

Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays

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Illyria, Italia, Englandia

Italy worthily called the Queene of Nations, can never be sufficiently praised, being most happy in the sweete Ayre, the most fruitfull and pleasant fields, warme sunny hills, hurtlesse thickets, shadding groves, Havens of the Sea, watering brookes, baths, wine, and oyle for delight, and most safe forts or defenses as well of the Sea as of the Alpes.

Fynes Moryson

It hath a very temperate and wholesome air, fertile fields, pleasant hills, batful pastures, shadowing woods, plenty of all kind of trees and groves, abundance of corn, vines, and olives, good wools, fair cattle, and so many springs, fountains, lakes, rivers, and havens that it is an open lap to receive the trade of all countries; and, as it were to offer all men help, it seemeth willingly to put itself into the sea.

William Thomas

O Italie, the Academie of man-slaughter, the sporting place of murther, the Apothecary-shop of poyson for all Nations: how many kind of weapons hast thou invented for malice?

Thomas Nashe

Like an American on a one week tour of all of Europe, when Viola comes ashore in the second scene of *Twelfth Night*, she wants to know where she is: 'What country, friends, is this?' (I,ii,1). And the captain assures her, 'This is Illyria, lady' (I,ii,2). Editors dutifully note that Shakespeare takes his place name from a favourite sourcebook, Golding's Ovid, and that Illyria is located in present-day Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, all would also agree that the feel and ambience of Orsino's dukedom of music and love is decidedly Italian – like the settings for a goodly number of other Shakespeare plays.

The beginning of the Elizabethan dramatic fashion for locating plays in more or less contemporary (that is, not classical) Italy is

usually dated from George Gascoigne's *Supposes* and the tragedy *Gismund of Salerne*.¹ Gascoigne's drama, staged at Gray's Inn in 1566, is a source for both *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. An adaptation of Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, it is perhaps the first English comedy based on an Italian play.² Roughly two years after *Supposes*, *Gismund of Salerne*, a collaborative effort by five writers, was produced at the Inner Temple. It is thought to be the first English tragedy based on an Italian novella tale.³

From this beginning, of course, came a veritable flood of Renaissance English plays set in Italy. The two parts of Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore* are set in Milan, Ben Jonson's *Volpone* in Venice, John Marston's *The Malcontent* in Genoa, George Chapman's *All Fools* in Florence, Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* in Sicily; and there is Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Massinger, Ford, John Webster's great plays – the list might go on and on.

Throughout his career Shakespeare returns again and again to Italian settings for all genres of plays. The early tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Verona and Mantua, and the first act of *Othello* takes place in Venice. Five comedies – two early, two middle, and a problem play – are located either partly or wholly in Italy: *The Taming of the Shrew* in Padua and the neighbourhood of Verona; *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in Milan, Verona, and a forest near Mantua; *The Merchant of Venice* in Venice and 'Belmont'; *Much Ado About Nothing* in Messina; and *All's Well That Ends Well* in or about Florence in nine scenes. *The Tempest* is set on an unnamed island, but the ruling families of Milan and Naples people it. Another romance, *The Winter's Tale*, is located partly in ancient Sicilia, yet jealousy associated with contemporary Italy motivates the action of the play, Italianate court intrigue is in evidence, and a supposed statue by Julio Romano, an actual Italian artist (d. 1546), is displayed. One of the settings for *Cymbeline* is an ancient Rome having here and there the feel of a Jacobean place. Imogen refers to 'That drug-damn'd Italy' (III,iv,15), complete with 'stews' (I,vi,152), where 'Some jay' (III,iv,49), 'Some Roman courtezan' (III,iv,123) might pervert her husband. The tempter is rather, to be sure, the 'bold Jachimo, / Sienna's brother' (IV,ii,340–1), a recognizably conventional 'false Italian / (as poisonous tongu'd as handed)' (III,ii,4–5). The wager plot of *Cymbeline* perhaps goes back to Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ninth novel, second day) or to *Frederyke of Jennen* [Genoa], but in any case it derives ultimately from an Italian story.⁴

Even plays Shakespeare does not set in Italy sometimes have

Italian sources and strong Italian flavours. *Twelfth Night* seems similar to the play *Gl'Ingannati*, whose prologue phrase 'la notte di beffana', where some think Shakespeare's 'twelfth night' title.⁵ Shakespeare's more immediate source is generally conceded to be Barnabe Riche's Apollonius narrative (in *Riche his Farewell to Militarie Profession*). On its turn, received his story from, among others, Mattiello. The sentimental tone of *Twelfth Night* has been compared to the entertainment *Il Sacrificio*, which includes in its plot the character Malevolti, a name suggesting Malvolio.⁷ As Yachet's pastoral drama like Tasso's *Aminta* (1572–3) and *Fido* (published 1589–90).⁸ Shakespeare copies *Rosalynde*, and Lodge earlier found inspiration in Sannazaro's *L'Arcadia*.⁹

Measure for Measure is set in Vienna, but like *Othello* derived from Giraldo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. Shakespeare changed Cinthio's names, perhaps to make them more stereotypical for his English audience: Juriste becomes Angelo, Isabella, Vico becomes Claudio. Cinthio's Angelo is Shakespeare's – with nuns and friars, fornication, a corrupt judge, a disguised ruler – may well have been set in Italy. Just as *Measure for Measure*, Hamlet's 'Mousetrap' is set in Vienna, and the characters' names and actions are Italian. The duke's name is Gonzago (similar to Gonzaga, name of Mantuan dukes) and his wife is Baptista. Hamlet's murder by poison to satisfy selfish ambition. Hamlet is the drama's Italian source: 'the story is extant, and of no choice Italian' (III,ii,262–3).

Though set in Navarre, *Love's Labour's Lost* is a *Commedia dell'arte* figures. Don Adriano de Armado, the soldier, Holofernes the comic pedant, Moth the servant, and Sir Nathaniel the clerical pedant. Many of its characteristics have been found in a number of Italian comedies, even in so English a one as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

With all of Shakespeare's attention to Italy and the East, it is surprising that over the years only glancing notice has been given to this aspect of the playwright's work. Among modern scholars W. Draper has accomplished the most, presenting a series of articles ranging from 'Some Details of Italian Influence in "Othello"', to 'Shakespeare and Florence and the East', 'Shakespeare and the Doge of Venice', and 'Shakespeare and the Doge of Venice', and 'Shakespeare and the Doge of Venice'.

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Measure for Measure is set in Vienna, but like *Othello* its main plot is derived from Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. Shakespeare changed Cinthio's names, perhaps to make them more stereotypically Italian for his English audience: Juriste becomes Angelo, Epitia becomes Isabella, Vico becomes Claudio. Cinthio's Austrian action as Shakespeare's – with nuns and friars, fornication and a bed trick, a corrupt judge, a disguised ruler – may well have been located in Italy. Just as *Measure for Measure*, Hamlet's 'Mouse-trap' is also set in Vienna, and the characters' names and actions are again clearly Italian. The duke's name is Gonzago (similar to Gonzaga, the family name of Mantuan dukes) and his wife is Baptista. The plot concerns murder by poison to satisfy selfish ambition. Hamlet himself tells of the drama's Italian source: 'the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian' (III,ii,262–3).

Though set in Navarre, *Love's Labour's Lost* has recognizable *Commedia dell'arte* figures. Don Adriano de Armado is the braggart soldier, Holofernes the comic pedant, Moth the quick-witted servant, and Sir Nathaniel the clerical parasite. *Commedia* characteristics have been found in a number of Shakespeare plays, even in so English a one as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.¹⁰

With all of Shakespeare's attention to Italy and things Italian, it is surprising that over the years only glancing notice has been taken of this aspect of the playwright's work. Among modern scholars, John W. Draper has accomplished the most, presenting his findings in a series of articles ranging from 'Some Details of Italian Local Colour in "Othello"', to 'Shakespeare and Florence and the Florentines', 'Shakespeare and the Doge of Venice', and 'Shakespeare and the

Lombard Cities'.¹¹ In yet another essay, 'Shakespeare and the Conversation', Draper writes about manifestations of a formal and mannered Italian rhetorical convention in the plays.¹² As a whole, Draper's work asks what Shakespeare might have known about various Italian regions, customs, traditions, and governments.

The late Mario Praz's 'Shakespeare's Italy' is the most ambitious single piece written on its subject.¹³ Reviewing relevant background and past criticism first, Praz next makes 'a rapid survey' of Shakespeare's Italian plays, emphasizing one thing or another as he passes: mistakes in geography, echoes of Italian poetry in *Romeo and Juliet*, local colour in *The Merchant of Venice*, Iago's motivation, political intrigue in *The Tempest*. He concludes with speculation about 'the way in which Shakespeare may have got acquainted with Italian things'. While Praz's essay is admittedly a generalized overview, it highlights relevant areas ripe for further investigation.

Another abbreviated discussion from a different angle is provided by A. C. Partridge in 'Shakespeare and Italy'.¹⁴ Partridge sees Shakespeare as part of a rising wave of 'cosmopolitanism' in Renaissance England, with interest in Italian humanism, education, language, art, and culture generally. He reminds us of the influential Florio family in England, who may have fuelled Shakespeare's interest in Italy and taught him about the country. Like other scholars, Partridge wonders if Shakespeare visited Italy. Brief paragraphs on the influence of the Italian comic, tragic, and poetic traditions, with some discussion of Machiavelli, round out the essay.

Finally, G. H. McWilliams gave his inaugural lecture as Professor of Italian in the University of Leicester on 'Shakespeare's Italy Revisited'.¹⁵ Interesting because it is from the perspective of a translator and scholar of Italian literature, it again addresses the question of 'Shakespeare's knowledge of Italy', but also considers as well 'those Italian authors, chiefly of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, to whom he was chiefly indebted'.

Shakespeare's Italian plays were written against a background of intense English interest in Italy. This interest manifested itself in travel to the country, learning the Italian language, translating and being influenced by Italian books, and copying Italian fashions and culture. For Renaissance Englishmen Italy was an exotic place, a fabled land. On the one hand, it was the home of Machiavelli and the Pope; on the other, it was thought the most advanced civilization of the time, the most progressive society. In politics and

warfare, science and technology, finance, banking, art, music, and literature, Italy was the leader. Qu many of her courtiers (the Earl of Southampton patron, for example) knew Italian. Italians regularly. Alfonso Ferrabosco, from Bologna, wa to Elizabeth between 1562 and 1578, and othe family succeeded him in the position. Petruccio England as early as 1545, married an English served the Queen on the continent for a time, and *Twelfth Night* may have been written in 1601 expre Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano.¹⁶ Marr King James' children included ones from Venice Ottaviano Lotti spent a number of years in Eng marriage between an Italian princess and the Pri

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Based in part on his own travels as well as Thomas (c. 1507-54) wrote the first history of Ita reprinted 1561).¹⁷ A Welshman, Thomas was pr Oxford. He fled to Venice at about age forty whe embezzlement by his patron Sir Anthony Brown Italy for three years, and his travel while there addition to Venice, he visited Padua, Florence, cities in between. Thomas' book consists of first of places, customs, society, and summary hist Italian cities. The account of Prospero Adorno, th Duke of Genoa, is considered by some a p

warfare, science and technology, finance, banking and commerce, art, music, and literature, Italy was the leader. Queen Elizabeth and many of her courtiers (the Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's patron, for example) knew Italian. Italians visited the court regularly. Alfonso Ferrabosco, from Bologna, was Court Musician to Elizabeth between 1562 and 1578, and other members of his family succeeded him in the position. Petruccio Ubaldini came to England as early as 1545, married an Englishwoman, perhaps served the Queen on the continent for a time, and died in England. *Twelfth Night* may have been written in 1601 expressly for the visit of Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano.¹⁶ Marriage proposals for King James' children included ones from Venice and Tuscany. One Ottaviano Lotti spent a number of years in England promoting a marriage between an Italian princess and the Prince of Wales.

Travel to Italy from England began in earnest just after the middle of the sixteenth century and did not slow down until after 1630. The tourists included all kinds – students and merchants, even vagabonds, but especially courtiers. During Elizabeth's reign, a trip to Italy was thought necessary for rounding out a gentleman's education. Many young men, often in the company of guardian tutors, went abroad. In *As You Like It* Jaques tells Rosalind that it is 'the sundry contemplation of my travels' that makes him melancholy (IV,i,17–20). Rosalind dismisses the affected Jaques curtly, calling upon the clichéd image of the English traveller bored with provincial life at home now that he has been to the continent: 'Monsieur Traveller', she says, 'look you lisp and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of your own country; be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are; or I will scarce think you have swam in a gundello' (IV,i,33–8).

Based in part on his own travels as well as research, William Thomas (c. 1507–54) wrote the first history of Italy in English (1549, reprinted 1561).¹⁷ A Welshman, Thomas was probably educated at Oxford. He fled to Venice at about age forty when he was accused of embezzlement by his patron Sir Anthony Brown. Thomas stayed in Italy for three years, and his travel while there was extensive. In addition to Venice, he visited Padua, Florence, Rome, Naples, and cities in between. Thomas' book consists of first-hand observations of places, customs, society, and summary histories of important Italian cities. The account of Prospero Adorno, the fifteenth-century Duke of Genoa, is considered by some a possible source for

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.¹⁸ Thomas' *The History of Italy* was influential in encouraging English enthusiasm for Italy, and it stressed the positive. The emphasis was on Italy as a model of refinement: 'the Italian nation . . . seemeth to flourish in civility most of all other at this day'.¹⁹ Because Thomas focused on Italy's appeal, he played down its religious differences with England.

Another important contemporary traveller, however, did not. In *The Scholemaster* (1570) Roger Ascham (1515–68) writes that he too visited Italy, 'but I thanke God, my abode there, was but ix dayes: And yet I sawe in that lit[t]le tyme, in one Citie [Venice], more libertie to sinne than ever I h[e]ard tell of in our noble Citie of London in ix yeare'.²⁰ Ascham was convinced that the Italians 'have in more reverence, the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses: They make more account of *Tullies* offices, than *S. Paules* epistles: of a tale in *Bocace*, than a storie of the Bible'.²¹ Allow an Englishman to travel in Italy, says Ascham, and he may return '*Italianato, e un diabolio incarnato*'.²² He may bring home with him, among other things, the Italian religion, 'Papistrie or worse'.²³

Thomas Coryat (c. 1577–1617) reports a 1608 visit to Italy in *Coryat's Crudities* (1611).²⁴ His wide-eyed account details everything he saw from forks and umbrellas to the fashion for topless nudity among women. He ate 'fried Frogges'. Coryat even visited a courtesan, though, he assures his reader, for purely academic reasons.

The most balanced view of Italy from the perspective of a traveller of the time is offered by Fynes Moryson (1566–1630).²⁵ One can mostly agree with E. S. Bates who writes that Moryson's work 'must form the basis of any description of the countries he saw . . . going, as he does, more into detail than anyone else, and being a thoroughly fair-minded, level-headed, and well educated man whose knowledge was the result of experience'.²⁶ Educated at Cambridge, Moryson apparently sacrificed a church position to gain further education by travel. His journeys took him beyond Italy, and even beyond the Europe of his day. With typical Renaissance bravura, he wished to do 'a sociological survey of the civilised world of his time', in the words of his modern editor.²⁷ Another scholar thinks it possible that Moryson and Shakespeare knew one another, and that some of the playwright's Italian details may derive from the traveller – even that Moryson, who studied at Wittenberg from 1590–92, might be a model for Hamlet!²⁸

In any case, the fictional view of Italy that generally prevailed was

Ascham's. It was nurtured by translations of novellas. Thomas Nashe's Jack Wilton was 'unfortunate traveller' because he wound up in romance, an English Earl who has been banished 'Countriman, tell me, what is the occasion of your going out of *England* to visit this strange Nation? If it maist learne them at home; nought but lasciviousness learned here.'²⁹ The Earl tells Jack that young

the art of atheisme, the art of epicurising, the art of poisoning, the art of Sodomitie. The thing they have to keepe us from utterly committ, maketh a man an excellent Courtier, a courtier which is, by interpretation, a fine close hypocrite. It is nowe a privie note amongst them when they would set a singular marke or trade on a villaine, to say, he hath beene in *Italy*.³⁰

John Lyly's *Euphues*, which somewhat parallels *Verona*, offers yet another negative view of Italy from a general fictional view.

It was also the popular dramatic view. The Jacobean mind, but the Elizabethans as well loved the splendour of Italianate palaces, vengeful men (and poison), and Antonios lurking behind every archway. It became a dramatic convention, spilling over into tragedies, Denmark, or even the England of the time. Italy itself was the setting, a place where presented – irrational jealousy, passion, corruption, real adventure, horrible violence.

One can observe in Shakespeare something of the imagined Italy. His plays touch usual motifs: jealousy in *Othello*, political intrigue a focus in *The Tempest*, the merchant in *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, war, Beatrice would have Benedick 'Kill Claudio' dishonour in *Much Ado About Nothing*, bear wooing against all odds are to be found in *Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The treatment of some of the harsher items of Italian life is polite. *Othello* is jealous, but he is not a native

Ascham's. It was nurtured by translations of many lurid Italian novellas. Thomas Nashe's Jack Wilton was undoubtedly an 'unfortunate traveller' because he wound up in Italy. In Nashe's romance, an English Earl who has been banished to Italy asks Jack: 'Countriman, tell me, what is the occasion of thy straying so farre out of *England* to visit this strange Nation? If it bee languages, thou maist learne them at home; nought but lasciviousnesse is to bee learned here.'²⁹ The Earl tells Jack that young men bring from Italy only

the art of atheisme, the art of epicurising, the art of whoring, the art of poysoning, the art of Sodomitie. The onely probable good thing they have to keepe us from utterly condemning it is that it maketh a man an excellent Courtier, a curious carpet knight: which is, by interpretation, a fine close leacher, a glorious hipocrite. It is nowe a privie note amongst the better sort of men, when they would set a singular marke or brand on a notorious villaine, to say, he hath beene in *Italy*.³⁰

John Lyly's *Euphues*, which somewhat parallels *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, offers yet another negative view of Italy, and this was the general fictional view.

It was also the popular dramatic view. The Jacobean come first to mind, but the Elizabethans as well loved stories and plays with splendid Italianate palaces, vengeful murders (perhaps by poison), and Antonios lurking behind every arras. The vices of Italy became a dramatic convention, spilling over to Malta, Spanish tragedies, Denmark, or even the England of the chronicle plays. But Italy itself was *the* setting, a place where anything might be presented – irrational jealousy, passionate love, religious corruption, real adventure, horrible violence.

One can observe in Shakespeare something of the popularly imagined Italy. His plays touch usual motifs: jealousy is a theme in *Othello*, political intrigue a focus in *The Tempest*, religion is at issue in *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well* presents Italians at war, Beatrice would have Benedick 'Kill Claudio' to avenge Hero's dishonour in *Much Ado About Nothing*, beautiful women worth wooing against all odds are to be found in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. But Shakespeare's treatment of some of the harsher items of Italian lore seems rather polite. Othello is jealous, but he is not a native Italian. The political

fencing in *The Tempest* takes place on a remote island, and all ends happily. The religious conflict in *The Merchant of Venice* is overtly between Judaism and Christianity, rather than the expected and more controversial Catholicism and Protestantism (Shakespeare never satirizes obvious corruption in the Roman Church the way Marlowe and Webster do). Bianca in *Othello* is the only courtesan we can find in the Italian plays, and Shakespeare's other women, in addition to possessing honour and beauty, are brave (Juliet), witty (Beatrice), loyal (Julia), strong-willed (Kate), learned (Portia) – rather an attractive lot on the whole.

At first, Italian characters presented in English plays were merely depicted as comic foreigners. But then the Machiavellian stereotype took over, most often in his native Italian setting.³¹ This Machiavel became a symbol for what the Renaissance English hated and feared but, at the same time, was fascinated by about Italy. Machiavelli was a devil linked with the Pope and his religion, and he personified power-hungry ruling Italian families like the Borgias. He evolved into a melodramatic stage villain associated with the morality Vice character. The real Machiavelli's work, of course, was misunderstood by the English. Books written by antagonists, some of them with little comprehension of the philosopher's ideas, were more read than Machiavelli himself. *Il Principe* (not published in English until 1640) was viewed as a call for tyranny and repression, rather than as about strategies for effective leadership. Machiavelli was portrayed as an apologist for dictators. And Shakespeare, not knowing much if anything of the real Machiavelli, breathed what was in his English air.

Shakespeare's work contains a quantity of 'Machiavillains'. What is curious, however, is that many of his most Machiavellian characters – Aaron, Regan, Goneril, Bullingbroke, for example – are to be found outside his Italian plays. His British overreachers, such as Richard III and Edmund, especially come to mind, displaying as they do the typical characteristics of ambition, greed, ruthlessness, irreligion, and immorality in serving their own ends. When plotting his crown in *Henry VI, Part 3*, Richard boasts that he will 'set the murderous Machevil to school' (III,ii,193). Other specific references to Machiavelli appear in *Henry VI, Part 1* (V,iv,74) and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (III,i,101). The Bastard's soliloquy on 'commodity' in *King John* is one of a number of typically Machiavellian speeches in Shakespeare. It concludes with the blasphemy: 'Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee' (II,i,598).

Just as Shakespeare's Machiavellian villains are contemporary Italy, the meaner features associated with the country are found in the non-Italian plays. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, set in classical Rome, is a violent and bloody tragedy of rape, murder, maiming, and worse; as well as intrigue, and the use of poison are to be found in *King Lear*; gouging and family betrayal in *King Lear*; prostitution and immorality in *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakespeare's villains therefore, seem closer to the affirmative picture of Italy given by Thomas and some of the comic romance literature, as, to Ariosto and Castiglione than the more modern picture.

All but one of the five major Renaissance Italian settings employed by Shakespeare as settings in his plays are Venetian *terra firma*, including Padua, Verona, and Venice, beyond, is his favourite. Milan and Florence are the only northern settings. Messina, a Spanish controlled protectorate, is the only southern setting. In all but his classical plays, the setting is Rome, the headquarters of the Papal States. In Rome as a setting, Shakespeare kept control of religious issues only implicit in some of his plays.

Fynes Moryson observes: 'Touching the City of Rome, it is proverbially said [that] . . . Rome [is] the holy, Italy the Rich, Venice the Rich, Florence the Beautiful, Milan the Powerful, Naples the Gentile.'³² 'Individual cities were also associated with specific evils', adds J. W. Stoye: 'Above all Rome was a danger. In the Elizabethan Protestant's blurred picture of Italy, city, Jesuits, assassins, Machiavelli's politics, Venetian influence of Spanish overlords in Milan and Naples, and constituent elements in a power menacing the salvation of your Protestant Englishman.' The characters from specific Italian cities have recognized their own not always those with the traditional associations. The gentlemen, like Cassio, Claudio, and Lucentio (with the exception of Florence), are mostly well-spoken, courteous, and politically astute, as we might have expected them to be according to Machiavelli. Bertram fights for Florence as part of his education; Machiavelli, we recall, wrote *The Art of War* for the Prince. The women from Florence in *All's Well That Ends Well* are honourable. The Venetian milieu of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* suggests sophistication and cosmopolitanism. The Moors are about, Antonio's circle seems very social.

Just as Shakespeare's Machiavellian villains are mostly outside his contemporary Italy, the meaner features associated with the stage country are found in the non-Italian plays. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, set in classical Rome, is a violent and bloody revenge tragedy of rape, murder, maiming, and worse; assassination, court intrigue, and the use of poison are to be found in *Hamlet*; eye gouging and family betrayal in *King Lear*; proverbial Italian-like immorality in *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakespeare's Italian plays, therefore, seem closer to the affirmative picture of Italy forwarded by Thomas and some of the comic romance literature – closer, that is, to Ariosto and Castiglione than the more modern mythic Italy.

All but one of the five major Renaissance Italian power centres are employed by Shakespeare as settings in his plays. Venice and the Venetian *terra firma*, including Padua, Verona, and Mantua just beyond, is his favourite. Milan and Florence are the other two in the north. Messina, a Spanish controlled protectorate like Milan, is his only southern setting. In all but his classical plays Shakespeare avoids Rome, the headquarters of the Papal States. By omitting Rome as a setting, Shakespeare kept controversial Christian religious issues only implicit in some of his plays.

Fynes Moryson observes: 'Touching the Cities of Italy, it is proverbially said [that] . . . Rome [is] the holy, Padua the learned, Venice the Rich, Florence the Beautiful, Milan the great, . . . [and] Naples the Gentile.'³² 'Individual cities were also associated with specific evils', adds J. W. Stoye: 'Above all Rome was England's danger. In the Elizabethan Protestant's blurred image of the Papal city, Jesuits, assassins, Machiavelli's politics, Venetian Harlotry, the influence of Spanish overlords in Milan and Naples, all seemed constituent elements in a power menacing the life, liberty, and salvation of your Protestant Englishman.'³³ Shakespeare's characters from specific Italian cities have recognizable traits, and not always those with the traditional associations. His Florentine gentlemen, like Cassio, Claudio, and Lucentio (whose hometown is Florence), are mostly well-spoken, courteous, and not especially political, as we might have expected them to be coming from the city of Machiavelli. Bertram fights for Florence as part of his gentlemanly education; Machiavelli, we recall, wrote *The Art of War* as well as *The Prince*. The women from Florence in *All's Well That Ends Well* are honourable. The Venetian milieu of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* suggests sophistication and cosmopolitanism. Jews and Moors are about, Antonio's circle seems very social, the Italian Iago

has a name of Spanish origin, Bianca plies her trade here. Othello's insecurity comes in part from believing that Desdemona is one of those 'super-subtle Venetian' women, thus capable of deceiving his simple non-Venetian self. Shakespeare's gentlemen from Verona, Romeo, Petruchio, Proteus, Valentine, all seek wives. Padua, as might be expected, signals learning and wit: Benedick is from Padua, the disguised Portia arrives from this city to plead Antonio's case in court, Lucentio comes to Padua explicitly for education.

Most of Shakespeare's Italian plays are comedies (only two are tragedies), and it is not surprising to find present the inevitable comic conflict between parents and children. Fathers consider daughters difficult: Baptista Minola has his problems with both Bianca and Kate, Leonato believes the charge against Hero and is ready to disown her, Shylock learns that Jessica has run off with his money to marry a Christian. But the tragedies, too, manifest father and daughter conflicts: old Capulet is well-meaning but impossible to Juliet, and Brabantio eventually dies of grief at the mismatch of Desdemona. Fathers dead have planned ahead for daughters living, as in the cases of Helena and Portia. The relationships between fathers and sons are generally happy: in the end Vincentio is satisfied with Lucentio's choice of wife, as is Alonso with Ferdinand's; Petruchio has extended his late father's estate; Old Gobbo helps Launcelot to a better service. There are a number of surrogate fathers for sons in the Italian plays: the King of France for Bertram, Antonio for Bassanio, and Don Pedro for both Claudio and Benedick. The Countess serves Helena as a surrogate mother before she becomes her mother-in-law.

In almost all the dramas set in Italy, learning and education are major themes. Prospero carefully instructs Miranda, but gives up on the hopeless Caliban. Romeo and Juliet both mature while learning that they cannot escape their fate. Kate is tamed and taught by Petruchio, Bertram gains his manhood after rejecting his false tutor, Benedick discovers to his surprise that he wishes to be a married man, Proteus and Valentine find out about love and friendship.

At once the cradle of past civilization and now the newest frontier, Italy surely implied lessons for more than characters in a play – English audiences were also meant to be instructed. An obvious message in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* is that factious noble families hamper rule and confuse social and political order. Marrying well and managing an estate wisely is central in a number of plays.

Shakespeare's city settings are vague on specific location: the Arno in Florence or the Adige in Verona, for example, are not mentioned. And there are few concrete physical descriptions of any place. When the Rialto in Venice or St. Gregory's in Verona are alluded to, it comes as a surprise. Some of the most famous architectural sights of a city – like the amphitheatre of Verona – are missing. All we are told usually is that the city is old, fair, has walls, gates, citizens. One might say that the consistency that this vagueness is purposeful: it is meant to be evocative but not intrusive – characters are always in the forefront.

Most importantly Italy serves in part as a stand-in for Shakespeare's England – the metropolitan viceregal capital. Italian places are those of the Queen's and Duke's courts; the unnamed tidal river in Verona is really the Tiber. Paduan scholars, Florentine courtiers, Venetian merchants, and Englishmen in disguise. There are 'alehouses' and 'taverns' in Shakespeare's Italy. The playwright does not even name many of the servants' names Italian – Susan, Oatcakes, people these plays. The island of Illyria is allegorically the playwright's land.

Thus, when we scratch the surface of Duke Vincentio in *Twelfth Night*, or indeed the surface of any of the plays, we do not find Shakespeare's England. Olivia's country house, the gentlewoman, fool, steward, and parasitic relative who lives downstairs is, shall we say, Charlecote Manor. Malvolio, Parolles, Tybalt are Englishmen Italianated with Italian tricks, supposed language fluency, and 'fancy' Italian names. Despite his Italian name, Malvolio is recognizable as an upwardly mobile middle-class English Puritan. Antonio plan to lodge at *The Elephant*, a bankside inn near the Globe Theatre frequented by Italians.³⁴

Viola, then, understandably asks her captain about the whirlwind trip abroad, what country she has touched foot on land. Illyria seems Italia, and Italia, Englandia. Where are we indeed? What country

Shakespeare's city settings are vague on specific geography. The Arno in Florence or the Adige in Verona, for example, are never mentioned. And there are few concrete physical details to locate a place. When the Rialto in Venice or St. Gregory's Well near Milan is alluded to, it comes as a surprise. Some of the most famous architectural sights of a city – like the amphitheatre or Roman ruins of Verona – are missing. All we are told usually is that a particular city is old, fair, has walls, gates, citizens. One might conclude from the consistency that this vagueness is purposeful. The settings tend to be evocative but not intrusive – characters and action are kept always in the forefront.

Most importantly Italy serves in part as metaphor for Shakespeare's England – the metropolitan virtues and vices of Italian places are those of the Queen's and King's cities. The unnamed tidal river in Verona is really the Thames of London. Paduan scholars, Florentine courtiers, Venetian villains are types of Englishmen in disguise. There are 'alehouses' not wine cellars in Shakespeare's Italy. The playwright does not even bother to make many of the servants' names Italian – Susan Potpans and Hugh Oatcakes people these plays. The island in *The Tempest* is allegorically the playwright's land.

Thus, when we scratch the surface of Duke Orsino's Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, or indeed the surface of any of the Italian plays, we find Shakespeare's England. Olivia's country house with a waiting gentlewoman, fool, steward, and parasitic relative with friends downstairs is, shall we say, Charlecote Manor. Sir Andrew, Parolles, Tybalt are Englishmen Italianated with dancing back tricks, supposed language fluency, and 'fancy' swordsmanship. Despite his Italian name, Malvolio is recognized as an ambitious upwardly mobile middle-class English Puritan. Sebastian and Antonio plan to lodge at *The Elephant*, a bankside London Inn near the Globe Theatre frequented by Italians.³⁴

Viola, then, understandably asks her captain, as we might on a whirlwind trip abroad, what country she has touched when she sets foot on land. Illyria seems Italia, and Italia, to be sure, seems Englandia. Where are we indeed? What country, friends, is this?