his methods seem to have been modelled on those of Henry Irving. This is not intended to imply that he has deliberately imitated the style and methods of the English actor whom in all probability he never saw upon the stage. Nevertheless, one could not but be impressed by the similarity shown in their respective performances.

Of all the Shakespearian plays The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, Othello and Hamlet are most frequently acted with success on the Italian stage. The Compagnia Stabile of Rome presented Julius Caesar and King Lear at the Teatro Argentina, where some years ago A Midsummer Night’s Dream; given for twenty-two evenings to a crowded house; initiated the most wonderful Shakespearean revival in Italy, which culminated with the imposing success of Coriolanus and Julius Caesar produced at the Costanzi Theatre in Rome by the gifted artist Gualtiero Tumiati and with an open-air performance of The Merchant of Venice staged in the City of the Doges in presence of a large number of illustrious Italians.

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It seems as if Shakespeare must somehow or other have learned enough Italian to read and understand our writers. Dramatis personae, like Mercutio for example, cannot avoid the Italian linguistic forms which Shakespeare employs with great ability and success. The greeting between Hortensio and Petruchio (The Taming of the Shrew, Act i, scene ii) is exchanged in two or three lines of pure Italian.

Pet. Signior Hortensio, come you to part the fray?
   ‘Con tutto il core, ben trovato’, may I say.

Hor. ‘Alla nostra casa ben venuto, molto honorato signor mio, Petrucio.’

And Holofernes in Love’s Labour’s Lost quotes the well-known proverb:

Venetia, Venetia,
    Chi non ti vede, non ti pretia.

Speaking of the merchant his use of the word ‘pedant’ in the sense of ‘pedestrian’ is analogous to that of our ‘pedone’, while this same ‘pedant’ declares that Tranio will always be the patron (i.e. il padrone) of his life and liberty. (The Taming of the Shrew, Act iii, scene iv.) The word ‘traghetto’, used in Venice to signify an anchorage for gondolas, appears in the plays in the anglicised form of ‘traject’. Frequently we find whole lines translated literally from Italian without the slightest alteration.
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Mi perdonato, gentle master mine,

Basta; content thee, for I have it full,

and many other similar instances.

The majority of proverbs found in Shakespeare's plays are Italian or of Italian origin; as, for example, 'se fortuna mi tormenta, la speranza mi contenta'. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona we find, 'Sound as a fish,' 'sano come un pesce' being an expression still in common use in certain parts of Italy. Often Shakespeare's proverbs have given rise to protracted and futile discussions amongst critics who have little knowledge of Italian language and customs. This was exemplified some years ago by the correspondence in the columns of an English literary review on the subject of 'The Lady of the Strachy'. Shakespeare has a perfect knowledge of the correct use of names belonging to the Italian aristocracy of his own time; Lucentio, for example, describes his father Vincentio as 'come of the Bentivoli'. He is also acquainted with the dialectal forms of Christian names e.g. Petruccio, Francisco, Marianna, Caterina, Ortensio, Fidele; and he often amuses himself by playing on their significance in English.

The frequent use that the poet made of Italian Novelle and other works and the accuracy with which he introduced proper names and even whole sentences into his dramas are sufficient proof of the poet's knowledge of the Italian language. It has been argued that in Elizabethan England translations of Italian books abounded, but certainly Shakespeare's knowledge of

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life and customs in Italy was not entirely derived from them. In his lifetime some of the books to which he was indebted for much of his material had not been translated into English. In the collection of tales by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino entitled Il Pecorone we find the whole plot of the Merchant of Venice; and in the Hecatomistii of Cinthio we may read the story of Othello, and that of the adventures of Isabella, which Shakespeare utilised in Measure for Measure. Many of Cinthio's Novelle had been translated into French, but the tragic tale of Othello was to be found in neither French nor English. This collection of short stories—Il Pecorone—was only published in Italy in 1558, and in Shakespeare's time existed solely in the original. The simple story of the Jew and the pound of flesh might be traced to other sources, but only in The Merchant of Venice and in Il Pecorone do we find that the debtor, Antonio, whose pound of flesh was demanded by the creditor, is liberated by the skilful defence and intercession of the Lady of Belmont, wife of the debtor's own friend. In every other detail, too, we note that Shakespeare faithfully followed the Italian original, whose characters are transferred to the English comedy without the slightest alteration.

On reading Hamlet we feel that we are studying a work of a philosophical and scientific nature. Undoubtedly in the contemplative atmosphere of this drama we detect the preponderating influence exercised upon the poet by our philosopher, Giordano Bruno; an influence clearly recognisable, for example, in the soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be' and in some of the

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sonnets, notably Nos. 106, 109 and 123. It is true that Giordano Bruno had been for several years in England, had lectured at Oxford University and had been in London a guest of the French Ambassador, who had introduced him to the most influential people at Court, in particular to Sir Philip Sidney; but not a single work of his had been translated into English, not even La Cena delle Ceneri, in which he ridicules the habits of the Oxford dons. In Hamlet too Shakespeare introduced a purely Mantuan episode connected with the Court of the Gonzagas. The tale is written in choice Italian and our poet must undoubtedly have had recourse to MSS. in Italian.

In Othello, Act III, scenes iii and iv there are many reminiscences of Italian poets; and these references are of great interest, showing as they do not only the poet’s learning but also the subjects of his studies. In Canto LI of Berni’s revision of the Orlando Innamorato we find Iago’s declaration:

Who steals my purse steals trash; . . .
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.

Another reminder of Berni is to be found in Othello’s farewell to military life:

O, now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
Farewell! Othello’s occupation’s gone!

Indubitably Shakespeare derived material from Machiavelli’s Mandragora and he gives us the impression of

knowing also The Prince and other works of the illustrious statesman, but for reasons of popularity he subscribes to the general belief in the historian’s wickedness. As a contrast to Machiavell, the type of astute politician, he occasionally introduces Aretino as an example of the sensuality and corruption of the times.

The study of Ariosto in Italian has also left many traces in the plays of Shakespeare. In Othello, for instance, the language of the hero when he is speaking of the handkerchief:

A sibyl
In her prophetic fury sewed the work.

reminds us of a similar passage in Ariosto; and in writing The Tempest our dramatist must certainly have had in mind stanzas from Canto XLIII of the Orlando Furioso. Stanzas 14 and 15 especially contain something similar to the episode of Prospero and Miranda, while in stanza 187 allusion is made to the use of the magic arts in arousing or calming tempests. In the same play we find too that Shakespeare made use of the works of the Venetian explorer, Marco Polo. In Much Ado About Nothing our dramatist took the details for his plot from several Italian works. From the first canto of the Furioso (the story of Ariodante and Ginevra had already furnished the material for a drama presented at Court) he derived the idea of the malevolent lord trying to persuade a young lover of the infidelity of his beloved. Other details were taken from a novella of Bandello.
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English critics have tried to minimise the importance of the fact that four-fifths of Elizabethan dramas were based on Italian Novelle. But these dramatists were indebted to the Novellieri for much more than the material for their tragedies and romantic comedies. The sight of such vivid pictures of a free and passionate life aroused the minds and excited the emotions of the phlegmatic English, making the blood course more vigorously through their veins. From a study of our Novelle their dramatists learned the vast and hitherto unknown possibilities of human existence which gave a new and powerful stimulus to their life. Moreover, these volumes of Novelle which had found their way into every household prepared the minds of the audience to receive sympathetically the performances of their own English tragedies and comedies. Between 1560 and 1590 there appeared in England more than fifteen collections of the Novelle translated from the Italian, many of them being reprinted several times. Thus it was that the Italian Novelle exercised a powerful and decisive influence upon that most characteristic product of the English Renaissance—the Elizabethan Drama.

It is important to add that Shakespeare's debt towards Italian literature is not confined to the Novellieri and other writers already mentioned. The technical apparatus and stage settings also originated in Italy; in fact, they were merely reproductions and imitations of the Italian stage as introduced by the actors of the Commedia dell'Arte. This and the Commedia Erudita have left profound traces upon all

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the poet's works, even on those whose spirit seems most remote from Italian art. Much has already been written on this subject, but we hope that some of the younger generation will devote themselves seriously to further research, in the excellent results of which they will doubtless find ample rewards.

Italian lyrical poetry has also played an important part in providing inspiration for his dramas, whilst in his sonnets Shakespeare has shown himself to be a worthy disciple of our neo-Platonic poets from Guido Guinizelli to Petrarch, and from Petrarch to Bembo, Michelangelo and Tasso. Nor was the poet ignorant of another field in which the Italians displayed their imaginative powers. In several passages he gives the impression of being well acquainted with particular works of our Renaissance painters and sculptors. In The Winter's Tale he speaks enthusiastically of his contemporary, Giulio Romano, and describes the supposed statue of Hermione as the one conceived by that remarkable Italian artist, who was the renowned and perfect imitator of natural beauty. Giulio Romano is better known as a painter than as a sculptor; but in the earlier part of his life he devoted himself to sculpture; and although here the name of Michelangelo might have been more appropriately cited, Shakespeare is not guilty of ignorance or carelessness in associating with the name of Giulio Romano the supreme qualities of Italian Renaissance sculpture.
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Is it possible that Shakespeare visited Italy? From the very start of his career the land of the Renaissance had exercised a great fascination over him, and the critics have rightly marvelled at the profound knowledge of the whole Italian peninsula which his plays reveal; but several whose scenes are laid in Italy have given rise to misconceptions and disputes. Italy with its public and private life, its laws and customs, its ceremonial and other characteristics, pulsates in 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.

It may be asked, 'How and when could he have undertaken this journey?' The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Romeo and Juliet must be considered as his first declaration of love for Italy. Yet in these two plays we find little that encourages us to believe that the poet had actually seen the locality where the development of the action takes place. It is quite the contrary when we consider some of the later dramas, for example, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night and Othello, in all of which the scenes are purely Italian. Here we find such definite characteristics, such vivid local colour and such a

wealth of precise and vigorous details that we are forced to conclude that Shakespeare must have visited Milan, Verona, Venice, Padua and Mantua. With this in mind we can fix with some certainty the date of his journey between the autumn of 1592 and the summer of 1593—the period when the Plague was so prevalent in his own country that, for fear of it, the sittings of the London Law Courts were suspended. At this time, too, the Queen prohibited all dramatic performances at Court, and the Council of State issued a proclamation forbidding any religious or political gatherings.

It was natural that a man of Shakespeare's culture and intellect should seize this opportunity of seeing for himself the beauties of Italy; because to the literary and artistic world of his day Italy was, as she had always been and always will be, the mother of learning and of classical culture. Men like Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Spenser studied her literature and imitated her poets; and, as Symonds declares, the example of Italy exerted an influence on every department of study and on every branch of intellectual activity. Three centuries in advance of all other countries in the fields of science and art, with names such as Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Tasso amongst their classics, with a varied literature of tales, treatises, comedies, tragedies, pastoral and lyrical dramas, with the great histories of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, with their political philosophy and metaphysical research the Italians inevitably attracted men of taste in England, inspiring them to imitation and reproduction. Surrey and Wyatt brought back from Italy blank verse, the
sonnet, the ottava rima, the sestina, etc.; Spenser wrote his *Faerie Queene* under the influence of Italian chivalrous poetry; Raleigh could not confer higher praise than to say that the reading of such verse would have made Petrarch shed tears of jealousy for his poetic fame, while Sidney copied the Italians in his lyrics and imitated Sannazzaro in his *Arcadia*.

Italy was the magic land where the joys of life abounded. With even the slenderest resources it was possible to undertake the pilgrimage, for one could travel at little expense on foot, on horseback, by boat or even in a carriage. Living in those days was very inexpensive—lodgings were obtainable for a few coppers at an inn or tavern, while the very poor could always find hospitality in the monasteries or colleges. All the most illustrious personages of the period had visited this glorious land; men of science like Latimer, Bacon and Harvey; poets and prose-writers like Lilly, Sidney, Nash and Greene; painters and sculptors, too, had sojourned there. Many of them have left us accounts of their travels, but if, with regard to Shakespeare, we possess no biographical information, we have at least many other important facts to adduce in support of our belief.

English critics while seeming to encourage the idea that Shakespeare was an unlearned genius fallen meteor-like from heaven, aver with strange inconsistency that it was easy enough for him to obtain the necessary information by consulting the volumes about travels in Italy which were in circulation at that time. They even go so far as to quote a long list of books in

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Italian, French, Latin, English and German—books which in all probability the dramatist never either saw or read. Some Italian authors have asserted that Shakespeare must have obtained information relating to Italy at the house of the Earl of Southampton, an Italianate Englishman whose court was frequented by the most celebrated literary men of the period, prominent amongst whom was Florio, a professor of Italian in London and Oxford, an able teacher and writer, who by his books and lectures had popularised Italian literature amongst the Elizabethan courtiers. It has even been suggested that Florio was in reality author of many of Shakespeare’s dramas; but however flattering this conjecture may be to a teacher of Italian in Great Britain, it is a theory which we cannot accept because what Shakespeare knew of our country, of its customs and its life, was assuredly not derived from any of these sources.

The various scenes of *Othello* are no mere Venetian reminiscences, but pictures exalting the very spirit of Venice, which Shakespeare has transferred to his drama. The darkness of morning, the narrow and mysterious ‘calli’, Brabantio’s house with its heavy iron-barred doors, the Sagittary, the official residence of the commanders of the galleys, the hired gondolier witness of gallant intrigues, the gondola where the lovers had been seen, the galleys sent on a multitude of errands, the armaments, the attendants with torches, the special night guards, the council chamber, the senators, the Doge—the beloved Signor Magnifico—the discussions about the war, Brabantio’s accusation that his daughter
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had been stolen and seduced by means of drugs and
witchcraft, the history of Othello with all the sacrifices
made in defence of the republic, the appearance of the
divine Desdemona, fair and beautiful as a Titan portrait—all give the impression of a vivid portrayal of
scenes enacted in the very heart of the Queen of the
Adriatic.

The local colour of the Taming of the Shrew displays
such an intimate acquaintance not only with the
manners and customs of Italy but also with the minutest
details of domestic life that it cannot have been gleaned
from books or acquired in the course of conversations
with travellers returned from Padua. The form of
marriage between Petruchio and Katharine, which was
later recommended by Manzoni's loquacious Agnese
to Renzo and Lucia, was Italian and not English. Some
lines where the noble lord proposes to show Sly his
pictures:

We'll show thee Io as she was a maid;
And how she was beguiled and surprised,
As lively painted as the deed was done.

suggest that the poet may have seen Correggio's
famous picture—Giove ed Io—which is quite possible
if he visited the north of Italy in 1592–3; because from
1585 to 1600 the picture was exhibited to the public
in the palace of the sculptor, Leoni, in Milan, where it
was admired by numerous travellers.

The description of Gremio's house and furnishings
is striking because it represents an Italian villa of the
sixteenth century with all its comforts and noble luxury.

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My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;
In ivory coffers I have stuffed my crowns;
In cypress chests my arras, counterpoints,
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,
Valance of Venice gold in needlework,
Pewter and brass, and all things that belong
To house or housekeeping:

These magnificent objets d'art were only to be found in
Italy, in the palaces of the aristocracy of Milan, Genoa,
Turin, Pavia, etc. since living conditions in England
were very primitive, and not even Elizabeth's courtiers
could boast of possessing such refinements. In his
Cena delle Ceneri Giordano Bruno speaks most
disparagingly of the filth and coarseness of England,
referring in particular to the disgusting table manners
of her inhabitants. In The Taming of the Shrew, too, we
find frequent references to the Alps, to Padua, to the
River Po, to Venetian territory and to

fruitful Lombardy,
The pleasant garden of great Italy;

convincing evidence that the poet must have travelled
in the country and brought back with him a clear
recollection of its features.

In the Merchant of Venice we find an inimitable Italian
atmosphere, whose fragrance can be more easily per-
ceived than explained or analysed. The topography is
so precise and accurate that it must convince even the
most superficial reader that the poet visited the country,
acutely observant of all its characteristics as he travelled

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through its mountains and valleys. One instance is the gift of a dish of pigeons which Gobbo takes to his son’s master. Gobbo is a purely Venetian name, which must certainly have been suggested to Shakespeare by the statue of the kneeling hunchback of the Rialto, which forms the base of the pillar upon which in ancient days were affixed the decrees of the Republic. The scene where Portia despatches Balthasar in all haste by the common ferry on the River Brenta, which commanded the trade routes to Venice, cannot be sufficiently praised for its precision. We may conjecture that the country estate of Belmont, where the villa is situated, corresponds to our Monte Bello, and that Balthasar with the documents and Bellario’s gown was to meet his mistress at the landing stage. Portia and Nerissa travel by carriage and, according to the poet, the distance they must traverse is twenty miles.

‘For we must measure twenty miles to-day.’

The exact distance between Monte Bello and Padua is twenty miles; and this amazing accuracy is no chance coincidence.

But what gives the most characteristically Venetian flavour to this drama is the Rialto, around which the poet concentrates all his knowledge of the city of Venice. It is here that he wishes to transport his audience in imagination, that he would have us see the throng on the bridge and crowding the long flights of steps at either end of it. We can see the good Antonio going around with his friends in the hope of receiving news of his ships, and Shylock, slow and hesitating,

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fearing to attract the notice of the urchins, who never failed to torment the Jew whenever they chanced to recognise him. Amongst the _dramatis personae_ also Venetian characteristics are faithfully sustained. Portia is a true Venetian lady, whilst Shylock and Antonio are indubitable types. The nature of the Jew, as represented by Shylock, would have been impossible in England, where the resettlement of the Jews had not yet been permitted after their expulsion. In Venice, on the other hand, there were in those days four or five thousand of them. Indeed Shylock in many respects represents the ordinary Venetian merchant; not a merchant such as Antonio, of course, for he is described as exceptional, but the typical city merchant who, in his methods and the conduct of his business, did not greatly differ from the Jew of popular imagination.

Italian lawyers and jurists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance travelled round the cities of Italy putting their counsel and culture at the disposal of the public; very often they decided lawsuits and gave judgment in commercial and civil cases submitted to them. Our English dramatist gives us in *The Merchant of Venice* an example of this method of procedure; but for his convenience and to give more prominence to the love the rich Lady of Belmont bore to Bassanio, and her admiration for Antonio, he inverts the parts, making the noble lady play the part of judge in place of the jurist Bellario. There is just one instance where the Venetian tradition is violated—the characters of Launcelot Gobbo, the clown, and his old father. They
are both peasants, but their actions, the tone of their conversation and their humour are not Italian. It is in Portia and Nerissa, Shylock and the Rialto that we enjoy the true Venetian aroma exhaled by the play.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ITALY IN SHAKESPEARIAN DRAMA

Notwithstanding the fact that his Italian scenes are depicted in colours faithfully reproduced from the originals, the majority of commentators tell us that Shakespeare knew nothing of conditions in northern Italy, and that he was totally ignorant of the geography of these provinces. Three well-known passages are quoted in support of their assertion: the first in The Tempest, the second in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the third in The Taming of the Shrew. Sidney Lee, our dramatist’s biographer, never tires of reiterating this argument to prove Shakespeare guilty of saying things which in fact he neither said nor thought. It is erroneously repeated that Shakespeare described Verona as a city on the sea coast, and Bergamo as a place where canvas was woven for the making of sails, without considering that Shakespeare in his allusions to Verona was careful to mention not the sea but the very river—the Adige—which flows through that city; and that if he asserts that Tranio’s father followed the trade of sail-maker in Bergamo he cannot have been far from the truth, for the city of Bergamo has been famous for that industry until recent times. Indeed, Manzoni, in his I Promessi Sposi, describing the flight of Renzo, speaks of the sail-making industry which flourished in that district. But perhaps it will be better to give here some further examples to illustrate our argument. In
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The Tempest, Prospero relates how he had been taken out of the gates of Milan, put upon a ship and despatched some leagues to the sea. The poet's sole error here is in making the voyage too short; but even this is explained in the line,

'In few, they hurried us aboard a bark.'

The words 'in few' indicate that he has much else to say and cannot waste time on useless descriptions. 'In few' corresponds to the Italian 'in breve', which is sufficiently significant. In those days it was quite possible to embark at the gates of Milan for ports on the Adriatic Sea, and since, in the sixteenth century, there were no railways, a journey by water was often preferable to one by road because of its greater safety and comfort.

But if Shakespeare is to be accused of inexactitude what shall we say of other writers: Goldoni, for instance, who in his Memoirs describes at length a voyage which he made, in company with a Dominican Friar, from Pavia to Chioggia? Montaigne, Coryat and others tell us that in their wanderings from one city to another in northern Italy they were in the habit of travelling by boat. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare describes Valentine as sailing from Verona to Milan. This is another passage quoted by critics to prove that Shakespeare's information was not the result of personal observation; but here also the accusation of ignorance is wholly unjustified. In Romeo and Juliet, the city of Verona has no harbour and is said to be situated in the midst of the Venetian Plain, as in reality it is. From a superficial reading of The Two Gentlemen of

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Verona one might think that the city was on the coast, since the word 'road' is used for the place of Valentine's embarkation, and several allusions are made to the ebb and flow of the tide. But such expressions do not necessarily indicate that the city was a seaport. It is true that 'road' is now only used of the sea, but in the sixteenth century and even much later it merely signified a place where large ships could be anchored. Hundreds of examples from English authors prove that Shakespeare did not err, for the word is freely used in descriptions of towns on the River Thames. As for the ebb and flow of the waves, it is well known that the effects of the tide can be seen more than a hundred miles from the mouth of a river.

But all these discussions seem of little consequence when we read the drama more diligently and ponder carefully the words of the poet, who, at the end of his description of the journey by water, speaks not of the sea but of the river:

'Tut, man, I mean thou'lt lose the flood, and, in losing the flood, lose thy voyage, and, in losing thy voyage, . . .'

The reply to this apostrophe which has been overlooked by commentators proves the dramatist to have been more accurate than he has generally been given credit for.

'Lose the tide, and the voyage, and the master, and the service, and the tied! Why, man, if the river were dry, I am able to fill it with my tears; if the wind were down, I could drive the boat with my sighs.'

'If the river were dry'—what is this river? Without doubt the Adige, on whose banks Verona was built, a
river which in the sixteenth century had communications with many of the cities of northern Italy, including Milan. The River Adige which comes from the direction of Milan and flows through Verona was a navigable river; and Milan itself was situated on several canals, by means of which it was possible to travel from city to city. Three administrators were appointed by the Venetian Republic to supervise commerce on the River Adige and these canals. Verona appears to have been a port of some consequence, often visited by the galleys of the Republic of St. Mark, stationed in Lake Garda a few miles from the city. It seems as if critics wish to judge Shakespeare by twentieth-century conditions, forgetting that journeys on foot or by coach in earlier centuries, and especially in the time of Shakespeare, were neither comfortable nor safe. Therefore all the rivers and canals of northern Italy were utilised for commerce and travel, these means of communication playing an important part in the history of Italy long before The Tempest or The Two Gentlemen of Verona were written or published. We have chronicles, letters, and numerous documents of merchants, diplomats and historians in which they are mentioned; and it is impossible to write the history of Venetian commerce and of the Galleys of the Republic without giving prominence to their usefulness both in peace and war.

The River Po, with its thirty main tributaries and many smaller ones, was in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as in earlier times, the principal means of transport for the inhabitants of northern Italy; and one cannot read the history of its cities without noting
the numerous allusions to the commerce carried on by these waterways. Even Polibius tells us that the river was navigable for 250 miles from the sea; Strabon speaks of Roman navigation from Piacenza to Ravenna, and Pliny alludes to the trading ships which sailed up the Po to the place where Turin now stands. From the twelfth century onwards the Po and its tributaries became still more important. Italian chroniclers assert that Milan in the fourteenth century enjoyed all the advantages that were to be gained through the possession of a canal which communicated with the Po, and that later, for the transport of the marble which was to be used in building the Duomo, the city constructed other canals leading to the Ticino, the Po and to Lake Maggiore. All this justifies Carlo Pagano’s assertion in 1520 that Milan, though far from the sea, might easily be reckoned a seaport. English travellers mention that many of their compatriots travelled by boat down the Po from Turin to Venice. Coryat speaking of Milan declares that the city was surrounded by a network of canals whose waters flowed into the river.

When we come to consider the aspect presented by the Adige and Po in time of war, the amount of traffic along their courses is nothing less than marvellous and a source of astonishment to those who doubt the possibility of a voyage from Milan to the sea. The historian Guicciardini writes that in 1509 the Po was the scene of bitter naval battles between the galleys of Milan and Venice. We may add that in 1431 Niccolò Trevisano, an Admiral of the Venetian Republic, had his fleet destroyed by the Milanese, under the command of
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Ambrogio Spinola, not far from Cremona. This was a serious blow for the Venetians, who lost no time in building a powerful fleet to humiliate the proud Duke of Milan and the Marquis of Mantua. In August, 1438, a fleet of a hundred galleons, thirty barques, six galleys and many other vessels loaded with provisions and munitions sailed up the Po from Venice to attack the region of Milan.

Shakespeare’s accurate knowledge of the geography of Italy is all the more noteworthy as it contrasts strikingly with his ignorance of that of other European countries, France, for example. In his allusions to French towns we find nothing to indicate that he knew them well. In the three plays of which the scenes are laid in France—Love’s Labour’s Lost, As You Like It and All’s Well That Ends Well—local colour and topographical realism are entirely absent. The scene is for the most part set in districts far removed from the direct route to Italy; but all the cities where a traveller on his way to Italy would stop to change horses or coaches are accurately named by our dramatist, e.g. Calais, Amiens, Longueville, Troyes, Marseilles and Genoa. When we consider that in the north of Italy he reveals a more profound knowledge of Milan, Bergamo, Verona, Mantua, Padua and Venice, the very limitation of the poet’s notions of geography proves that he derived his information from an actual journey through Italy and not from books. All that he says about our country is marvellously accurate, and this precision is manifest not only in the passages already cited but in all those adduced by the critics to prove his ignorance of

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the geography of Italy. A German critic asserted that he could not have known Padua and Venice because in The Merchant of Venice he describes these two cities as ‘neighbouring’. Since Padua is only about twenty miles from Venice one can hardly deny the proximity of the two cities. A statement such as Shakespeare’s, besides being correct to-day, seems all the more exact when one remembers that he wrote it towards the end of the sixteenth century.

Another critic based his accusation of ignorance on the fact that Shakespeare had alluded in The Two Gentlemen of Verona to a forest in the Province of Milan, extending in the direction of Bergamo, where robbers had taken refuge. If Shakespeare is in error here, then so too is Manzoni, who describes the Gran Macchia into which Renzo plunged on the night of his flight from Milan to the territory of St. Mark. Here too Shakespeare is correct, because he places the forest in the only locality where it ever existed or could have existed. Still another writer accuses Shakespeare of ignorance because in one of his plays he alludes to a small island in the River Po. This argument seems superficial and ridiculous when one thinks that, in reality, small pieces of land surrounded by water and called isolotti are by no means rare in the rivers and lakes of north Italy. It will suffice to mention the famous island of Belvedere, formed by the Po not far from Ferrara, where the Este family in the sixteenth century built a magnificent palace, and the isolotti on the Piave, of which so much was heard during the last phase of the fighting against the Austrians in 1918.
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Thus all these arguments fail to prove Shakespeare's ignorance of the geography of Italy. Apart from a few trifling errors, the topographical details of the Italian cities with all their individual characteristics are surprisingly accurate in his plays: far more exact than in the works of many other writers who have visited Italy. Even Byron who travelled map in hand through Europe, and who earned such unstinted praise for the fidelity of his descriptions, made a considerable number of errors in his *Childe Harold*; Walter Scott, who knew Edinburgh as the Romans know their own city, made some unpardonable mistakes in his novel, *The Antiquary*; Chaucer, who made at least three journeys to Italy, in the Prologue to his *Clerkes Tale* makes the River Po flow beyond Venice; and of Browning, who loved and lived in Italy, one could cite many instances of errors in the description of scenes often visited and admired. But no one would dream of suggesting that Scott had never been in Edinburgh or that Chaucer and Browning had never visited Italy.

In conclusion we may affirm that of all the English poets who visited Italy, with the possible exception of Shelley and Byron, no one has depicted our scenes, our life, our character and our nature better than Shakespeare. The portrayer of the spirit of humanity, the genius of the English Renaissance, in whose works we find not only true life and passion, but all European institutions with their chivalry, courtesy and ambitions, could not have sung the praises of the classical yet ever romantic land of Italy without having paid her at least a fleeting visit. It need occasion no surprise therefore