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SHAKESPEARE AND ITALY

Edited by
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and
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INTRODUCTION

SHAKESPEARE AND ITALY: PAST AND PRESENT

Michele Marrapodi
(University of Palermo)

The rubric of 'Shakespeare and Italy' has gained renewed attention in recent years. The old historical controversy over Shakespeare's alleged visit to Italy and the related question of local color in his plays are decisively losing ground in favor of a novel critical perspective which takes into account the humanist idea of traveling as both a learning process, nourished by concrete experience, and a reading custom, an intellectual and imaginary journey of the mind. Jonathan Bate, perhaps more acutely than others, has epitomized how "For the Renaissance, travel, like reading, was a means of self-discovery (and conversely, humanist reading was a form of travel, a voyage into the classical past)."¹ Shakespeare's topographic imagination is thus seen as addressing a poetics of space, rooted in the early modern fascination with exoticism and foreignness, which led him to explore the dramaturgical mapping of Italy in association with the representation of the stranger as either mysterious, extravagant, and extraordinary or vicious, blood-thirsty, and vindicative, as opposed to ideal concepts of Englishness and proud national identity. In such plays as Othello, The Merchant of Venice, and The Tempest, this geography of difference, as Gillies has shown, portrays strong characterizations, endowed with the poetic capacity of representing otherness and placed in sharp contrast with ideas of social, religious, and political nationalism.²

The dialectic with Italy (or, rather, Italies, since the English view of Italy is a pliable construct capable of suiting diverse dramaturgical needs), escaping the limiting frame of insular legacies, has turned out to be a reciprocal form of cross-cultural exchange and ideological appropriation and, specifically for the theater, negotiated in social terms alongside a wider corpus of dramatic and literary traditions. Thanks to the works of Leo Salingar, Louise George Clubb, and others,
the playwright is now seen as a careful reader of the classics, an agile reviser of dramatic structures, an exceptional builder of theatrical sequences derived from a *contaminatio* of genres, plots, and situations, exploiting the effectiveness of the representational force of the theater through the convergence of domestic and alien cultures, traditions, and ideologies. This stance has followed, accompanied, and involved other productive discourses of cultural and historicist-oriented studies on both sides of the Atlantic, such as the theatrical representation of the Italianate setting as a structural constituent and an over-determined signifier, the refashioning of literary models, *topoi*, and theatrical conventions, the negotiation with the social and political hierarchy of power, the exploitation of otherness as an ideological construct, up to the reassessment of a cultural poetics founded on the total circulation of learning in early modern England.

In exploring the variety of what he terms 'social energy' in the literary domain of the Renaissance, Stephen Greenblatt has proposed a shift from close reading of the textual traces of a literary text to a thorough examination of the boundaries of the text, attaining a new poetics of culture through a "study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices". Moving away from the positivistic analysis of source studies and Italian-based drama in general, as well as from the accurate reconstruction of a stage topography through the myth of Italian lore, these procedures delve into the more political fields of cultural exchange, cultural difference, and cultural resistance, melting together a process of transition throughout Europe operating in a homogeneous interchange. In other words, the issue at stake is no longer whether Shakespeare visited Italy or whether he could read Italian and other foreign literature but to analyze the cultural processes that helped the dramatist accommodate the myths of Italy in a period of the notorious migration of ideas and historical transactions. As Greenblatt has put it,

The textual traces that have survived from the Renaissance and that are at the center of our literary interest in Shakespeare are the products of extended borrowings, collective exchanges, and mutual enchantments. They were made by moving certain things – principally ordinary language but also metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblems, items of clothing, well-

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worn stories, and so forth – from one culturally demarked zone to another. We need to understand not only the construction of these zones but also the process of movement across the shifting boundaries between them. By taking up the importance of cultural transactions, reassessing early modern texts and contexts, a number of recent monographs and collections of essays have helped diverge the critical discourse on early modern drama from fixed categories and topical areas of investigation. As Keir Elam has succinctly indicated at a relevant conference, which captured the principal changes in the lines of development that have affected the study of Anglo-Italian relations during these last years, the move is from the 'topological' to the 'typological':

If we think about the way that not so many years ago the question of the debt or the relationship between Renaissance English drama and Italy was studied either in terms of geographical history or in terms of borrowings, debts, verbal echoes and so on, i.e. a fairly literal, unilateral approach in which England took over, or borrowed the cultural riches of Italy, this has quite clearly changed. We have moved away from the idea of the drama representing Italy in some way, describing it, choosing Italy as a setting more or less accurately [...] to an idea of Italy as a kind of force of cultural mediation, political mediation and ideological mediation.

This force, to be more precise, is not only confined within the theatrical representation of foreign and exotic sites educed from an alien culture, but also in the ways in which the alterity of Italy is used ideologically and politically to set off the concept of England and of Englishness from the construction, adaptation and modification of, as well as resistance to, a diverse range of shifting traditions and national identities, including cultural and racial differences alongside of, as well as distinct from, questions of empire and colonialism. The ideological appropriation of Italy may thus become a disruptive force which serves as a cover for political dissent, or satire against social and political life in early modern England. These challenging perspectives further testify that, while in the process of dramatic construction Shakespeare recreated, refashioned and re-modeled the myths, traditions, and literary conventions of diverse countries and cultures, he has also become, in turn, the national poet of a number of other nations and cultural
identities, suiting the exigencies and concerns of differing historical and regional realities. The linguistic choices and technical difficulties of the divergent translations of Othello by Leoni, Bazzoni-Sormani, Valletta, Rusconi, Maffei, and Carcano provides significant cues, as Angela Locatelli demonstrates, of the different aims, interests, and poetic capacities in relation to contemporary aesthetics, critical norms, and theatrical performances. It also shows that the art of Shakespeare translation is not a mere neutral transposition of verbal meaning across diverse cultural contexts but a sign of the changing tastes of an epoch, as well as a telling indicator of the modes of reception.

The cross-cultural adaptation of the Elizabethan dramatist by the nineteenth-century Shakespearean actor Tommaso Salvini, on Italian and international stages during his tours of Europe and the United States, is extraordinary evidence of the influence that the fortunes of an acclaimed actor produced upon the interpretation of Shakespeare by audiences of diverse nationalities. Shaul Bassi combines a survey of theater history with concrete references to Salvini's acting strategies in performing the role of Othello's ethnic identity within the context of a largely xenophobic and nationalist Victorian society. Salvini's historiographic research for impersonating Othello's identity as a factor of cultural difference involved all levels of the semiotics of performance, ranging from the linguistic and gestural to the proxemic, from the costumes to the make-up. The impact of Italian imagination on the traditional view of the Moor is proved by Henry James's enthusiastic description of Salvini's passionate interpretation, which changed forever the perception of the Moor of Venice in both English and American theater history.

Italian adaptations of Macbeth have become a productive intertextual practice in recent years. In rewriting this tragedy for the modern stage, the most talented playwrights have often refashioned Shakespeare's text through the experience of Verdi's nineteenth-century libretto. Mariangela Tempera's discussion of Verdi's operatic version and its influence upon Giovanni Testori's experimental harmonizing of Italian and dialect, and Carmelo Bene's exercise with sound and verse via the blending of Shakespeare and Verdi provides a telling account of the process of the production of the Shakespearean text and its ideological appropriation and modification in contemporary theater practices. While Testori's
deconstruction aims to disrupt the gender issues of the play through a process of emasculation which leads to a totally pessimistic abandonment of an indifferent and hostile God, Benè's interaction of words and sounds, derived from Piave's libretto and Verdi's music, plays on the eroticism aroused in the enticement of power and in Lady Macbeth's persuasion to regicide through the orchestration of Benè's pliable voice to suit the multiplicity of several roles.

The last two articles in this section turn to the issue of Italian influence. The religious division of Gertrude's shifting identities throughout the three texts of Hamlet reflects, as Rocco Coronato suggests, the mediation of possible Italian sources, conduct books and Italian treaties on remarriage and widowhood. Charting a number of early modern Italian religious and literary texts, including Cini's La vedova, and the influential writings of Savonarola and Guazzo, Coronato finds distinguishable traces of Italian Catholic thinking in all Shakespearean texts, especially in the performing rhetoric of the memoria mariti topos, originating from the Italian Renaissance tradition on widowhood and remarriage.

An important feature of Italian influence on early modern England was of course the vogue of the translation and publication of Italian works which reached its peak by the turn of the century. Among the great variety of heterogeneous material imported for the English construction of the Italian myth, encoded as the cradle of the classical and European civilization as well as the homeland of all vicious crimes, what also attracted attention of translators and printers alike were the political and religious writings of some radical thinkers such as Machiavelli, Aretino, and Bruno. In this climate of religious and political disidence, the texts of antipapist authors were particularly welcomed by Protestant England. Soko Tomita's discussion of Cheke's Freewyl, translated from Francesco Negri's Tragedia del libero arbitrio (1546), explains the ideological appropriation that this kind of antipapist literature has had in the Elizabethan age, affected by the social and political consequences of a religious controversy, as well as the fortune of Italian translations and printing within the context of cultural transformation and social change in early modern England.

Sources and Culture
Recent scholarship has changed the conventional idea of the source as a direct and deliberate borrowing into a more dynamic process of dramatic construction, substituting positivistic source study with a more productive investigation into the dramatist's transcodification of a variety of literary traditions, going back to the notion of a deep, ultimate source among a long chain of re-uses and developments. In the search for background and historical material through which the transition of cultures between Italy and England may well be elicited, the function of emblem books and emblematic literature in Shakespeare's drama provides a particular case in point. As Clayton Mackenzie demonstrates, Andrea Alciati's work is at the core of the flourishing of emblem books in England either for direct influence, borrowing or imitation. While it is not possible to discern precisely what kind of emblems, deriving from Italian or English traditions, Shakespeare saw and exploited in his theater, the use of emblematic language and moralizing mottoes in most of his plays testifies to the specific adoption of an emblematic strategy in the rhetorical construction of his dramas similar to that put forward by Alciati's iconography. In studying some recurrent icons, that better exemplify the emblematic presence in the language of Shakespeare's plays, most notably the topoi of Fortuna, Hercules, Cupid and Death, Mackenzie claims that Alciati's work had a significant influence, not hitherto fully recognized, which the dramatist absorbed directly or from one of the numerous English imitators.

The historical reconstruction and documentation of the cultural practices of Renaissance Venice and Shakespeare's England must take account of the use of two different calendars: the Old Style Julian and the New Style Gregorian systems adopted respectively in England throughout the Renaissance were in sharp contrast with the More Veneto, a unique Venetian calendar, which was in use until the late eighteenth century. In Steve Sohmer's reassessment of several time shifts and apparent incongruities in the internal calendars of The Merchant of Venice and Othello we are given new, challenging interpretations of a number of notorious textual cruces, in light of the controversy between the Julian and Gregorian systems and the More Veneto, as well as a reconsideration of the years
of composition of Shakespeare's two Venetian plays.

Venice as both the center of international trade and cultural appropriation is studied in Bindu Malieckal's essay on the conflicts between multicultural reading and the role of racist ideology and patriarchal authority in Othello. Taking up recent new historicist and postcolonial discourses on miscegenation as a disruptive force in the social context of the play, Malieckal finds a totally subversive impact of the exotic stranger on the apparent stable world of Venice, and a real threat to the concept of national identity and political order as maintained in the hierarchichal idea of Venice as a state of white supremacy. Hence, the Venetian characters in the play project the Islamic Other on Othello and express the English racist preconception of the Moor, the Turk, and Islam which they absorbed from many early modern treatises describing the growing imperialism of the Turks as a menace to Christian and western civilization. The abrupt wave of racism and patriarchal authority in the play, as a defense against the Islamic threat, flows directly from Iago and propagates from him toward the other characters' minds, suggesting the idea of miscegenation as both corruption and sexual perversion and a turn into bestiality.

The use and function of Petrarchism in Twelfth Night, seen as a productively cultural and poetic force in relation to recent modern productions, is the subject of Zara Bruzzi's chapter. While the works of Castiglione, Guazzo, and Alberti were affecting the poetic construction of love of early modern drama, stereotyped features of romantic Petrarchism, such as melancholy, weariness and languor, became at the turn of the century a merely rhetorical convention, something which is ridiculed and laughed at in most Shakespeare's characters. On the other hand, recent productions tend to take the conventional love-sickness topos seriously, a totally convinced and convincing part played by a leading actor. This is the case of the role of Orsino in Branagh's production, where the lover's complaint draws naturally from the elegant imagery of Petrarch's Rime Sparse, or refashions Ovid's and Giordano Bruno's language with greater vigour and credibility. In other modern productions, such as Trevor Nunn's cinematic version, the play regains its pristine combination of contradictory but complementary Petrarchan genres whose poetic tension is only apparently relieved in the comic resolutions of the play's gender issues. Patriarchal preconceptions, as seem to align in the BBC version, have constrained these Petrarchan tensions in the homoeroticism of the text which, instead, Branagh's and Nunn's productions have chosen more freely to articulate.

Machiavellian rhetoric is a typically stylistic feature of the Renaissance king. Donatella Montini coalesces the political language in the speeches of Elizabeth I with the rhetorical strategies of Shakespeare's Henry V. Both are traditionally conjoined by a series of ideological affinities, enhanced by a common policy toward similar historical situations. But much more than that, they have both interpreted their role as a functional blending of spectacularity and political power, as a fusion of state and stage, politics and theatricality. This interaction is indeed an effective Machiavellian strategy which appears manifest in public speeches and in monologues in the political figure of Elizabeth as well as in the fictions character of King Henry. Their common strategy is particularly evident in their playing with the subjects, enacting an intimate relation between them which is manoeuvred to score the highest political effect of collaboration, as well as the evidence of a solid political unity. The 'king in disguise' topos, which is politically exploited by Henry to achieve a stronger political cohesion, seems to follow a common thread in Elizabeth's political image of a divided self which splits into various parts to reach the individual subjects, and suits the Tudor propaganda of the Queen's two bodies, both mortal and divine.

Representation and Misrepresentation
Every theatrical representation of Italy is always, in some way, a misrepresentation, an ideological appropriation of the country's history, traditions, iconology, as well as a semantically over-determined signifier, developing from the English constructedness of the Mediterranean nation. As the heart of romanitas and the classical world, Italy was also regarded as the ancient site of the Roman empire and, as such, the relevant emblematic expression of imperialism and
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While Hopkins's article emphasizes the sophisticated social world, Thomas G. Olsen's discusses the relationship with Italy to question the idea of Englishness and British nationalism. The play revolves around a set of contrasts between the tradition of Italy as a land of courtesy, false shows, and rhetorical ability and the corresponding image of James's propaganda of a perfect ruler, with the idea of a nation characterized by sincerity and plainness in political life. Likewise, the city of the ancient empire is opposed to the idealized British union and patriotic nationalism advanced by James's self-celebrating political philosophy. Drawing upon the ambivalent English representations of Italy as a site of both vices and civilization available at the dawn of early modern England, Shakespeare's construction of Cymbeline abandons all pretense to verisimilitude and historical accuracy to provide a locale of Italianate corruption and Machiavellian deception, where Iachimo's knavery could easily thrive and be considered in the wider Jacobean political context. An historiographic analysis of the interpretations of Roman Britain in the early modern period by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Polydore Vergil, Holinshed and Camden provides a range of differing perspectives through which Shakespeare's Cymbeline has shaped its own ideology in representing the British myth of liberation from Roman imperial hegemony. Ancient theories of climatic determinism in a number of early modern texts constitute a second cultural frame of references between Italy and England by providing a cluster of old beliefs, stereotypes, and preconceptions affecting national characteristics based on facts of longitude and latitude, topography, and even dietary habits. The ideological oppositions between Italy and Britain in Cymbeline, especially in the characters of Iachimo and Posthumus, derive from these orthodoxies and are expressed in climatic terms.

Issues of national identity and cultural difference are essential elements in Shakespeare's political agenda in Cymbeline. Through the play's blatant anachronisms, conflating pre-Christian Britain, ancient Rome, and contemporary Italy, the idea of political imperialism suggests comparisons with James I's political propaganda of a unified nation. Topical references abound and the idea of a return to Britishness through James's discourses of Anglo-Scottish union, as Michael J.
Redmond demonstrates, seems to be the real political focus of this play's cultural meaning. A newly-restored British national identity, replacing established notions of Englishness with a composite term that includes Scotland, emerges as an opposition to a foreign threat, as a defence against the idea of otherness as a disrupting cultural difference, a malign force of deception and misrule. The same ideological significance applies to the menace of the Roman invasion and political aggression which gives rise to the play's issues of patriotic feelings and the contemporary idea of national pride. The celebration of the island's resistance to the foreign invaders depicts a restored political union which alludes to James's political campaign and moves toward sentiments of reconciliation but it also contains a subversive ironic understatement of opposition and dissidence toward the monarch whose name echoes that of Iachimo/Giacoimo, the 'Italian fiend' of the play.

The concept of England and Englishness, placed alongside of and in contrast to the influence exerted by Italian culture and the representation of Italy and Italians in early modern drama, is the subject of J. B. Lethbridge's contribution. Gaunt's self-celebrating description of England in Richard II is comprehensible in its fullest sense in so far as it is set off against the idea of otherness represented by Italy. The English transmutation of Italy in terms of Italian vices, with the fashion of the Machiavellian knavery of plotting and dissimulation and the notion of the Italianate Englishmen by Ascham and other English writers, is the malady Gaunt speaks of, describing Richard's infection which spreads Italian vices over England. The sea borders, isolating the land from foreign influences, are weakened by a series of cultural factors which make them porous, such as renown, traveling, language, religion, and factional strife, straining against the boundaries of nationhood, and infecting the purity of Englishness. Italy's profound influence on England became possible, however, through the cultural receptivity of the English nation, through the country's natural predisposition to the misrepresentation of Italian vices. Italian stereotypes were English constructions used to accommodate English vices in order to suit the theatrical necessities of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists.

**Intertextuality**

The aesthetics of intertextuality, which I have described as "the 'Darwinian' theory of literary heredity by common ancestry" in a recent collection on the issue, has proved especially useful with regard to the study of Anglo-Italian drama of the Renaissance, a genre where poetic imitation was considered a common practice in the creative process of early modern drama. Yet, as Louise George Clubb's chapter in that volume has rightly emphasized, the nature of intertextuality with its manifold perspectives is far from being univocal, and the proposals in the present section testify to the great variety and extent of intertextual investigation.

In treating the Italianate unity of The Taming of the Shrew, Michele Marraapodi offers an argument for establishing Italian rather than English sources of the Sly scenes, seeing these scenes as linked by numerous echoes and cross-references to the rest of the play, and highlighting the ultimately Italianate origin and inspiration of the Shrew as a whole. The construction of the Sly framework suggests the influence of the classical and Italian prologue, whereas the peculiar motif of the trick on Sly seems closer in inspiration to the theme of the beffa in Boccaccio rather than to the often quoted 'Arabian Nights' tradition, or to probable events in Shakespeare's personal experience. Taking the Sly plot as the central focus of discussion, the chapter considers the rest of the play through the Induction itself and with reference to Italian theatergrams in the commedia erudita. While the influence of the New Comedic tradition of both Latin and Italian comedy is particularly evident in such elements as male sexual disguise, pretense, and theatricality, the joke on Sly gives rise in the commedia improvvisa to the duet between Zanni and the Magnifico, which provokes a display of class power at the expense of Sly's misfortunes. In this intertextual perspective, Aretino's Marescalco provides an analogue to the Induction, since it offers a similar aristocratic entertainment, played on a lower-class figure, in the duke's farcical marriage of the misogynistic stablemaster to a transvestite boy. This raises
doubts about Sly's ignorance of the trick played on him, and makes a case for the hypothesis that, like Katherina, he realizes the game and complies with the situation.

Distancing his view of Shakespeare's skepticism from Stanley Cavell's treatment of the subject, and placing it in the wider context of comparative discourses on pragmatism and cultural studies, Lawrence F. Rhu analyzes the Hero and Claudio plot in Much Ado About Nothing, claiming a much broader Ariostan influence in this and other Shakespearean plays, such as Othello and The Winter's Tale, than has hitherto been recognized. The novella of Ginevra and Ariondante in Orlando furioso provides Shakespeare with a vision of reality overshadowed by falsehood and deceit, questioning the nature of truth and its representation. The same discourse applies to the distorted reality of Othello and Leontes, whose radical doubts confound the borders between appearance and reality, exposing the two characters to a crisis of faith, lack of confidence, and mistrust. The madness of Orlando, caused by Angelica's intimate involvement with Medoro, represents an analogue to Shakespeare's characterization of the deceived lover. Hence an investigation into the Ariostan intertext as both a source and analogue to Shakespearean theatergrams in Much Ado, Othello, and The Winter's Tale may serve to detect the common ideological traits and the distinctive cultural differences between the two authors, as well as providing a more comprehensive account of early modern skepticism.

The Commedia dell'arte is another important genre that has affected early modern English drama, as Frances K. Barasch persuasively argues. She considers theater iconography and pictorial intertexts of some theatrical illustrations and scenarios to demonstrate the influence of improvisatory comedies in the construction of Renaissance theatergrams and stock characters. One peculiar English characterization drawn from typically Italian iconography is the Shakespearean heroine which is modeled on the type of the Innamorata, immortalized in paintings of the period. These portray stock elements of the conventional dramatis personae in tableau-like gestures, such as the Innamorata with her right hand on her breast, signifying her purity of heart, Pantalone, the jealous father or husband, the servant Zanni, the Captain and other masks, and suitors, all in their significant costumes and postures. The Innamorata's role, the chaste new heroine of Italian theater, performed with great success by the actress-author Isabella Andreini, is discussed in detailed semiotic terms within a comprehensive account of a group of paintings (Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4), considered as Shakespearean intertexts. The pictures convey the multiplicity of cultural meanings inscribed in recurrent theatergrams that have affected the visual language in a number of Shakespearean plays, from The Taming of the Shrew to The Two Gentlemen of Verona, from As you Like it and A Midsummer Night's Dream to Much Ado About Nothing, exploiting Italian types, ideas, and genres on the English stage.

The great popularity of the Italian actress-author Isabella Andreini, and the impact of her fame and touring company on early modern drama provides material for another compelling study on the cultural appropriation of Italian intertexts. Pamela Brown argues for the influence of female roles, theatergrams, and Venetian habits on the construction of Shakespearean drama, most notably The Merchant and Othello, where an implicit comic structure turns into a tragic outcome. Despite the English dismissal of Italian plays, the notorious hostility to actresses, and the growing wave of anti-Italian sentiments, the most famous of all cortigiane oneste, Andreini, reached a fame unsurpassed even by Shakespeare in his lifetime. Her role as innamorata, combining witty language, comic skills and verbal artfulness with foreignness and a transgressively passionate nature, offered a theatrical counterpart for the roles of Portia and Desdemona. Shakespeare's creative adaptation of these Venetian women constructs their roles as a quasi-divine, wondrous performances, but in The Merchant the dramatist also refashions elements resembling an Italianate plot with the use of tricks and sexual disguises, whereas Othello displays a travesty of Commedia dell'arte portraying an innamorata with multiple suitors, an aging cuckold, and a fantesca, influencing the reception of the play by the early modern audience in light of Isabella Andreini's impact on the popular imagination.
Another well-known and highly influential Italian writer was Pietro Aretino, whose satirical works not only were widely spread throughout Europe but contributed with their subversively outspoken language to the decline of medieval chivalry in England. Taken as a whole, Aretino’s production may well be placed in opposition to the idealized philosophy of Castiglione’s Cortegiano, and Mario Domenichelli’s article convincingly demonstrates that Aretino’s plain style and antirhetorical attitude in his fragments of L’Orlandino and L’Astorfoidea are particularly helpful to understand the collapse of the entire tradition of chivalry, love, honor, war, and renown as expressed in Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida. In sharp contrast to the Ariostan world, Aretino’s early works provide an ironic representation of chivalry. His mock-chivalric, mock-epic style is similar to the language of Shakespeare’s Thersites, which ridicules the Grecian ideals of chivalry and heroism in quite the same terms as Aretino. A common parodic strategy links Shakespeare’s intent in Troilus and Cressida to that of Aretino, whose mock-chivalric production was appreciated for its radicalism in Italy and abroad and, together with Machiavelli’s political discourse, became acclaimed for its moral values and criticism of Italian princely corruption. The approaches of both Italian authors coalesce in an intertextual reading of Troilus and Cressida which takes into account Aretino’s satirical perspective and Machiavelli’s expanded metaphor of the fox-lion beast defining virtue in The Prince to illuminate the Italianate vision of greed and power epitomized in Ulysses’s universal wolf.

Coda

Apart from a wealth of literary models and source material, the cultural appropriation of Italy and Rome in the drama of Shakespeare offers a basis for measuring the imperial claims of the nascent English empire. For Jonathan Hart, the focus on Italianate intrigue, especially in the History plays, constructs a negative typology between England and a conflation of classical Rome and Papal Italy. By drawing on established stereotypes of the “dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome” (Henry VIII, 2.4.239), Shakespeare’s allusive strategies rehearse domestic anxieties about nationhood and colonial expansion. The cultural power of the Italian tradition, disseminated throughout Europe, was not matched by an equivalent economic and political dominance. One of the ironies of this obsession with Italy and Rome is that the actual focus of English colonial competition was with Spain, France, and Holland, nations that received less attention in the works of Shakespeare.

The aim of the present volume is to place Italy and England in the same European historical context in order to emphasize the transition of cultures between the two countries in the early modern and contemporary periods. This approach has opened up a common path of reciprocal appropriations, investing traditional areas of research with fresh critical perspectives. The idea of a translatio imperii as establishing imperial descent, a pattern of dynastic continuity, from ancient Rome to Renaissance London and, more generally, from Italy to early modern England, has turned out to be a process of cultural migration in the largest sense, literary, ideological, and political, a transnational movement which is in no way monistic and unidirectional.

Notes


SHAKESPEARE IN ITALIAN ROMANTICISM:
LITERARY QUERELLES, TRANSLATIONS, AND INTERPRETATIONS

Angela Locatelli
(University di Bergamo)

1. The Shifting Cultural Context of the Italian Ottocento

Shakespeare's reception in Italy in the nineteenth century is an important aspect of Italian Romanticism and an interesting case study in intercultural exchange. In fact, the years between 1800 and 1875 mark the rise of Italy's intense interest in 'the Bard' of Stratford as well as his crowning as a symbol of poetic genius and national pride.

The mainstream culture of the Italian literary Ottocento may be seen as involving a gradual shift from the admiration of French and Neoclassical norms to German and Romantic aesthetics. Romanticism took some time to become fully assimilated in the Italian literary context, partly because of political reasons connected to the French occupation of Milan, but also due to the powerful cultural influence of the French Enlightenment, which continued to direct intellectual élites towards Neoclassical aesthetics and political reform.

The French cultural context must be taken into account when examining the early Italian reception of Shakespeare because in the eighteenth century most Italian literati had read Shakespeare in French translation, and in some instances this practice was also followed throughout the nineteenth century. This indirect form of acquaintance with 'the Bard' no doubt contributed to a partial and/or distorted view of his works, and favoured a general acceptance of Voltaire's judgment on his "barbarian genius". The evaluations expressed by Voltaire between 1728 and 1778, and by Diderot in his article on "genius" in the Encyclopédie, stressed the grandiosity, but at the same time the coarseness, of the English dramatist, and were certainly relevant within the literary querelle on the importance of order versus talent, rules versus spontaneity, and authority versus...