Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays

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lessons learned in Italy. When Diana confronts him publicly, he
dismisses her as a courtesan, 'a common gamester to the camp'
(V.iii.188). It is not, however, until his lies about his family ring, the
symbol of his old world honour, are uncovered that Bertram finally
confesses all. He was, alas, willing to pawn his noble name and
lineage for present gratification. In the end, presumably
Shakespeare now wishes his audience to feel that Bertram has
learned his lesson, and that his experience in Italy has shown him
the way to maturity, virtue, and wisdom. The lesson for English
youth is clear: Italy's fashionable temptations can compromise the
most basic virtues and teachings of home.

In The History of Italy, Thomas writes of three things which
characterize a gentleman: 'the first is arms, to maintain withal his
honour; the second love, to show himself gentle and not cruel of
nature; and the third is learning, to be able to know, to understand
and to utter his opinion in matters of weight'. Bertram's
experience seems to be measured in these terms. He has
distinguished himself in 'arms', but must 'show himself gentle and
not cruel of nature' in love, and ultimately reflect his 'learning'.
While there may be some debate concerning the ultimate tone of
All's Well That Ends Well, it seems clear that whether or not Bertram
has learned by the end of the action, the opportunity for the
education of this young man is in part what has been centrally
presented. Though of noble birth and great promise, Bertram
requires the nurture of war, love, and learning to educate him to the
wisdom necessary to complement the fortune of his birth. Virtue
growing out of experience is needed to ennoble him fully.

B MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

The Claudio and Hero plot of Much Ado About Nothing harkens back
to Italian sources. The fifth canto of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso
(1516) in its English poetic elaboration by Peter Beverley (c. 1566)
and/or rendering by Sir John Harington (1591) may have stimulated
Shakespeare's retelling of the classic story of a lover betrayed into
believing his mistress false. Shakespeare's most direct source,
however, is thought to be Matteo Bandello's La Prima de le Novelle
(1554), perhaps in François Belleforest's French version or in some
English version now lost. Bandello seems to have been the origin for
several of the names in Shakespeare's play, though Lionati to
Leonato is easier to see than Piero to Pedro. Shakespeare also takes its
cue from Bandello, but, as we shall see, another more special reason
that the play is:

A. R. Humphreys, the New Arden editor of Shakespeare's
'shrunkenly good natured': 'it is a lively, social scene for the cheerful
manoeuvres of amorous courtship, a scene for the cheerful
manoeuvres of a love story'. 'In this comedy of love, the
sophisticated foreigners, Messina entertains the

Claudio (whose name, by the way, is taken from
'dell'arte lover') is Florentine (I,i,11), and shares
his fellow native Cassio in Othello. His
reputation of Hero is so overwhelming later
that he is even to think that Claudio is modest, graceful, and so
Claudio is clearly young and inexperienced.

The wooing of his lady into Don Pedro's hands, as
resigned when he thinks the prince has won the
real truth discovered, he is so meek and ready
prompted to kiss his love. J. W. Draper finds
Hero's dowry consistent with the Florentine
'shrunkenly good natured'. However, as we have noticed,
Shakespeare's Italian plays, no matter where
interested in such matters.

Benedick is from the university city of Padua,
and learning are everywhere in evidence, as
read. He alludes learnedly to 'Cupid' (I.i.25)
and 'Troilus' (V.ii.31). His reasoning is with
'soliloquy at the end of II.i (7–36). He knows he
'the thing he hath the tongues' (V.i.166) - and not, one
or two of them like Sir Andrew Augecheek. He
still the student open to new information in
his characteristic but comic logic he declares:
'When I said I would die a bachelor,
should live till I was married' (II.i.242–4).
Transformation: 'Gallants, I am not as I was.'

Yet despite their stated places of origin, Claudio and Benedick
seem as much English as specifically Italian courtesy of Claudio and the wit of Benedick
many a nimble romantic hero, no matter when
Leonato is easier to see than Piero to Pedro. Shakespeare’s Messina also takes its cue from Bandello, but, as we shall observe, there is another more special reason that the play is set in this seaport city.

A. R. Humphreys, the New Arden editor, describes Messina as ‘essentially good natured’: ‘it is a lively, sociable world presented through its etiquettes and enjoyments, . . . creating a close-knit scene for the cheerful manoeuvres of affluent leisure’.34 He continues, ‘it is a scene of social engagement, courtly diplomacies and festive pleasure, a cheerful world of carnival’.35 A city of sophisticated foreigners, Messina entertains not only Spaniards but Italians from the north.

Claudio (whose name, by the way, is traditional for a Commedia dell’arte lover) is Florentine (I,i,11), and shares qualities of courtesy with his fellow native Cassio in Otello. Because his heartless repudiation of Hero is so overwhelming later in the play, one might forget that Claudio is modest, graceful, and sympathetic earlier on. Claudio is clearly young and inexperienced. He willingly puts the wooing of his lady into Don Pedro’s hands, and is disappointed but resigned when he thinks the prince has won Hero for himself. The real truth discovered, he is so meek and retiring that he must be prompted to kiss his love. J. W. Draper finds Claudio’s interest in Hero’s dowry consistent with the Florentine reputation for financial shrewdness.36 However, as we have noticed, most young suitors in Shakespeare’s Italian plays, no matter where they are from, are interested in such matters.

Benedick is from the university city of Padua (I,i,35–6), and his wit and learning are everywhere in evidence.37 He is obviously widely read. He alludes learnedly to ‘Cupid’ (I,i,254), ‘Leander’ (V,ii,30), and ‘Troilus’ (V,ii,31). His reasoning is wittily balanced, as in his soliloquy at the start of II,iii (7–36). He knows foreign languages — ‘he hath the tongues’ (V,i,166) — and not, one suspects, just a word or two of them like Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Moreover, Benedick is still the student open to new information and to change. With characteristic but comic logic he declares: ‘the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married’ (II,iii,242–4). He acknowledges his transformation: ‘Gallants, I am not as I have been’ (III,ii,15).

Yet despite their stated places of origin, Claudio and Benedick seem as much English as specifically Italian young men. The courtesy of Claudio and the wit of Benedick are characteristic of many a nubile romantic hero, no matter where he is from. There are
also a number of clearly English touches in the play: references to 'a Scotch jig' (II.i,74, 75), the 'Hundred Merry Tales' jest book (II.i,30), the song 'Light a' love' (III.iv,44), and 'sword' and 'bucklers' (V.ii,17–18). Messina would have wine cellars not the alluded to 'alehouses' (III.iii,42) as in Shakespeare's play. Margaret and Ursula, 'Meg' (III.iv.8, 98) and 'Ursley' (III.i,4), have English sounding names. Dogberry and his watch, 'Verges', 'Oatcake', and 'Sea-coal', are certainly English types with English names, despite Dogberry's 'palabras' (III.iv.16) and other 'fine' words.

Messina in Much Ado About Nothing has no specific geographical details of place, but there are some light touches in the play that evoke a vaguely Italian atmosphere. When inspired to poetry Benedick and Beatrice are prone to the sonnet form (see III.i,107–16; V.iv.87). Leonato has a family tomb like the Capulets in Romeo and Juliet, and Beatrice refers to Benedick as 'Signior Mountanto' (I.i,30) – using an Italian fencing term. Venice is mentioned as a place associated with love (I.i,271–2). In the manner of the stereotypical Italian spy in a drama of palace intrigue, Boroachio 'whipt me behind the arras' (I.iii.60–1). (The baits of Beatrice and Benedick, and the watch's fortunate overhearing of Don John's plot against Hero are other examples of the play's prominent eavesdropping motif.) 'Would the cook were a' my mind!' (I.iii,72–3), exclaims Don John, who wishes to poison more than just humour. Specific references to 'poison' are to be found at II.ii,21 and V.i,246.

There are two sides to the Italian character revealed in Much Ado About Nothing. First of all, there is the volatile 'temperament' demonstrated by the emotionally wounded Claudio; he lashes out extravagantly against the innocent Hero. A recent editor of The Prince describes Machiavelli's character in terms precisely appropriate to Claudio: 'Like a great many Tuscans, he had a horror of being taken for a dupe, and to avoid that appearance did not mind sometimes being considered a monster.'38 Beatrice's command to 'Kill Claudio' as a way for Benedick to prove his love is another example of what the English considered stereotypical Italian temperament.

The other side of the Italian coin is the courtliness of the wit, friendship, and most actions of the central characters. Castiglione's Il Cortigiano may well have provided the model for the wit combats of Beatrice and Benedick in the exchanges between Lady Emilia and Lord Gaspare Pallavicino, and have also suggested the genteel behaviour of the aristocratic characters in Shakespeare's play.39 Barbara Lewalski has noticed that the phrase Book IV of Sir Thomas Hoby's translation, 40 the playwright gives to Don Pedro's music course, Castiglione's Christian name Balda associated with courtesy in the Renaissance.

Italy, and to a lesser extent Spain and France for Shakespeare's age. A Venetian and Jacopo Soranzo, noted in correspondence that the Italian. 32 Portia remarks on the stranger English wooer Falcondrige: 'How oddly he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in Germany, and his behavior everywhere' (I.ii, 31). Edward II, Gaveston 'wears a short Italian hat with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap A jewel of crown' (I.ii,418–19). When 'contrary to fashion the gentlewomen generally for gory jewels exceed, I think, all other women of

*Fashion* is a key word in Much Ado About Nothing with it in a number of lines as he describes his love to Hero to his friend Conrade (III.iii.118, 121, 122). His point is that clothes can deceive. Benedick, Claudio lying 'ten nights awake carving the doublet' (II.17–18). There is a reference to 'A gown' (III.iv.15–16), and to the 'rebato' (III.iv.15–16). Repudiation, Antonio challenges Claudio among them 'fashion-monging boys, /That lie and cause /and slander,/ Go anticly, and show outwardly'.Early in the play, Beatrice wishes to know her friend, since 'He wears his faith but as the (I.75–6). Leonato will disdains 'the fashion of the fair cost' (I.75–6), and entertain Don Pedro as an extravagant manner.

Much Ado About Nothing is Shakespeare's only play and the question may be asked why here of all works of other locales might have served the playwright gathering of courtship and deceit. Why this one seems some buried allusion to be discovered.

In Shakespeare's day, Messina had quite spent in the Christian west. It was the launching point for
Barbara Lewalski has noticed that the phrase 'much ado' recurs in Book IV of Sir Thomas Hoby's translation.40 'Balthazar', the name the playwright gives to Don Pedro's musical attendant, was, of course, Castiglione's Christian name Baldassare; it was a name associated with courtesy in the Renaissance.41

Italy, and to a lesser extent Spain and France, set the English fashion for Shakespeare's age. A Venetian ambassador to England, Jacopo Soranzo, noted in correspondence that English styles copied the Italian.42 Portia remarks on the strangeness of clothing of her English wooer Falconbridge: 'How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behavior everywhere' (l.ii,73–6). In Marlowe's Edward II, Gaveston 'wears a short Italian hooded cloak, Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap A jewel of more value than the crown' (l.iv,415–17). When 'contrary to... Italian fashion [Webster's Duchess of Malfi] wears a loose-bodied gown' (II,i,78), she is suspected of being pregnant. Thomas seems awed by Italian fashion: 'the gentlewomen generally for gorgeous attire, apparel, and jewels exceed, I think, all other women of our known world'.43

*Fashion* is a key word in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Borachio plays with it in a number of lines as he describes his wooing of Margaret as Hero to his friend Conrade (III,iii,118, 121, 122, 124, 139, 141, 143). His point is that clothes can deceive. Benedick finds the love-smitten Claudio lying 'ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet' (II,iii,17–18). There is a reference to 'the Duchess of Milan's gown' (III.iv,15–16), and to the 'rebato' (III.iv,6) ruff. After Hero's repudiation, Antonio challenges Claudio and Don Pedro calling them 'fashion-monging boys; / That lie and cog and flout, deprave and slander, / Go antically, and show outward hideousness' (V,i,94–6). Early in the play, Beatrice wishes to know Benedick's current friend, since 'He wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat' (I,i,75–6). Leonato will disdain 'the fashion of the world... to avoid cost' (I,i,97–8), and entertain Don Pedro and his friends in an extravagant manner.

*Much Ado About Nothing* is Shakespeare's only play set in Messina, and the question may be asked why here of all places. Any number of other locales might have served the playwright for his après-war gathering of courtship and deceit. Why this one specifically? There seems some buried allusion to be discovered in the play.

In Shakespeare's day, Messina had quite specific associations for the Christian west. It was the launching point for the last galleys war
in naval history. The Battle of Lepanto, fought on 7 October 1571, some twenty-seven or so years before Much Ado About Nothing, resulted in a great Christian victory against the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{44}

Pope Pius V had managed somehow to get Spain and Venice, among others, to cooperate with him and form a ‘Holy League’ alliance for waging war against Islam – the Turks and their allies. Don John of Austria, the ‘bastard’ brother of Philip II of Spain, was the Captain General of the Holy League fleet. Thus, there is an association of setting, character name, and Don John’s circumstances of birth recalled in Shakespeare’s play.

The Christian victory at Lepanto is historically noteworthy not only as the last great galleon action in the history of naval warfare, but also for putting to rest the western notion of Turkish invincibility. Lepanto was the battle in which Cervantes (born the same year as Shakespeare) lost the use of his left hand. Ultimately, however, Lepanto turned out to be ‘much ado about nothing’; the victory was never followed up by the Christians. Pius V’s death and the Holy League’s continual bickering about selfish interests saw to that. As one scholar writes: ‘It is generally considered that the battle of Lepanto was one of the great turning points of history, but modern historians have been hard pressed to explain why. Militarily the Holy League derived little immediate advantage from the victory. No territory changed hands in the wake of the battle . . . . It is apparent that in the short-term military sense Lepanto accomplished little or nothing.’\textsuperscript{45}

But for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Lepanto fired the Christian imagination. To commemorate the wonderful victory, 7 October was declared a perpetual holiday throughout most of Europe. On the heels of the Ottoman defeat celebrations abounded, with a special one at Messina to honour Don John’s return to the city. A statue by Andrea Calamech was erected there as a memorial to the great general. Many songs, poems, and paintings were offered throughout the Christian world. Among these were a number of English works. George Gascoigne devoted part of his 1572 wedding masque, in honour of the English Montague’s weddings, to Lepanto.\textsuperscript{46} Abraham Holland wrote Naumachia, or, A Poetical Description of the cruel and bloody Sea-fight or Battale of Lepanto.\textsuperscript{47} The ‘Epistle to the Reader’, included with the revision of this work (1626; STC 13579), details Queen Elizabeth’s response to news of the victory: ‘Shee commanded the Citizens of London, to give Almighty GOD humble and heartie thanks, Her

Sacred selfe performing the same: The Londoner and showed other pleasant sigens of rejoicing James VI of Scotland, who would become Shpetered published his poem about the great victory.\textsuperscript{48} to the Reader’ indicates that James was about when he penned his more than 1100 lines choruses. In Lepanto he writes of ‘Messema’, armies convened, and ‘There Don Joan d’.’\textsuperscript{49} Gene

But why then, if all Christendom was singing ‘John – indeed, if the present Queen and future joined the chorus – would Shakespeare have villainous namesake in his Much Ado About Nothing we must consider the historical Don John’s role.

First and foremost, Don John was a prom brother to Philip II who was the Spanish King and arm of the Roman religion. Philip, we recall, English Catholic Queen Mary I in 1554 (his Charles V, gave him Milan and Naples as a When Mary died in 1558, Philip offered his hand was refused. Following this, as we might queenship and her sister Mary Queen of Scots not viewed kindly by the Spanish King, After refusal and Lepanto, Philip II together with suggested Mary Stuart as a bride for Don John, reasserting Catholicism in England. Don John involved in attempting to free Mary from prison seemed to be in favour of this match, for if Don Mary Queen of Scots he would, through her, Catholic England.\textsuperscript{50}

It also appears that Queen Elizabeth herself and affction of Don John. She let it be known that he might aspire to her hand.\textsuperscript{51} Whether Elizabeth personal or political cannot be determined, but John rebuffed her overtures despite the prodding saw in such a marriage another way to restore Enfold. In the words of Don John’s nineteenth, ‘Although it is impossible to believe that she thought of marrying him, it is not the less probable much displeased by his refusal even to woo her said, great indignation at the slight put upon
Sacred selfe performing the same: The Londoners also made Bonfires, and showed other pleasant signes of rejoicing.' In 1576, the future James VI of Scotland, who would become Shakespeare's James I, published his poem about the great victory.48 The 'Authors Preface to the Reader' indicates that James was about twelve or thirteen when he penned his more than 1100 lines (including epilogue choruses). In Lepanto he writes of 'Messenia', where the Christian armies convened, and 'There Don Iuan d' Austria came,/ Their General great ...' (l. 205).

But why then, if all Christendom was singing in praise of Don John - indeed, if the present Queen and future King of England joined the chorus - would Shakespeare have created such a villainous namesake in his Much Ado About Nothing? To find reasons, we must consider the historical Don John's relations with England.

First and foremost, Don John was a prominent Catholic, step-brother to Philip II who was the Spanish King and muscular military arm of the Roman religion. Philip, we recall, had married the English Catholic Queen Mary I in 1554 (his father, the Emperor Charles V, gave him Milan and Naples as a wedding present). When Mary died in 1558, Philip offered his hand to Elizabeth but was refused. Following this, as we might imagine, Elizabeth's queenship and her sister Mary Queen of Scots' imprisonment were not viewed kindly by the Spanish King. After Elizabeth's marriage refusal and Lepanto, Philip II together with Pope Gregory XIII suggested Mary Stuart as a bride for Don John, as the way of reasserting Catholicism in England. Don John himself was actively involved in attempting to free Mary from prison.49 English Catholics seemed to be in favour of this match, for if Don John were to marry Mary Queen of Scots he would, through her, be the ruler of a Catholic England.50

It also appears that Queen Elizabeth herself sought the attention and affection of Don John. She let it be known in appropriate circles that he might aspire to her hand.51 Whether Elizabeth's coquetry was personal or political cannot be determined, but, in any event, Don John rebuffed her overtures despite the proddings of the Pope who saw in such a marriage another way to restore England to the Roman fold. In the words of Don John's nineteenth-century biographer, 'Although it is impossible to believe that she had ever seriously thought of marrying him, it is not the less probable that she was much displeased by his refusal even to woo her. She expressed, it is said, great indignation at the slight put upon her by a bastard, and
the Spaniards believed that she set on foot plots for his assassination. 52

King James’ preface to his youthful account of Lepanto is an elaborate apology attempting to excuse his writing ‘in praise of a forraine Papist bastard’. 53 Contents James, ‘I name not Don Iloan, neither literally nor any waies by description’, and ‘my invocation [is] to the true God only, and not to all the He and She Saints, for whose vaine honors, Don Iloan fought in all his wars’. 54 One can see by the rigour of James’ disclaimers that Don John was not a hero to the English.

Fynes Moryson also describes the negative side of Don John’s character from the English point of view when he reports a cruel episode concerning a cave filled with ‘ill vapour’: ‘don John, base sonne of the Emperor Charles the fifth, forced a Gally-slave to goe into this cave, and he falling dead, forced another slave to fetch him out, who likewise fell dead, and that he killed a third slave with his own hand, because he refused to fetch out his two dead fellowes’. 55 Shakespeare’s Don John, like Iago resenting the ‘daily beauty’ in Cassio’s life, hates ‘the most exquisite Claudio’ (I,iii,50), and, with bristling jealousy, labels him ‘A proper squire!’ (I,iii,52). Hero notes that Don John ‘is of a very melancholy disposition’ (II,i,5). ‘How tartly that gentleman looks!’ affirms Beatrice, ‘I never can see him but I am heart-burn’d an hour after’ (II,i,3–4). The real Don John apparently also had a melancholic temperament. 56

Though several of Shakespeare’s likely sources for Much Ado About Nothing are Italian, and an important historical episode involving Italy is in the play’s background, the playwright does not call particular attention to his Italian setting except in a most general way. Skirting opportunities to exploit some lurid recent Sicilian family history, as do Beaumont and Fletcher in Philaster, or heavy-handed ridicule of Spain, Italy, and Catholicism, as do many a Renaissance English dramatist, Shakespeare is content in Much Ado About Nothing to poke at the historical Don John of Austria, and make of Italy a believable comic backdrop.

C THE TEMPEST

The first scene of The Tempest is at sea, and the rest of the action takes place on an island – not, that is, in Italy. However, all of the non-fabulous characters in Shakespeare’s play have allegiances to either Milan or Naples. As in Verona, Shakespeare again makes Milan a poor Antonio banishes Prospero and Miranda ‘to sea’. Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s essay The long been recognized as a source for Gonzagas Utopia. The counsellor states that in his

... commonwealth I would by contrariety
Execute all things; for no kind of trade
Would I admit; no name of magistracy
Letters should not be known: riches
And use of service, none; contract, sale;
Bourn, bound of land, tillth, vineyard;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and peaceable.
No sovereignty –

Edward Capell, in the eighteenth century, Shakespeare’s passage about Utopia resembled Florio’s Montaigne: ‘It is a nation... that hath... no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of nor of poverty; no contracts, no succession, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but of but naturelly, no manuring of landes, no use of metal’. 57 The British Museum copy of Florio’s disputed signature of Shakespeare, but even the evidence it seems clear that the playwright reworked the Italian’s version.

Another possible source for The Tempest is The Italy. 58 This work recounts the story of a fifteen-year Genoa, Prospero Adorno, with a relevant first Milanese and Neapolitan connections. Adorno 1460, then returned to power seventeen years later in Milan. The Genoese Duke subsequently consulted with the King of Naples, Ferdinando, another in the context of Shakespeare’s play. Tired of