

# Writ in Choice Italian:

## Shakespeare and Italian Literature

by **Kevin Gilvary** Talk at the SAT Conference, Sunday 24 November 2013

The Shakespearean Authorship Trust has organised many speakers and conferences over the years to debate the Authorship Question. I myself have greatly enjoyed and benefitted from listening to many speakers. In November 2006, I heard Richard Roe talk about his researches on Shakespeare and Italy, which he published shortly before he died. Roe talked about the sycamore grove which survives at Verona and made many other points to show that Shakespeare's knowledge of the geography and history of Italy was very accurate.

Among these was the reference in *The Taming of the Shrew* to Tranio's father being a sail-maker from Bergamo (5.1.68). Most scholars ignore the reference, or simply assert that Shakespeare was mistaken. However, Roe demonstrated that sails were in fact made in this town.

The literary point of the reference has not been picked up. In Italian Comedy, the servants or zanni, often came from Bergamo a town about 25 miles NE of Milan that was the easternmost city of the Venetian land empire.



**Harlequin, in the colours of the earls of Oxford.**

Thus the convention of Italian Comedy was that a poor man could be identified in Venice by his dialect, Bergamasco. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Tranio's ruse of swapping clothes and places with his young master, Lucentio, is confuted by his own accent and revealed by his old master, Vicentio. I wish to develop this theme and demonstrate how Shakespeare drew on Italian literature in his own plays.

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Richard Paul Roe (2011) *The Shakespeare guide to Italy*. London, HarperCollins.

This essay draws on previously published material: see DVS Archives 2004 and 2007.

Let us begin with the title: “**Writ in Choice Italian**”, which comes from *Hamlet* where the prince explains the action of the play within the play:

The story is extant, and writ in choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.  
(*Hamlet* 3.2.256, Q2 text)

Many scholars have wondered whether such a play really existed in Italian, although none has been found. If Shakespeare is not making a literary allusion, he is certainly making an historical reference. Geoffrey Bullough in his monumental survey of Shakespeare's sources, has shown that the details of the actual murder were closely followed by Shakespeare (1975, vii, 172). Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, was a renowned soldier in the service of the Venice and of Rome. He was poisoned in October 1538. Although he himself was not a Gonzaga, he was married to Eleonora Gonzaga. For further details, see the essay ‘Hamlet's *The Murder of Gonzago* in contemporary documents’ by Dott. Noemi Magri in the 2009 archive at [www.deveresociety.co.uk](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk).

## Roman Comedy: Plautus & Terence

The influence of Roman Comedy on Shakespeare was realised by contemporaries. In the *Gesta Grayorum*, there is a description of the revels enjoyed on Innocent's Night 1594:

Dancing and Revelling with Gentlewomen; and after such Sports, a *Comedy of Errors* (like to Plautus his Menechmus) was played by the Players.

Shakespeare's play follows the Roman source closely: separated twins, one who lives in Syracuse and the other brought up in Epidamnus. They are mistaken for each other by the slave, the courtesan and others. As in all Roman comedy, the father-son relationship is the most important one in the play, often with the son wishing to dally with courtesans and perhaps wishing to marry beneath his family's dignity (Duckworth, 1952). The father is usually a silly old man with a lazy but clever slave. Another play by Plautus, the *Miles Gloriosus* or Braggart Soldier, clearly influenced Shakespeare for the characters of Don Armado, Parolles and Falstaff. Artotrogus from *Miles Gloriosus* is fixated on food and sex, hoping to rely on his cleverness and flattery. Roman Comedy tend to present women in subsidiary roles. Often the love-interest originally a slave or prostitute turns out to be well-born as in Terence's play *Andria* (*The Woman from Andros*), which seems to have influenced *Twelfth Night* and perhaps *Pericles*. In Roman Comedy, the unities are observed with a fixed scene and continuous action: similarly *The Comedy of Errors* follows the unities, one of only two Shakespearean plays to do so. Plautus was rarely studied at school as the Latin was harder than the Latin of Terence. Since Plautus' *Menaechmi* was not published in translation until 1595, Shakespeare must have read the text in the original.

## Italian Novellas

Two poets from the Italian Renaissance who did not seem to influence Shakespeare (or at least only directly) were Dante and Petrarch. Writers of prose fiction, however, exerted a much greater influence. **Boccaccio** (Florence, 1313 – 1375), whose collection of tales known as *The Decameron* was collected in 1358 was the main source (either directly, or possibly through French translations or in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, 1575) for various stories in Shakespeare, e.g. Beltramo and Giletta (day 3, tale 9) who become Bertram and Helen in *All's Well*, and for the episode of Posthumus' wagering on Imogen's fidelity in *Cymbeline* (2.9). Another writer of prose fiction was **Bandello**, (Milan, 1480 – 1562) who wrote 214 novellas, some of which were translated 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*, and Silla and Apolonius become Viola and Orsino in *Twelfth Night*. **Fiorentino's** collection of short stories, *Il Pecorone* (1558, Milan), provided many details for the plot in *The Merchant of Venice*. In addition, Shakespeare followed **Cinthio** (1504-73), whose *Hecatommithi* or *Hundred Tales* was published in Venice in 1565, were the main sources for *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*.

Perhaps more important than his use of Italian prose fiction, was Shakespeare's use of Italian Comedy. That he did so is clear from Maningham, who described in his diary in 1602 the play *Twelfth Night*:

At our feast we had a play called Twelve Night or What you Will much like the Comedy of Errors or Menaechmi in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called *Inganni*.

This Italian play 'The Deceits' was published in 1562 as an adaptation of the play *Ingannati*, ('The Deceived'), which had been produced and published in Siena by the Intronati in the 1530s and translated into French in 1543. The comedies of Plautus and Terence had been transmitted from ancient times and eventually printed in Italy in the early sixteenth century. These comedies were eagerly read by courtly and aristocratic audiences who adapted the form into contemporary Italian, the **Commedia Erudita**, Erudite or Learned Comedy. One major difference was that Italian comedy emphasised the father-daughter relationship, as did Shakespeare. 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 in about 700 closed literary academies. One of these in Siena, the Accademia degli Intronati, the Thunderers or the Stunned, produced and published plays such as *Ingannati*. Another play, *La Pellegrina*, performed at Florence, showed a young woman who undertakes to travel far and wide, in the guise of a pilgrim, to look for her lover, which seems to have been another source for *All's Well that Ends Well*.

Among the Italian dramatists was **Machiavelli** (1469- 1527), whose play *Mandragola* 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. Within the Italian plays, the character who most brings to mind Machiavelli is Iago:

Not poppy nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to that sleep  
Which thou owedst yesterday.      (*Othello* 3.3.335)

Another playwright was **Arisoto** (Ferrara, 1474 – 1533) is said to have made the first attempt to up-date or modernise the plays of ancient Rome with *Gli Suppositi* (c 1509), performed 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 seems to have influenced the Bianca scenes in *The Taming of the Shrew*. **Aretino**, (1492-1557), whose sonnets and plays won (and in some cases lost) him the favour of Popes and kings. Aretino as a secondary influence on *The Comedy of Errors* has been recognised by Leo Salingar (1974: 206-8) and Cairns (1991: 130-4). Aretino's braggart soldier seems also to have influenced Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*.

For his knowledge of the *commedia erudita*, Shakespeare 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. However, many of Shakespeare's comedies involved travel, a feature which seems to have been more important in the *commedia dell'arte* or *commedia all'improvviso* as it was known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Let us go back to *Hamlet* where Polonius announces that the "actors are come hither" whom he counts as

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral  
(*Hamlet*, 2.2.334)

We know that Shakespeare wrote tragedy, comedy and history, but we may also note that Polonius includes pastoral among their repertoire. Polonius ends his speech with reference to Roman playwrights: "Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light."

In Italy, the *commedia all'improvviso* was the vernacular or public form of entertainment. The Art in the title *commedia dell'arte*, which refers to the performers and not to the author, was not used until the eighteenth century. It is first attested in 1546 when a touring group of players performed in the city of Padua. They performed both in palaces and in public squares, basing their plays on stock characters, outline plots known as scenarii and improvised dialogue Their appeal to the masses stemmed from the

acting troupe weaving topical references into their existing plots, in much the same way as Hamlet adds a speech into the Murder of Gonzago.

The companies came from northern Italian and the leading actor was also generally the director of a company and often the lead writer. One troupe, the Gelosi, (the Zealous) were formed in Milan, played in Milan, Ferrara and other Italian cities. Professor John Rudlin of Exeter believes that Polonius was referring to the Gelosi as “the best for tragedy, comedy, historical, pastoral” (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.

### Stock Characters

The stock characters are clearly related to figures in the Commedia Erudita, and were indicated by distinct costumes and masks. The Clever Servants or Zanni are given a more prominent role in the or Madcap Servants seem to be a distinctive feature.

**Vecchi:** (Elderly Men or guardian types) at least two including **Pantalone**, a Venetian merchant, who is pompous, tyrannical and prone to sententious speeches: Lucentio tells Bianca that he wishes to ‘beguile the old pantaloon’ i.e. Baptista (*Taming* 3, 1, 37). Other pantaloni include Egeus in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*; Shylock in *Merchant of Venice*; Brabantio in *Othello*; Polonius in *Hamlet*; Capulet; Leonato and Antonio in *Much Ado*. 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 counter-balancing the first is **Dottore Gratiano**, a lawyer, often from Bologna or Padua, who in Italian commedia is gullible and lecherous. The name Gratiano occurs as a minor character in *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. A secondary old man occurs frequently in Shakespeare e.g. the father of Proteus and the Duke in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Vicentio, father to Lucentio in *Taming*, the Duke to Egeon in *Comedy of Errors*, Capulet to Montague *Romeo & Juliet*, Theseus to Egeus *MND*, Duke to Brabantio in *Othello*, Antonio to Leonato in *Much Ado*.

**Pair(s) of Lovers:** At least one will be the child of one of the Vecchi. Their love will be forbidden often due of an imbalance of status or an ancient family enmity. (e.g. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice*, *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)

There were usually two **zanni** servants, invariably from Bergamo who had gone to Venice to seek their fortune. In the *commedia dell'arte*, the zanni is allowed to address the audience directly and his main role is to contribute to the confusion of the plot. 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 (c.f. 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*).



The Author with the statue of the Jester, Stratford

The main zanni was often called **Pedrolino**, a clever servant who willingly acts as the go-between and thrives when serving others. Another important zanni was **Arlecchino** or Harlequin, usually the first servant who could be witty.. In *Taming of the Shrew*, Tranio is from Bergamo. 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 (3.2) and later tantalises Katherine with his description of tasty dishes (4.3). In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed is a clownish servant to Valentine. He delivers a letter from Proteus not to Julia but to her maid, Lucetta. He gently but clearly satirises his master's love for Silvia (2.1). Indeed, Bottom offers to sing a Bergamask dance in *MND* (5.1.347), a reference which has never been explained, yet seems clearly linked to the *commedia dell'arte*.

Another zanni was **Brighella**, another servant. 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. Other zanni characters included Scapino, who was less scheming and 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.

Other Characters in the *commedia dell'arte* used by Shakespeare include: Maids to the lady lovers, Lucetta in *TGV*, Juliet's nurse, Narissa in *Merchant of Venice*, Maria in *Twelfth Night*. Capitano, the boastful soldier, who runs away at the slightest smell of danger and may also be the lover: Don Armado in *LLL*; Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*; Falstaff in *Merry Wives & Henry IV*. Humanistic pedant Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* who is derided for his pedantry, the schoolmaster from Mantua in *Taming* and Sir Hugh Evans in *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

### Scenarios

The troupes improvised their actions and speeches while following an outline plot known as a scenario, which usually involved three acts, each involving about 20 actions, performed and recited by a number of stock characters, amounting to roughly three pages each in modern editions. Many of these scenarios derived from the *commedia erudita* or *learned comedy*. Some scenarios are known from print, especially Flaminio Scala's outline of over 50 which was published in 1611 as *Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative* ("The Theatre of Stage Plots"). The suggestion that such scenarios influenced Shakespeare has been largely ignored except by Geoffrey Bullough, 1975, vol viii, who 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."

Many plots are known from manuscripts. The two volume Corsini manuscript, i. 33, contains illustrations of about 100 scenarii from about 1570-1620. It is held at the Biblioteca Lincei at the Palazzo Corsini in Rome (Susanna Panetta, *Guida al patrimonio documentario della Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale del Lincei e Corsiniana*). About 70 of the scenarios in Corsini i. 33 are in common with another manuscript in Rome, Locatelli ii 26 at the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome (A. A. Cavarra, ed. *Biblioteca Casanatense, Roma. Guida breve*). Most of the plots in the Locatelli and the Corsini manuscripts are comedies, but some are pastoral-comedies. 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. 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. (MS Corsini i 13, transcribed, printed and translated by Lea, 610 – 620).

*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. (MS Locatelli ii 26; Corsini. I 33; transcribed and printed by Neri pp 69 – 76; collated and translated into English by Lea, 658 – 662.)

*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. (*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.)

For a detailed comparison of *The Tempest* with these three scenarios, see the essay “*The Tempest* as an Italian Comedy” in archives for 2007 at [www.deveresociety.co.uk](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk). For the text and translation of the scenarii, see the separate posting “*The Tempest* & three scenari.”

#### **Negative Reaction to Shakespeare’s use of Italian Literature**

Few scholars have been 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 – lxxviii) 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 (true in a superficial sense as Scala’s work was published in 1611 and the manuscripts date to c. 1620, but the commedia dell’arte was an acting tradition). Secondly, Kermode in referring to these scenarios states (intro, lxxvii) that their own “provenance is highly dubious”. Unfortunately, Kermode does not expand on these doubts. Next, Kermode asserts that Lea has misrepresented the works of the commedia dell’arte. In fact, it is Kermode who has seriously misrepresented Lea’s work. 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.”

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. Orr, however, limited his approach to la commedia erudita the “learned comedy” of the aristocrats and ignored the commedia dell’arte. However, 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.

Leo Salingar refers only briefly to the commedia dell’arte in his study *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (1974) and not at all to the work of Neri. Salingar, however, seems to have revised this view in his generously review of Clubb’s *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* in; Salingar 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. (*Renaissance Quarterly*, 45.1 (1992) pp 195-7)

David Lindley notes in his 2000 Cambridge edition of *The Tempest* (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 Arden<sup>3</sup> 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.

There is similar neglect in recent biographies. Among recent biographies of Shakespeare which have ignored the influence of Italian Comedy are: Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001); Stanley Wells, (2002); Michael Wood (2003); Stephen Greenblatt, (2004); Peter Ackroyd (2005). Michael Dobson in 2001 ignores Italian Comedy in the entry on *The Tempest* in the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. In the same volume, however, there is a short entry for the commedia dell’arte in which a contributor, JKS [i.e. 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*.

More generally, the tendency has been to reject Shakespeare’s vision of Italian places such as Venice and to see them as fictionalised and idealised (e.g. Levith and Marrapodi). For similar interpretations offered by Holderness, see the review article “Shakespeare and Venice in the 21st Century: A Review of

Recent Publications” by Earl Showerman in *Shakespeare Matters* Winter 2012, pp. 16-23), in which he states:

new historicist analyses of Shakespeare’s Venice leads to a belief in idealized, imaginary structures and relationships, created with dazzling rhetoric, but containing little actual substance. Shakespeare’s Venice to these scholars is a dreamy place of abstract oppositions, of archetypal dualities, and serves to demonstrate the mysterious workings of transcontinental intertextuality.

### **Positive Reaction to Shakespeare’s use of Italian Literature**

Scholars of the theatre, especially Italian specialists, have been enthusiastic in their support for the connection. Ernesto Grillo, an Italian scholar who taught at Glasgow stated:

Italy with its public and private life, its laws and customs, its ceremonial and other characteristics, pulsates with every line of our dramatist, while the atmosphere of many scenes is Italian in the truest sense of the word. We cannot but wonder how Shakespeare obtained such accurate information, and we have no hesitation in affirming that on at least one occasion he must have visited Italy. (Grillo 1949)

One Shakespearean scholar who readily embraced this interpretation was Allardyce Nicoll, whose 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 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 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. 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*. Another expert in Italian Renaissance Literature, Richard Andrews, expressed similar findings in his monograph (1993).

## 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, 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.

Secondly, 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.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare makes clear use of a wide variety of genres of Italian literature. It is not possible to construct a scenario by which William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon could have acquired such fluidity with the Italian language, knowledge of Italian literature and familiarity with Italian commedia dell'arte.

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,

**Kevin Gilvary, De Vere Society, November 2013**

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