him to kill Prospero so that they can rule the island. Ferdinand meets Miranda and they fall instantly in love. Prospero sets heavy tasks to test Ferdinand and, when satisfied, presents the young couple with a betrothal masque. As Prospero's plan draws to its climax, he confronts his enemies and forgives them. Prospero grants Ariel his freedom and prepares to leave the island for Milan.

There is wide agreement that there is no single source for the plot of *The Tempest*; however, opinion remains divided as to whether there was a main source, as yet undiscovered (*e. g.* Muir), or whether Shakespeare simply invented the plot himself (*e. g.* Kermode):

In 1747, Warburton suspected an Italian source, not yet identified.⁴ In 1790, Malone asserted that for Shakespeare's *Tempest* 'no origin is yet assigned.'⁵ A few years after Malone, Steevens made the same point: 'No one has been lucky enough to discover the romance on which Shakespeare may be supposed to have founded this play.'⁶ Barton (1968: 24) agreed that the plot had yet to be identified: 'The Bermuda pamphlets did not provide him, however, with either his characters or, except in the most generalised sense, his plot. Exactly where they came from is, and seems likely to remain, a mystery.' Muir (1978: 261): 'There were, therefore, a number of minor sources of *The Tempest*, but it is highly probable that there was a main source as yet unidentified.' Salinger (1978 173) saw great influence from Roman drama: 'Again, scholars have found no direct source for Shakespeare's plot. But this play, with its incidental fantasies of empire and dominant

motif of the just man in exile requited by Providence through a storm, it seems very likely that Shakespeare took strong hints, if not his shaping ideas, from Plautus' *Rudens*.'

However, in the mid twentieth century, Kermode asserted (Arden2. lxiii): 'Ultimately, the source of *The Tempest* is an ancient motif, of almost universal occurrence, in saga, ballad, fairy tale and folk tale.' Bullough seems to agree (viii, 245): 'No specific source has been found so we must content ourselves with analogues to the setting, plot and personages of the play.' Dobson (2001: 471) tends towards the idea of no single source: 'The main part of the play, though – unusually, largely told in retrospect, the play neo-classically confining itself to showing the last few hours of the story in a single location – is Shakespeare's own.' Lindley concurs (2002: 26): 'Like only two other of Shakespeare's plays, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – it [*The Tempest*] has no dominant narrative source, though it is generally agreed that it makes substantial allusion to Virgil, Ovid and Montaigne and to reports on the wreck of the *Sea Venture* in the Bermudas.'

Thus there is no consensus as to whether Shakespeare was relying on a major source or not. Furthermore, there has been little consensus as to the possible influence of the *commedia dell'arte*. Kermode explicitly rejects it; Bullough, slightly more cautiously, explains (259-261): 'There is no proof that Shakespeare ever saw a *commedia dell'arte* acted' and thus he concludes that it 'cannot be claimed as a specific influence.'

It is my contention that that Shakespeare must have known (either in performance or in manuscript) various scenarios of the pastoral comedy *commedia dell'arte* and that the proof which lies in this very close correlation between these scenarios and *The Tempest*..

(a) *The Voyages to Virginia*

It is often asserted that Shakespeare needed to know about the voyages to Virginia in 1609-11 so as to compose *The Tempest*. This position has been stated by Barton (1968) and implied by other editors. There were several accounts of the storms, shipwrecks and deserted islands from this period.⁷ Of these, however, only Strachey's letter (published in 1625) is now thought to have had any influence on *The Tempest*: indeed, both Orgel (Oxford, 209) and Vaughan & Vaughan (Arden, 287) limit their appendix on sources to this letter only.

Kermode (1954: introduction p. xxv), however, argues that Shakespeare might have composed *The Tempest* without reading Strachey's letter: 'There is nothing in *The Tempest* fundamental to its structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered, and the Bermuda voyage never taken place.' Bullough merely refers to a number of 'promising features' in

this letter, mainly the storm and the landing in the Bermudas, but nothing essential. Kenneth Muir expands this doubt in his study of the sources:

The extent of the verbal echoes of [the Bermuda] pamphlets has, I think, been exaggerated. There is hardly a shipwreck in history or fiction which does not mention splitting, in which the ship is not lightened of its cargo, in which the passengers do not give themselves up for lost, in which north winds are not sharp, and in which no one gets to shore by clinging to wreckage. (Muir 1978:280)

David Lindley, editor of the New Cambridge Shakespeare (2002: 31), agrees that there “is virtually nothing in these texts [the Bermuda pamphlets] which manifests the kind of unambiguous close verbal affinity we have seen in other sources [Virgil, Ovid and Montaigne] so far considered.” Thus the Virginia accounts might have provided some thematic and topical elements but did not provide the plot or any specific turns of phrase.

Arguing against any knowledge on Shakespeare’s part of the Virginia expeditions, Stritmatter and Kositsky (2007 & 2009) have demonstrated that the major historical source for the shipwreck was Peter Martyr’s *De Orbe Novo* (‘Concerning the New World’, published in Latin in 1530). Martyr’s work, which describes the earliest explorations of the Americas from Columbus’s first voyage in 1492, was available from 1555 in Richard Eden’s translation as *The Decades of the New Worlde or West India*, (augmented by Willes in 1577).

In conclusion, it seems that Shakespeare need not have read Strachey or been acquainted with any of the Virginia accounts in order to compose *The Tempest*.

(b) Other possible sources

Another major source for the material of *The Tempest* has been cited in the Greek pastoral. Carol Gesner has demonstrated striking correspondences between *The Tempest* and the Greek pastoral narrative *Daphnis and Chloe*, ascribed to Longus.⁸ Gesner makes a convincing case that Shakespeare knew features of this story. The major similarities include: a girl grows up ignorant of her own and her father’s nobility; the girl falls in love without realising what is happening; the girl is courted by other suitors, who attempt to ravish her; the boy is taken by pirates; finally, the lovers are recognised as both coming from noble families, and are eligible to be married. So far as the general roles of Miranda and Ferdinand (as lovers) are concerned, the similarities are clear, but there is no correspondence in the main plot in terms of a magician on a remote island, taking revenge on shipwrecked enemies. Similarly, Feuer’s study (1997) of the biblical influence of the

Joseph story on the reunited families lacks precise correlation. Peter Bilton (2000) has argued for some influence from Gaspar Gil Polo's *The Enamoured Diana*. Bilton accepts, however, that there is no direct correlation with Prospero or Ariel or Caliban, but "it does have an island, and enough other points of similarity to *The Tempest* for it to merit inclusion among Shakespeare's sources."

Among other works considered as analogues is *Die Schöne Sidea*, published in German in 1618. It was ascribed to Jacob Ayrer, who died in 1605. The plot contains 'a magician-prince driven from his land, a reluctant devil-servant, the enemy's son captured and made to serve by carrying logs, a daughter who falls in love with the young man, their marriage, and a reconciliation.' (Bullough, viii, 248). Kermode (Intro, lxiii-iv) considers this play but rejects it as too 'naïf and buffoonish' to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, its use of a disgruntled nobleman-turned-magician as a character (the protagonist of the German play is the magician's daughter, Sidea) has some parallels in *The Tempest*. Because of the date of publication, *Die Schöne Sidea* is usually taken to be the later work.

2 Shakespeare's Use of Italian Sources

(a) Italian geography

Most nineteenth century commentators felt that there was a clear Mediterranean setting for the play. H. H. Furness (1892) had followed Joseph Hunter, who in 1839 identified the scene of the action with Lampedusa, an uninhabited island lying to the north of Sicily.⁹ Hunter's observations include the congruence of sea routes from Milan (Prospero's journey), Tunis to Naples (Alonso's journey) and from Algiers (Sycorax's being marooned). In 1880, Theodor Elze proposed Pantelleria, another island off the coast of Sicily article.¹⁰

This denial of the Italian context of the play is odd, given that the names of Prospero, Alonso, Antonio are Italian, as are their cities of origin, Milan and Naples, and that they return to these cities at the end of the play.¹¹ More recently, the balance has been slightly redressed as Vaughan & Vaughan (2005: 48-51) consider the play's likely location between Italy and Africa.

(b) Italian history: William Thomas's *Historie of Italie* (1549)

Joseph Hunter also identified a likely source for names and historical details in William Thomas's *Historie of Italie* published in 1549, a work that was suppressed under Mary but reprinted in 1561 (STC 24018).¹² Some commentators accepted the Italian political context for the play: Murray Levith in *Shakespeare's Italian Plays and Settings*, 1989, argues that the political concerns of the Italian Renaissance city-states constitute the background for the action.

However, there has been limited enthusiasm for the suggestion that Thomas's history provided important background details for *The Tempest*: Frank Kermode (1954, intro. lxix-lx) refers to Thomas only as a 'reputed' source and with reluctance admits that 'certain names are mentioned, certain events described, which somewhat resemble those of Shakespeare's play.' He states that 'Thomas's account is by no means easy to follow.' He then gives an outline, noting at the end that Antony Adorno is 'no usurper' and concludes that it is 'possible' Shakespeare knew Thomas's *History*, but that it 'matters little either way.' How Shakespeare used this source will, as we shall see, turn out to be very important.

Anne Barton (1968: 24) lists Thomas's *History* in a list of sources, but claims that Shakespeare depended on 'a quite unlocalized consciousness of certain motifs and story patterns widely distributed throughout the world.' Geoffrey Bullough (1975: 249-250) also dismisses Thomas's *History of Italy* as a source for the background to *The Tempest*. He gives an outline of Thomas's history in his introduction to the sources of the play, but omits the text, considering it unworthy even as an analogue: 'It is of course possible that Shakespeare recalled the banished Duke of Genoa and his difficulties when naming Prospero of Milan; he may even have got Ferdinand from Thomas also; but it is not necessary to think so.' Similarly, Stephen Orgel (1987: 42-3) briefly mentions Thomas's *History* as an example of 'how little Shakespeare was controlled by the history he was reading.' Vaughan & Vaughan (2005: 23-4) described Thomas's *History* merely as an 'intriguing analogue'.¹³

William Thomas's influence as a source, however, has been greatly underestimated. Many of the details which seem so important to Prospero in his speech to Miranda (Act 1 Scene 2) derive from this text. Thomas published his work after travelling extensively in Italy and included a story about a Duke of Genoa, Prospero Adorno, who briefly held power in 1460:

But Duke John after this victorie rested not longe till the commons beganne to contende for paiement of taxes, and fynding faulte with the burde[n] that was laied upon them, toke their weapons in hande, and constreigned the Duke with all his frenchmen to flee into the Castell. Where they beseiged him: and than made Prospero Adorno theyr Duke: so that Raynolde, father unto the beseiged Duke (with helpe of the frenche kynge) made a great armie by sea and lande, and came to Genoa, where he was well fought withall, discomfitted and lost 2500 men: so that the Genowaise remained in theyr libertee: and yet were the enemies no sooner retyred, but civile sedicion sprange up amongst them within the citee. For the Duke Adorno could not be contented to suffre the Fregosi to tarie within the citee, whereupon either of them made what power they coulde: And the Fregosi havyng the better hande, expulsed Adorno and made one of theyr owne name Duke.¹⁴

This Prospero returned sixteen years later and ruled as deputy for the Duke of Milan. Prospero then made an alliance with Ferdinando, King of Naples and continued ruling for many years:

Wherefore incontinently a great armie was sente from Millane, whych by the helpe of the Adorni, wyth theyr partakers discomfitted Obietto de Flisco with the comminaltee, and so beyng entred into the citee, Prospero Adorno was established as the Duke of Millans liuetenant there. But he continued scarecely one yere, till by meane of new practices, that he held with Ferdinando kyng of Naples, he was had in suspicion to the Milanese: who willing to depose hym, rayseed a new commocion of the people: so that where he was before the Duke's liuetenant, now he was made governor absolutely of the common wealth.¹⁵

Prospero then ruled for a short while but was deposed by the Fregosi.¹⁶ Shortly afterwards, in 1498, the citizens made Antony Adorno their duke, although it is not known if Antony was a brother or a kinsman of Prospero. William Thomas also describes the rule of Alfonso, King of Naples, who married the daughter of the rightful Duke of Milan, but later (in 1495) renounced his state to his son Ferdinand and sailed into Sicily where he gave himself to 'study, solitariness, and religion':

Now as soone as kyng Alfonse heard, that the frenche kyng was arriued in Lumbardy, consideryng him selfe to be hated of his barons, and his son Ferrandino contrariwise welbeloued, incontinently renounced the astate vnto his soonne, toke his treasure with hym, and sayled into Sicile, where for the tyme of his shorte life (that dured scarce one yere) he disposed hym selfe to studie, solitarinesse, and religion.¹⁷

There are at least six points of comparison between the historical characters in Thomas's *Historie of Italie* and *The Tempest*: (a) a prince called Prospero, another called Ferdinand; (b) a ruler is deposed by his enemies, but later returns to rule; (c) an alliance with King of Naples; (d) a King of Naples, married to the daughter of the Duke of Milan; (e) a king of Naples called Alfonso or Alonso; (f) a Prince given to study and solitariness.

The correspondence between Thomas's history and the play go well beyond coincidence. The small changes made by Shakespeare in his adaptation of *Historie of Italie* will be considered later.

(c) Italian drama: background to the action

A second major reason for referring to *The Tempest* as an Italian Comedy comes from a published Italian play in the tradition of the *commedia erudita* ('learned comedy'), Bartolomeo Rossi's *Fiammella* (1584), which involves a shipwreck and a marooned magician.¹⁸ However, greater influence can be found in the Italian popular comedy, known in full as the *commedia dell'arte dell'improviso*, which was performed in various cities and courts from about 1550. Shakespeare's relationship with Italian popular comedy has been explored by various Shakespearean academics, especially Kathleen Lea and Allardyce Nicoll.¹⁹

Acting troupes used to travel about Italy during the second half of the sixteenth century performing plays based on an outline plot known as a scenario.²⁰ These plots, about two to three

pages in length, involved a number of actions which develop a story line. Many of these scenarios derived from the *commedia erudita*, but the *commedia dell'arte* either adapted the plot or reduced the literary language (usually both). The actors were free to improvise their scripts and their actions as they saw fit. Frequently, the action was adapted to please the audience, who were the townspeople, and reflect their complaints. We know of about 700 scenarios, mainly from printed sources, especially *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, Flaminio Scala's account of over 50 scenarios. Scala's work was published in 1611.²¹

Many others are known from surviving manuscripts,²² two of which (Locatelli ii and Corsini i) are especially important for *The Tempest*. Two scenarios (Locatelli ii 26 and ii 28) were written by Basilio Locatelli between 1618 and 1622, and contains over 100 scenarios plots.²³ Similarly, the Corsini manuscript i 33, contains about 100 scenarios.²⁴ About 70 of the scenarios are common to both the Locatelli and Corsini manuscripts, with small variations between the plot outlines. Most of the plots in the Locatelli and the Corsini manuscripts are comedies. Some of these scenarios in manuscript belong to a specific sub-genre, pastoral comedies, which seem to have been particularly influential on *The Tempest*.

Five of these handwritten pastoral scenarios were transcribed and published in 1913 by Ferdinando Neri, who was the first to suggest that the plot of *The Tempest* derives from the *commedia dell'arte*. Neri's work was made known to the English speaking world by Kathleen Lea in 1934 and it is from their work that we can see striking similarities between some scenarios of the *commedia dell'arte* and *The Tempest*.²⁵ Three pastoral scenarios have exceptional importance for *The Tempest* (see the appendix for the original Italian text and an English translation):

Il Mago deals with The Magician who inhabits a remote island where a group of buffoons are shipwrecked. After various tricks, plots and amorous adventures, all is happily resolved.²⁶

La Nave deals with a shipwreck on a remote island where a magician holds sway over some spirits. After various tricks, plots and amorous adventures, all is happily resolved.²⁷

Li Tre Satiri deals with three satyrs who are used by a magician on a remote island to torment a group of shipwrecked buffoons. After various tricks, plots and amorous adventures, all is happily resolved.²⁸

These three scenarios observe the unities of action, place and time. Unusually for Shakespeare, so does *The Tempest*. The action takes place on a remote island governed by a magician who controls spirits and demons. There is a shipwreck, caused in *La Nave* by the magician, and a group of buffoons come to the island in small groups or individually, believing everyone else on board has perished. They lament their hunger; food and sometimes clothing is provided by magic. Various characters are trapped inside trees or rocks. Small groups conspire against each other and against the magician, who forestalls their intentions. Various young people fall in love and are finally united. At the end the Magician reveals himself and is either punished or renounces his magic and in one version returns to civilisation with the others. Reborra (1949: 212) calls Shakespeare's play the first poetic treatment ("realizzatore") of a scenario from Italian Popular Comedy.

Many of these features occur in other pastorals: in *Il Capriccio*, a banquet suddenly appears to the starving sailors and is then suddenly snatched away again.²⁹ In *I Foresteri* the shipwrecked sailors get drunk. In *Arcadia Incantata* 'The Enchanted Arcadia', the magician announces a shipwreck and the arrival of strangers, promising to take his revenge on them. He is served by a wild man who helps him bring together the lovers. At the end of the play, the magician reveals himself as having a long-standing grievance against one of the shipwrecked gentlemen, on whom he is now revenged (Lea, 670-4).³⁰ At the end of *Pantaloncino* 'Panaloonet', the magician renounces his magic and throws away his wand and his book (Lea, 630-42). In *Il Gran Mago*, the Great Magician returns to civilisation with the travellers (Lea, 648-57). In *La Maga*, 'The Enchantress' traps various characters in stone and makes food appear magically (Lea, 616-9). In *La Pazzia di Filandro* 'The Madness of Filandro', a party from Naples are shipwrecked, some are supposed lost and others land on a remote island. A satyr announces his love for a nymph but foolishly allows her to tie him to a rock. He escapes and promises vengeance. The play ends with those supposed lost are found (Lea 643-47). Since all of these events can be paralleled in *The Tempest*, it is clear that the scenarios from the *commedia dell'arte* were the major source for the plot of *The Tempest*. The same holds true for the characters.

Table of Correspondences between Pastoral Scenarios & The Tempest

Events in Pastoral Scenarios	Mago	La Nave	Tre Satiri	Tempest
Unities of time, place and action	√	√	√	√
Scene is in a lost island	1.1	√	√	√
Magician causes a storm and a shipwrecked		3.7		√
Pantalone bemoans the shipwreck & his hunger	1.1	1.1	1.3	√
characters are trapped inside a tree and a rock		3.1 4	1.2	√
characters dress as / are taken by others as gods	1.5		1.1 1	√
food magically appears and/or disappears	1.1 6	1.2	2.1 5	√
Magician broods and considers marriages of others	1.7	1.6	1.2	√
Magician controls spirits, devils and/or satyrs	2.1 2	1.6	2.2	√
Magic garlands / Clothes appear		1.7	1.1 3	√
Attempt to steal magician's book and / or kill him	1.1 5	3.1 3	2.1 4	√
Lovers are revealed as children of Pantalone and/or Gratiano		3.1 3 3.1 5	3.1 3	√
Magician loses his art		3.1 4		√

(d) Italian drama: stock characters of the commedia dell'arte

The *commedia dell'arte* relied on the use of a number of stock characters who could be readily identified not only from their costume and mask but also from their situation.³¹ Herbert Coursen (2000) has offered the following identifications of the name characters of *The Tempest* with the stock characters of Italian popular comedy.

Characters in Pastoral Scenarios	Mago	La Nave	Tre Satiri	Tempest
Pantalone (vain, prosperous and elderly)	√	√	√	Alonso
Fausto / Sireno (lost son)	√	√	√	Ferdinand
Coviello, his servant	√		√	Gonzalo
Gratiano (old, wealthy & pretentious)	√	√	√	Antonio
Elpino (son of Gratiano)		√	√	(mentioned 1.2.439)
Pulcinello (dishonest servant)	√	√	√	Stephano
Brighella (even more dishonest servant)	√	√	√	Trinculo
Filli / Clori (love-struck daughter)	√	√	√	Miranda
Amarilli (love-struck local girl)	√			(Miranda)
Selvaggio (the wild man)	√		√	Caliban
Magician	√	√	√	Prospero
Demon / spirits	2.15	1.7	√	Ariel
Lion	2.15	Liste d at start		(mentioned in 2.1.313)
Gods	1.5: Jove Mercury Cupid	1.2; 1.13 Bacchus Mars Jove	2.8 Cupid	Iris, Ceres, Juno

Pantalone, who is vain, prosperous and elderly, clearly resembles Alonso, King of Naples. Pantalone's son and heir, called Flavio, Fausto or Sireno and usually feared lost in the pastoral scenarios, corresponds to Ferdinand. Coviello, a zanni (servant) or captain from Naples, is clearly Gonzalo. His friend and peer, the doctor Gratiano, old, wealthy and pretentious, corresponds to Antonio. There are various dishonest servants or zanni (Arlecchino and Brighella) who correspond to Stephano and Trinculo. There is a love-struck daughter, Filli, who is Miranda. In the pastoral scenarios, there is also a wild man, Selvaggio, who is Caliban; a Magician in control of the island who is Prospero. The Demon and spirits are represented by Caliban and Ariel. The roar of lions is mentioned by Antonio (2.1.315). The Gods who are presented in the Masque are Ceres, Iris and Juno. From this it should be clear that the characters in *The Tempest* correspond very closely to the characters in the pastoral scenarios of the *commedia dell'arte*. How have critics reacted to the hypothesis of Neri and Lea that *The Tempest* is an Italian Pastoral Comedy ?

(e) Negative Reactions to Neri & Lea's hypothesis

At first, Neri's hypothesis attracted positive attention. E. K. Chambers in 1930 made careful note of the similarities. He thought that *Li Tre Satiri* most resembled *The Tempest* in that foreigners are taken for gods as Trinculo is by Caliban, and the Pantalone and zanni steal Mago's book as Trinculo and Stephano plot to steal Prospero's book (Chambers, 1930: 493-4). T. W. Baldwin in 1947 was also impressed by the similarities; he asserted that the scenarios were analogues to those found for *The Comedy of Errors* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.³² Another Shakespearean scholar who readily accepted the similarity was Allardyce Nicoll. His critical study of the *Commedia dell'arte* in 1963 was heavily flavoured with examples from Shakespeare. He is particularly impressed with the correspondences with *The Tempest*:

Most Shakespearean students have been prepared to recognise that one of the impulses which led Shakespeare to pen *The Tempest* derived from this source [i.e. the scenarios of Italian pastoral comedies]. Just as soon as we turn to such a piece as *Arcadia incantata* and find there a 'tempestuous sea, with a shipwreck', meet a Magician who rules this land through the assistance of spirits and read its opening scene in which Policinella, dripping wet struggles ashore to tell us of the loss of the ship's company, . . . it is virtually impossible not to believe that Shakespeare had witnessed the performance of an improvised pastoral of this kind. (Nicoll, 1963: 119).

In 1980, Ninian Mellamphy asserted that it is 'virtually certain that Shakespeare's contemporaries had a more than casual knowledge of the *commedia dell'arte*'. In 1989, Louise Clubb, a specialist in Italian Renaissance Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, produced an up-to-date account of Italian Drama from the period, showing Shakespeare's extensive

debt to this form of literature. Similarly, another expert in Italian Renaissance Literature, Richard Andrews, expressed similar findings in his monograph (1993) and in a shorter article (2004).³³

However, not all scholars were impressed, either with Kathleen Lea's work or with the expert testimony of so many Italianists. J. M. Nosworthy's 1948 article on the sources for the play completely ignored Italian Comedy. Frank Kermode considered the connection but was then very dismissive. In the introduction (lxii – lxviii) to his 1954 Arden² edition of *The Tempest*, Kermode only concedes that there is 'a certain resemblance to the Italian Form' and that the *commedia dell'arte* is 'the most interesting reputed source.' Nevertheless, he believes that there is 'room for very serious doubt': firstly, he states that the extant scenarios post-date Shakespeare. This is true in a superficial sense as Scala's work was published in 1611 and the manuscripts which are quoted date to c. 1620. Against this, however, it is rather obvious that the *commedia dell'arte* was an acting tradition dating from c. 1550, relying on the spoken word and not the written. We know that the troupes were travelling around from about 1560 onwards.³⁴ These scenarios had developed for at least fifty years by the time they were committed to paper. While some might have been modern pieces by 1620, the sheer number of Arcadian pastoral romances would indicate that they were well established over a long period of time. Indeed, it can be argued that attempts to record the scenarios after 1610 indicate that a long-standing tradition was on the decline.

Secondly, Kermode in referring to these scenarios states (intro, lxvii) that their own 'provenance is highly dubious'. Unfortunately, Kermode does not expand on these doubts. The scenarios quoted come from two manuscripts held in different libraries in Rome. Both manuscripts date from c. 1620 and both claim to be records of scenarios used by the travelling companies when acting in public. The manuscripts record different versions of the same scenario, which seems to be corroborative proof that these scenarios were widely performed. It is difficult to know what doubts can be seriously held or why these scenarios should not be taken at face value.

Next, Kermode asserts that Lea has given a misleading account of the evidence:

She also constructs a 'normal' *scenario* which is indeed startlingly like *The Tempest*, but inevitably her preoccupation with *The Tempest* has affected her choice of incidents from the corpus.

Kermode suggests that Lea has misrepresented the works of the *commedia dell'arte*. In fact, it is Kermode who has seriously misrepresented Lea's work. He fails to mention that, in the Appendix, she gives nine complete scenarios (all in translation, four in the original Italian as well) including the three scenarios cited above. From any of the three cited above (and re-produced in the appendix

below) it is clear that there is a very strong correspondence between Italian pastoral comedy and *The Tempest*.

Finally, Kermode dismisses the *commedia dell'arte* merely as 'jocose pantomime' and claims that its stage tricks and plot devices were 'common stock of magic lore.' Certainly, this can apply to much of *The Tempest*, e. g. Caliban's disquisitions, or Stephano's discovery of 'some monster of the isle with four legs' at 2.2 66-100. However, Andrews (2004: 128-9) has demonstrated that the *commedia dell'arte* was 'heavily literary both in derivation and in character.' He shows how it had developed from the Roman Comedy of Plautus and Terence through the *commedia erudita* which emerged in various Italian cities in the first half of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, Kermode seems to ignore the satirical element: the use of humour for serious purposes. Frequently, the Italian troupes would perform an apparently innocuous play, but with enough contemporary resonance to please the populace and annoy the authorities. The *commedia dell'arte* was both comic and serious – in the same way as *The Tempest* and other plays of Shakespeare.³⁵ As stated earlier, Kermode asserted that there was no direct source for the play: 'the source of *The Tempest* is an ancient motif, of almost universal occurrence, in saga, ballad, fairy tale and folk tale.' However, he fails to quote any such ballad or tale which tells the story of a magician on a remote island who takes revenge on his wrong-doers who have been shipwrecked there.³⁶

Another doubter was David Orr (1970), who reviewed the effect of Italian Drama on the English theatre, concluded that there was very little direct influence. He noted that many dramatists including Lyly and Chapman, knew Italian plays, that John Florio possessed many play texts and that Italian troupes had visited England. Nonetheless, he sees very little influence from Italian Renaissance Drama on the English theatre.³⁷ Orr, however, limited his approach to *la commedia erudita* the 'learned comedy' of the aristocrats and ignored the *commedia dell'arte*. The main title for his work (*Italian Renaissance Drama in England before 1625*) therefore is very misleading. Orr's subtitle to his monograph (*The influence of Erudite Tragedy, Comedy and Pastoral on Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*) does not properly correct the mistake in the main part of the title.

One Shakespearean scholar, however, did acknowledge the possible influence of *commedia dell'arte*. In his introductory essay on the sources of *The Tempest* (vol viii, 1975: 259 – 261), Geoffrey Bullough considered the *commedia dell'arte* as an analogue: 'There can be no doubt he knew something about it,' he notes the recorded visits by Italian troupes to England in the 1570s and contemporary allusions to extemporized acting. Bullough prints his own translation of *I Tre Satiri* ('The Three Satyrs'). However, despite noting a wide number of parallels between the

scenarios and *The Tempest* – ‘they can scarcely be coincidences’ – he then follows Kermode’s conclusion that some were ‘common-places of story and drama’. Bullough then explains why he discards the Italian connection: not because there is little or no correspondence but because ‘there is no proof that Shakespeare ever saw a *commedia dell’arte* acted.’ Bullough concludes that the *commedia dell’arte* ‘cannot be claimed as a specific influence’ and he refers to *I Tre Satiri* as an analogue.³⁸

More generally, Kathleen Lea’s work has been ignored, presumably because the traditional biography can find no plausible connection between the author and the *Commedia dell’arte*. Leo Salinger refers only briefly to the *commedia dell’arte* in his 1974 study *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (1974) and not at all to the work of Neri.³⁹ David Lindley notes in passing (2000: 4) that ‘KM Lea’s suggestion of the influence of the improvised scenarios of the *Commedia dell’arte* has been extended by Louise Clubb.’ Stephen Orgel in his 1987 Oxford edition of *The Tempest* does not even mention Italian Comedy, nor does Stephen Greenblatt in his introduction to the play in the 1997 edition of *The Norton Shakespeare*. Vaughan and Vaughan in their Arden³ edition of the play (1999: 12) accept that the *commedia dell’arte* ‘may have influenced Shakespeare’s plot and character’ and that Kathleen Lea ‘made a case for his use of a scenario.’ Vaughan and Vaughan, however, do not develop this possibility. Michael Dobson in 2001 ignores Italian Comedy in the entry on *The Tempest* in the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*.⁴⁰ There is similar neglect in recent biographies.⁴¹

(f) Positive Reactions to Neri & Lea’s hypothesis

This omission has not been total. The director, Peter Brook, spoke of his interest in the sources of *The Tempest* for his productions of the play in the 1960s, particularly five *commedia dell’arte* scenarios.⁴² Most scholars of Italian Drama recognise that Shakespeare’s comedies are derived from the *commedia dell’arte*. Piero Rebora (1949) was particularly struck by the comparison. Louise Clubb lists the ingredients of Italian pastoral comedy and states that they were well-known to Shakespeare yet ‘even this essential knowledge has not found its way into all editions of Shakespeare’ (1989: 17). She continues (24) that *The Tempest* illustrates the pastoral as a language, a limitlessly recombinable repertory of *topoi* characters, relationships, actions. In the chapter on ‘The Making of the Pastoral Play’, she continues (97) to lament the short-sightedness of Shakespearean scholarship regarding Italian Comedy: ‘If modern scholars neglect some of the features and most of the kinds [of Italian pastoral plays], it is because certain received ideas have long obstructed our views of the pastoral plays.’ Regarding *The Tempest*, she notes (255) that Scala’s scenario *L’arbore incantato, pastorale* (‘The enchanted tree, pastoral’) includes many

elements in *The Tempest*: lovers and clowns, a sorcerer with book, staff, grotto, and familiar spirits; hallucinations, transformations and spectacular apparitions. This particular scenario contains many features found in a host of other works, eg *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Rossi's *Fiamella*. In a later article, Clubb talks of the 'creative vitality' of Italian Renaissance Drama which 'produced Shakespeare' (2001: 107).

Robert Henke (2007) has given the most detailed comparison between the tragicomedy of Italian drama and *The Tempest*. His comparison, he argues 'demonstrates a transnational theatricality intertextuality that, in demonstrating Shakespeare's great affinity with Italian theatrical practice' – Shakespeare's deep understanding of the traditions of Italian comedy are more important, he believes, than the identification of a single source.

3 Shakespeare's Adaptation of Italian Sources

Shakespeare did not, however, merely accept and repeat his sources, he adapted them. In so doing, he reveals his own interests and preoccupations. Firstly, in his use of Thomas's *History of Italy*, he is at pains to show the injustice of Prospero's exile. As Duke of Milan, he can claim an inalienable right to the dukedom, a right which is restored at the end of the play. While this was true of Milan, it was not true of Prospero Adorno's home of Genoa where the duke was elected or re-elected periodically by the leading families. Thus we can see Shakespeare's apparent inclination towards a view of hereditary kingship. By his own admission, Prospero did not make a good leader, having neglected affairs of state in favour of his private study.

Secondly, Italian pastoral comedies do not normally treat the magician as the protagonist. A brief review of the three plays described above shows that the emphasis is on the shipwrecked party, their initial despair, their joy at being reunited, their hunger and thirst etc. Even in *Il Mago*, The Magician acts mainly to initiate the action not to dominate it. The author of *The Tempest*, however, has made the Magician the focus of attention and endowed him with his own history and motivation: a man given to study, solitariness and grieving over his lost status. Eventually, Prospero is restored to his ancient rights as Duke of Milan. We can see Shakespeare's preoccupation with the motive of the restitution of rights to a dispossessed nobleman.

4 Conclusion

The resemblances between *The Tempest* and the three scenarios described above make it almost certain that the play was originally conceived as an Italian pastoral comedy. The playwright's main addition seems to have been to make the magician the protagonist and not simply one of the

wonders on the magic island. He does this by giving the magician a background and a motive for revenge on the shipwrecked mariners. By writing the lines and by using the sources to convert character-types into real historical figures in giving them each a history, the dramatist was changing the play back into an example of the *commedia erudita*. Nonetheless, *The Tempest* remains most decidedly an Italian Pastoral Comedy.

5 References

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¹ The following characters have Italian names: Alonso, Sebastiano, Prospero, Antonio, Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Adrian, Francisco, Trinculo, Stephano and Miranda; the names of Prospero's ministers, Ariel and Caliban might also be taken as Italian. The names of the gods, Iris, Ceres and Juno, are from Latin.

² Naples just shades it in number of mentions (20) compared to Milan (18 times). By contrast, Bermoothes, is only mentioned once (by Ariel at 1.2.229 in an aside). Most editors, eg Orgel and Vaughan and Vaughan print Bermuda.

- ³ See Patrick Murphy for a review of the critical reception of the play and for a transcription of Coleridge's lecture in 1811.
- ⁴ Reported by Furness (1892: 306). Warburton was struck by the observations of the unities and suggested Ariosto's *Negromante* as a possible source.
- ⁵ Reported by Furness (307) from Malone's *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, vol II, (Baldwin, London, 1790).
- ⁶ Quoted by Isaac Reed, *The Plays of Shakespeare*, vol I (1809) sig B1v.
- ⁷ The major accounts were: A True and sincere declaration of the purpose and ends of the Plantation beg un in Virginia. (Council of Virginia, 1609); Sylvester Jourdain's Discovery of the Bermudas (1610); A True Declaration of the estate of the Colonie in Virginia (Council of Virginia, 1610); William Strachey's A True Repertory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Knight (1625). In 1995, another tract by James Rosier, A True Relation of the most prosperous voyage made this present yeere 1605, by Captaine George Weymouth, in the Discovery of the land of Virginia (STC 21322) was suggested by Arthur Kinney, 'Revisiting The Tempest' in *Modern Philology*, vol 93.2 (1995) pp 161-177. Furness (1892) traced the identification of the action with the Bermudas to Malone, Chalmers and Thomas More, an identification which he considered 'an error'.
- ⁸ The work had been translated into French by Jacques Amyot in 1559 as *Les amours pastorales de Daphnis et Chloé*. Angel Day's translation into English (STC 6400) was published in 1587 under the title: *Daphnis and Chloe: excellently describing the vveight of affection, the simplicitie of loue, the purport of honest meaning, the resolution of men, and disposition of fate, finished in a pastorall, and interlaced with the praises of a most peerlesse preincesse, wonderfull in maiestie, and rare in perfection, celebrated within the same pastorall, and therefore termed by the name of the shepheards holidiaie*.
- ⁹ Joseph Hunter (1839) *A Disquisition on the Scene, Origin, Date, &c*. An illustrated version of Hunter's work came out in 1845 with some notes in 1853 replying to various points of criticism.
- ¹⁰ Quoted by Peter Bilton (2000, paragraph 20)
- ¹¹ Some editors have suggested that Shakespeare borrowed the names of Prospero and Stephano from Ben Jonson's 1601 text of *Every Man in His Humour*, which had been performed in 1598 at the Curtain with Shakespeare in the cast (Miola, 2000). However, the use of these names in Jonson's play adds nothing to our understanding of *The Tempest* since the roles are very different. In any case, all of Jonson's characters were renamed for the 1616 folio edition of Jonson's plays. If indeed, as shall be argued later, *The Tempest* was an early play of Shakespeare, it would be possible that Jonson borrowed the names from *The Tempest*.
- ¹² H. H. Furness (1892: 350) quotes Hunter as the first scholar to identify Thomas's *History* in his illustrated *Disquisition* of 1853. Furness (343) shows how G. O. Halliwell (1868) enthusiastically supported the idea that Shakespeare had used Thomas. G. B. Parks (1963) has edited the work whose full title was *The historie of Italie a*

broke excedyng profitable to be redde: because it intreateth of the astate of many and diuers common weales, how thei haue ben, [and] now be gouerned.

- ¹³ Stephen Greenblatt in his introduction to the play in the Norton Shakespeare does not mention Thomas. There are many further examples of his, e. g. from *The Tempest and its Travels* (2000) by Peter Hulme and William Sherman, who discuss a wide range of allusions and references but do not mention Thomas.
- ¹⁴ Sig Zz iv^v-Aaa 1^r; 180^v – 181^r. The marginal notes dates this paragraph to 1490, but since these events occur between 1459 and 1461, it seems more likely that the year 1460 is intended.
- ¹⁵ Sig Aaa^v; 181^r. Prospero's restoration from his expulsion is described on the following page.
- ¹⁶ Prospero was driven into exile, not once but twice, as described by Christine Shaw in *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy* (2001: 14-15). Shaw includes a brief account of Alfonso's voluntary retirement (24).
- ¹⁷ Sig Mmiv^r; 135^r. George Hersey (in *Alfonso II and the Artistic Renewal of Naples*. New Haven: Yale University Press) has described how Alfonso (1448-95), King of Naples and Jerusalem, had been a patron of the arts in his younger days.
- ¹⁸ The general correlation between *Fiammella* and *The Tempest* is mentioned by Clubb (1989: 253-7). The specific influence of this play was recognised by V. M. Jeffrey in his article 'Italian Influences in Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*' *MLR*, vol 21 no 2, (1926) pp147-158. Fletcher's play has been tentatively dated c. 1608.
- ¹⁹ The judgement of Kathleen Lea, and by implication of Allardyce Nicoll, has been called into question on the assumption that these Shakespearean scholars are so anxious to find a source that they misinterpret evidence according to their desires. Nevertheless, these two scholars have impeccable credentials: Kathleen Lea graduated in English from Oxford and taught at Westfield College, London and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Her work on *Italian Popular Comedy*, based on travel and research in Italy in the 1920s, was published in 1934. Allardyce Nicoll became professor of English at Birmingham University in 1951 and was founding director of the Shakespeare Institute. He edited *Shakespeare Survey* from 1948 until 1965. His critical study of the *commedia dell'arte* appeared in 1963. The accusation of bias, however, cannot be levelled at Neri, Clubb or Andrews, all of whom are recognised experts in Italian literature.
- ²⁰ The following account derives from John Rudlin, a specialist in Italian Drama, with no particular interest in Shakespeare.
- ²¹ Scala's work has been translated by Henry Salerno (1967) and by Richard Andrews (2008).
- ²² See Rudlin *Actors*, pp 13-63, especially 51-57. Cf Lea, and Nicoll, 115-20.
- ²³ Locatelli's manuscript, ii 26, is held in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome. This library contains 400,000 volumes including 1300 works on the theatre. See A. A. Cavarra, ed. *Biblioteca Casanatense, Roma. Guida breve*, Firenze, Nardini (2005). For details about Basilio Locatelli himself, see Cesare Molinari's 'Actor-authors of the *Commedia dell'arte*: The Dramatic Writings of Flaminio Scala and Giambattista Andreini'. *Theatre Research International*, 23 (1998) pp 142-151.

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- ²⁴ The two volume Corsini manuscript, i 33, held in the Biblioteca Lincei at the Palazzo Corsini in Rome, contains illustrations. The Lincei also contains a wide range of manuscripts. See Susanna Panetta, *Guida al patrimonio documentario della Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale del Lincei e Corsiniana*.
- ²⁵ Neri, F, *Scenarii delle Maschere in Arcadia*, 1913. Lea expanded Neri's work and Neri's proposals were further corroborated by Rebora, P 'Comprensione e fortuna di Shakespeare in Italia' *Comparative Literature*, Vol. I, (1949) 210 – 224; by Orsini, N 'Shakespeare in Italy' *Comparative Literature*, Vol. III (1951), pp. 178-180; by Clubb and by Andrews.
- ²⁶ *Il Mago*, MS Corsini i 13, transcribed, printed and translated by Lea, 610 – 620.
- ²⁷ *La Nave* MS Locatelli ii 26; Corsini. I 33; transcribed and printed by Neri pp 69 – 76; collated and translated into English by Lea, 658 – 662.
- ²⁸ *Li Tre Satiri* MS Locatelli ii 28, transcribed and printed by Neri pp 77 – 86; translated into English by Lea, 653 – 669; translated into English by Bullough, viii 322 – 328.
- ²⁹ MS in University of Toronto, no 178592. This play has been studied by Beatrice M. Corrigan in 'Il Capriccio: an unpublished Comedy and its Analogues' in *Studies in the Renaissance* vol 5, (1958), pp74-86.
- ³⁰ Neri (87) transcribed and printed a short version of *Arcadia Incantata* from a Neapolitan manuscript. Lea translated this version but in footnotes added details, including the magician's motive, from a fuller version in a manuscript in Perugia.
- ³¹ These short descriptions are based on Rudlin, *Actors*, which has very detailed descriptions of the stock characters in the *commedia dell'arte* (pp. 67-156).
- ³² Baldwin, *Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure*. Urbana, Illinois (1947) p796
- ³³ Similar views have been expressed by Andrew Grewar, 'Shakespeare and the actors of the *commedia dell'arte*' in *Studies in the commedia dell'arte* Cardiff, ed David George, (1993) pp 13-47
- ³⁴ From the memoirs of Pier Maria Cecchini, *Tutti I Trionfi, carri, mascherate o canti canalscialeschi*, Florence, 1559, quoted by Winifred Smith *The Commedia dell'Arte: A Study in Italian Popular Comedy* (1912: 44-5) and by Rudlin *Actors* (13-33).
- ³⁵ Regarding Kermode's dismissal of the *commedia dell'arte* as a 'jocose pantomime', Robert Henke (2007: 46) states: 'Such a conclusion neither acknowledges the many serious, modally tragicomic, moments in these plays nor the ways in which the *commedia dell'arte* was highly literate and closely connected to practical and theoretical developments in late sixteenth century Italian drama.' Some of Henke's observations are developed in this paper. In a later study *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne* (1971: 249), Kermode maintained his position: 'It is often argued, though it cannot be demonstrated, that Shakespeare borrowed the plot from the scenario of some *commedia dell'arte*' and [pastoral tragi-comedy] 'is a genre to which in some ways *The Tempest* belongs.' It is, however, difficult to envisage ways in which *The Tempest* does not belong to the genre of pastoral tragi-comedy.

- ³⁶ Richard Andrews (2004: 132) makes similar points very briefly, noting that Kermode was looking for a single precise source rather than a general tradition. Andrews concludes: “*The Tempest* resembles not just a couple of scenarios but a repeated Italian ‘repertoire plot’, which coalesced out of a mingling of comedy, pastoral and romance.”
- ³⁷ Orr limits Shakespeare’s acquaintance with Italian Comedy to Cinthio’s *Epitia* which was used for *Measure for Measure*, but dismisses (without explanation) direct influence for *Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* and *Taming of the Shrew*.
- ³⁸ Louisa Clubb (1989: 257) accepts that the dramatist’s “fellow actor Will Kemp may well have been” the source for information on the *commedia dell’arte*. See Louis Booker Wright, “Will Kemp and the *commedia dell’arte*,” *MLN*, 41 (1926): 516-20.
- ³⁹ Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*. Cambridge, CUP (1974). Salinger, however, seems to have revised this view in his generously review of Clubb’s *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45.1 (1992) pp 195-7; Salinger accepts that Clubb has demonstrated strong links between Shakespeare and Italian Comedy, especially for *The Tempest*. He further notes that Clubb has left ‘the practical question, how Shakespeare gained his up-to-date foreign knowledge, tantalizingly vague. But that perhaps matters less than her impressive demonstration of the many ways in which Shakespeare’s approach to playmaking coincided with approaches in the Italy of his own time.’
- ⁴⁰ In the same volume, however, there is a short entry for the *commedia dell’arte* in which a contributor, JKS [Jane Kingsley-Smith, University of Hull] asserts, *pace* Dobson, that a number of Shakespeare’s plays do indeed reflect the traditions of the *commedia dell’arte* in particular *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *The Tempest*.
- ⁴¹ Among recent biographies of Shakespeare which have ignored the influence of Italian Comedy are: Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare* Arden, London (2001); Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare for all Time* Macmillan, London (2002); Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* BBC, London (2003); Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World* Jonathan Cape, London (2004); Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: the Biography* Chatto & Windus, London (2005).
- ⁴² Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves, *Peter Brook* (CUP, 1995: 137).