

Richard Paul Roe, the new “Shlieman” of the “Shakespearian question” - His book “*The Shakespeare Guide to Italy – Retracing the Bard’s Unknown Travels, 2011- A fundamental milestone that will forever change our understanding of how to read the Bard – Brief review.*

1. Finally, after John Florio (lawyer himself), Michelangelo Florio (who also was an expert in law and a notary), Baynes (LL.D.), the Supreme Court of the United States, again a lawyer, Richard Paul Roe takes forcefully part in the debate of Shakespeare’s authorship (pardon me for the pride of belonging to that profession), in ways that only lawyers can do!

In this short document we intend to give a brief overview of some issues covered in the book, with the caveat that it, for the beauty of the contents and clarity of arguments, is widely recommended to anyone who wants to have a "real" vision of Italy described in the works of Shakespeare. In particular, **we have also included some of our opinions** (and not of Roe!), in line with **the ‘Florian’ thesis** (as described by Saul Gerevini, “William Shakespeare, ovvero John Florio: un fiorentino alla conquista del mondo, Pilgrim editions, 2008 and Giulia Harding in her studies in this website; see also our article *The Genesis of Hamlet’s soliloquy*, in this website) which we strongly support and **which seems perfectly compliant with Roe’s discoveries.**

It is worth noting that Roe was a Californian lawyer from Pasadena (a juris doctor summa cum laude as well as a recipient of degrees in English literature and European history from the University of California at Berkeley), who passed away on December 1st 2010. He, in addition to the legal profession (practiced for more than forty years), spent more than twenty years traveling the length and breadth of Italy, retracing the unknown trips of the author of the works of Shakespeare, using the texts from Shakespeare’s ten plays set in Italy. He identified the exact location of almost every scene. His chronicle of travel, analysis and findings clearly provide an unprecedented representation of what the Bard the experienced before writing his works. The volume, which is simultaneously the story of an investigation and a documented travel experience report (with many annotations and more than 150 maps, photographs and paintings), is the account of a unique compelling, and ***deeply provocative journey that will forever change our understanding of how to read the Bard ... and irrevocably alter our view of who William Shakespeare really was .***

As an excellent lawyer, as we can read in the Foreword written by his daughter Hilary Roe Metternich, Richard Paul Roe Roe “*knew that tangible evidence was probably the best source to go to the heart of things ...*

My father focused on a question that had puzzled him for years: how could someone clearly as intelligent as William Shakespeare repeatedly say things about Italy in his plays that, as was commonly assumed, were so inaccurate? Was it because Shakespeare never left England and referred, therefore to an Italy he couldn’t possibly know? Could this be true? Dad didn’t think so.

*Armed with his deep knowledge of medieval and Renaissance history and literature, his legal practice at an end, my father set out in his quest: investigating for himself whether Shakespeare’s references to localities on the grounds in his plays set in Italy – which Dad called the Italian Plays – were mistaken at all. As the **astonishing results**¹ of his search across the length and breadth of Italy revealed themselves one by one - - much like an archaeologist excavating artifacts after centuries of buried silence - the only conclusion possible was that the descriptive references uttered by the characters in Shakespeare’s Italian Plays reflected, to a surprising degree, realities on the ground. It never ceased to amaze my father that almost everything mentioned in the Italian Plays can still be visited now - and this after four hundred years. ... His book can be read ... as **a serious forensic revisiting of the accepted believe that the writer of Italian Plays never set foot out of Jolly Old England.** My father’s fundamental goal ... has been to present, in an accessible manner, enough evidence to support the view that whoever wrote the Italian Plays must have, unlike William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon, ventured out of England and onto the Continent. As my father has meticulously demonstrated between the covers of this volume, the only possible conclusion one*

1 Bold is mine.

can come to – throwing one's hands up in the air - is that **whoever wrote the Shakespearian plays set in Italy, plays we have loved for centuries , could only have seen Italy with his very own eyes**".

An erudite introduction follows, which is written by Daniel L. Wright, Director of "The Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre" of the Concordia University (Portland, Oregon).

The Author's Preface points out that "**There is a secret Italy hidden in the plays of Shakespeare. It is an ingeniously described Italy that has neither been recognized, nor even suspected – not in four hundred years – save by a curious few. It is exact; it is detailed; and it is brilliant. It ranges across territories in Lombardy and the Venetian Republic, leaps over the Apennine Mountains to Tuscany, soars southward to span the great island of Sicily; and, not incidentally, makes a visit to a magical dot in the Tyrrhenian Sea, just off the Sicilian shore.**

These descriptions are in challenging detail, and nearly all their locations can still be found in Italy today. It is an Italy that has never before been acknowledged because of a widely accepted dogma that negated its existence, dampening any motive to leave home and go in search of it. Of the few things about Italy that critics admit the playwright got right, they say he must learned them from a source right there in England, especially since the proclaimed playwright, William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, had never been in Italy- a consistently very asserted fact used to explain why the author of the plays set in Italy made repeated mistakes about the country.

In truth, as will be demonstrated, the precise and abundant allusions in those plays to places and things the length of that country are so unique to it that they attest to the playwright's personal travels there. By journeying in Italy today, with the Italian plays in hand, reading them as though they were books of instructions, the playwright's vast erudition about that exciting country and its civilization is revealed.

... No book or article addressing the identity issue of [the author of the works of Shakespeare] has provided a forensic evaluation of the unique references that the author has specifically disclosed in his plays. Indeed, his familiarity with Italy, its sites and sights, specific details, history, geography, unique cultural aspects places and things, practices and propensities, etc. – is quite simply astonishing.

To enhance objectivity, this book shuns all existing arguments about the identity of the playwright, simply calling himt 'the playwright', or 'the author'. Apart from these few conjectures, all matters in this book rely on hard facts and report where these facts are to be found. Pictures, photographs, drawings and maps are provided to illustrate those matters. What then, did the real author of the Italian Plays, whoever he was, know about Italy? What information does he reveal that was not available in the media of his day? And what does his body of unique and personal knowledge disclose about this man of actual travel and a wide-ranging awareness of the affairs of state?

2. (i) Let us begin with Romeo and Juliet, commonly said to be the first play the author wrote². In Act I, Scene i, Benvolio says: "underneath the grove of sycamore, That westward rooteth from the city's side" [Verona].

Nowadays, just outside the western walls of Verona, we find a grove of sycamore trees! Benvolio was right! And Roe had not been a fool with his thesis. Roe points also out (pg. 8) that the play borrowed an old Italian tale already reported by Luigi da Porto [*Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due Nobili Amanti, HThe recently rediscovered history of two Noble Lovers*, which was written about in 1530, according to Melchiori, op.cit. pg. 214] and by Bondello in the IX novel of the second part of his *Novels*; but neither da Porto, who was not from Verona but a noble from Vicenza, nor Bondello made any reference to this grove of sycamore trees. *The trees which are the descendants of Romeo's woodland are still growing where their ascendants grew in Romeo's day. The playwright knew this unnoted and unimportant truth about the lay of the city and he had deliberately dropped an odd little stone about a real grove of trees into the pool of his powerful*

2 Jaca Book Melchiori, *Shakespeare*, 2008, pag. 213, data l'opera fra il 1592 e il 1594.

drama. But concerned with a suspenseful love story no one has noticed this small stone. This is the playwright who is said to be ignorant of Italy (pg. 10) and truth is revealed in trifles.

Furthermore, the Prince Bartolomeo della Scala of Verona (the Shakespearian character was named 'Escalus', a sort of Latin form for della Scala, the powerful della Scala-Scaliger family whose domains came to include Verona itself in 1260), in Act, I, scene i, claims: 'You Capulet, shall go along with me; And Montague, come you this afternoon, To know our father pleasure in this case, *To old Freetown* [Villafranca], *our common judgment place*'. Villafranca, as Roe points out (pag. 13), is an 'old' town on the banks of the Tartaro River, which had been there since the Dark Ages and may have been a village in Roman times; according to Roe (pg. 11) the name Villafranca, Freetown, probably was due to the fact that transactions free of taxation were there possible. Villafranca is about sixteen kilometers from Verona. Italian road maps that shows Villafranca di Verona usually carry an added notation: "Castello Scaligero", "Scaliger Castle". It was built in 1202 and was the central Scaliger seat until 1354; when Bartolomeo ruled in 1302, the Castello Scaligero was already one century old (old in tradition, in power, in protocol). It is nowadays in perfect condition, as well as the market area. In Roe's opinion (pg. 17), the ruling prince is represented as someone who was not just, and violated the ancient protocol of "equal dignity" between the Capulets and the Montagues, favoring the Capulets and banishing Romeo Montague without a hearing.

"Saint Peter's Church" is mentioned by Juliet in Act III, scene v; "*Now, by Saint Peter's church, and Peter too. He [Paris] shall not make me there a joyful bride.*" This Church is mentioned three times in such passage. Roe, after some investigations, reveals that the Church, still existing, is the "Chiesa di San Pietro Incarnario" (pag.32), which was the Capulet parish. The diocesan records reveal that this was, indie a parish Church, fonde in 955. The church, as Roe concludes, is also on the path between Juliet's house andsi trova sulla strada fra la casa di Giulietta (in via Cappello 23, ove è stato aggiunto, per motivi turistici, un antico balcone nel 1930, sebbene il commediografo parli solo della sua 'finestra' – Roe, pag. 25) and the monastic cell of her confessor, in the St. Francis Monastery (San Francesco al Corso), where Friar Laurence married Romeo and Juliet.

(ii) In '*The Two Getlemen of Verona (part 1 of Roe's search)*', just at the beginning of the play (Act I, Scene i), reference is made to the departure of Valentine, by river, from the harbor of Verona to the harbor of Milan. Valentine tells Proteus: "Mio padre mi attende al porto per vedermi imbarcare". Proteus answers: "Possa Milano darti ogni felicità". Therefore they speak about a water travel between Verona and Milan and such travel is further mentioned in the play. Roe discovered in Verona's State Archives a map dated 1713, entitled "Confine dello Stato Veneto coll. Eclesco Lungo il fiume Tartaro", where the Adige, the Tartaro, and the Po were connected by a system of canals. *This was the proof, Roe was searching for* (pg. 61): *the water travel between Verona and Milan – not just for the two young gentlemen in the play – had been once a reality.*

(iii) In '*The Two Getlemen of Verona (part 2 of Roe's search)*', in Act I, Scene iii, Proteus and Panthino, in Verona, three times mention the Emperor who is in Milan. The scholars always stated that Milan was the seat of a Duke and not of an Emperor. Roe (pg. 70) gives evidence that, actually, Charles V, King of Spain, in 1530 was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in Bologna by Pope Clement VII, after the Treaty of Cambrai (August 5th 1529) which had established that Milan, and most of Italy, became a dependency of the Spanish crown. Furthermore, the Emperor, from the evening of 10 March 1533 until the morning of 14 March 1533, really was present in Milan; he arrived by the way of the Porta Romana and received the Duke's oath of fealty. The playwright had included a piece of Milanese history in his play; the imperial presence in Milan.

In Act IV, scene i, which is set in a "Forest fra Milano e Verona", the Second Outlaw speaks about his destiny to "*live as we do in this wilderness*"³, while in the successive Scene ii, Proteus makes reference to "Saint Gregory's Well". Roe (pg. 83) discovers that, during the devastating plague of

3 It is worth nothing, as our comment, that the Second Outlaw had used in the line before an expression ("To make a virtue of necessity") that is the literal translation into English of an Italian typical motto "Fare di necessità virtù".

1575-1576 in Milan, the Lazzaretto, where the plague victims were confined, had a gate facing the Church of San Gregorio and beyond such church was the great “wilderness”. The so called Saint Gregory’s Well was not a water source, but actually was the “whole of mass graves”, the “huge burial pit” for the burial of the plague victims, which was in the San Gregorio churchyard and was also called by the Milanese “Foppone del Lazzaretto”, “a name of the old Milanese dialect⁴, in which foppone means the ‘big pit’” (Roe, pg. 84 and pg. 85, footnote 7).

(iv) *The Taming of the Shrew* contains some passages (see Act I, Scene i) which show that, at the age the play was written, a traveler could proceed from Lombardy onward to Padua by fresh water; Roe identifies three practical routes that were available! (Roe, pg. 90).

At the end of the Scene iv of Act IV, Biondello announces: “My master hath appointed me to go to Saint Luke’s, to bid the pries be ready to come against you come with your appendix”. Roe has photographed the little Saint Luke’s Church, whose address (via Venti Settembre 22) he found at the diocesan office; Saint Luke’s origins are medieval, built where it stands, well before 1350, just inside Padua’s medieval wall (Roe, pg.100-101). The façade of the Church was freshened up and Roe has also found a Map of Padua in the very early 13th century showing the little parish church of Saint Luke (pg. 102). Roe, making his way through the close Porta S.G. Barbarigo (an arched opening in the medieval wall), found himself in the setting of Act I, Scene I; the entire layout before his staring eyes possessed all the elements that exactly fit the describing dialogues in that opening scene (a waterway, a landing place where a boat could tie up – now a narrow ledge -, a bridge across that waterway, a street with Saint Luke’s Church nearby, a wide space with a cluster of buildings). In Act V, Scene i, reference is also made to Bergamo (Roe, pg. 112).

4 And we very well know how Michelangelo Florio was **the main keen collector of the Italian dialects, expressions and mottos of his age** and (in a continuous dispute with Bembo’ opinion, aimed at limiting the Italian language to the sole words used by Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarca, the three crowns of the Italian literature; and such opinion was at the basis of Crusca’ dictionary of the Italian language, which was published in 1612, one year after the second dictionary of John Florio, dated 1611; Florio’s “*Italian-English dictionary was the first to fully take into account not only Dante Petrarca and Boccaccio but also contemporary Italian literature, the first to record a wealth of dialectal words and forms, and had preserved both in Italian and in English, a ‘colloquial stratum of discourse which so frequently never reaches the printed page’*”- Manfred Pfister, *Inglese Italianato-Italiano Anglizzato: John Florio, in Renaissance Go-Betweens. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Andreas Hofele - Werner von Koppenfels, Berlin, New York, 2005, pg. 44, where further references; see also § 11 of my article *The Genesis of Hamlet’s soliloquy*, in this website). In the epistle dedicatorie of his dictionary dated 1598, John Florio himself said: “*How shall we, naie how may we ayme at the Venetian, at the Romane, at the Lombard, at the Neapolitane, at so manie, and so much differing Dialects, and Idiornes, as be used and spoken in Italie, besides the Florentine?*”. Indeed, Florio’s dictionary not only covers several centuries of Italian linguistic practice, but includes many dialects and dialectal words, since Florio “*recognized the necessity of supplementing Florentine usage through the incorporation of Venetian, Roman, Lombard and Neapolitan voices*”! (see Michael Wyatt, *Giordano Bruno’s Infinite Worlds in John Florio’s World of Words, in Giordano Bruno Philosopher of the renaissance*, edited by Hilary Gatty, 2002, pg. 194). Michelangelo Florio surely knew this dialectal expression *foppone*, which was translated, in the play, into the intriguing English word “well”; Michelangelo had collected the Italian expressions, dialectal words and mottos in his *Secondi Frutti* (published, in Italian language, in Italy in 1549 – see my article *The Genesis*, cit, §7.18) and, previously, in his *Primi Frutti* (in Italian language); they were translated into English by his son John Florio and it is worth nothing, that - according to the paragraph of the entry “Shakespeare”, written by Professor Thomas Spencer Baynes in the “famous” Ninth Edition (“the Scholar’s Edition” “for its high intellectual standards”), entitled “Shakespeare goes to London (cont.). Shakespeare Continues his Education. His Connection with Florio” - “Shakespeare was also familiar with Florio’s earlier works, his First Fruits and Second Fruits”, manuals for the study of Italian, with parallel columns of Italian and English. To such purpose, a unique example is given, *since these examples being numerous and minute cannot be given here*”. This “paragraph” of the Ninth Edition is also freely available in the official website of the Encyclopaedia <http://www.1902encyclopedia.com/S/SHA/william-shakespeare-31.html>, under the title “*Shakespeare goes to London (cont.). Shakespeare Continues his Education. His connection with Florio*”. The quotations from John Florio’s *Fruits* are so many in the works of Shakespeare that they could not be entirely mentioned by Baynes in his entry “Shakespeare”. See also, with reference to such entry, the § 7.17 of my cited article *The Genesis*, in this website.

(v) In *The Merchant of Venice* (part 1 of *Roe's search*) the Rialto is mentioned by name five different times in the play (but none of its scenes is set there) and was the financial district of the city (Roe, pg. 123); the Rialto has often been confused with the bridge (Ponte di Rialto) which connects the Rialto district to the other side of the city. Rialto was the place where the city's nobles, merchants, and financiers gathered each weekday.

The name 'Ghetto' have never been used by the playwright, while we encounter the cloistered Jewish District of Venice (Roe, pg. 130). In particular, reference is made to the "Penthouse" where the Jewish Shylock lived: "This is the *penthouse* under which Lorenzo Desired us make a stand"(Act II, Scene vi). Roe clarifies that (according to the Eleventh Edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*) a "penthouse" is a small structure (from the Middle English form *pentis* derived from the Latin verb *appendere*; we can add that the word has the same root of the word *appendix*). Roe better identifies the meaning of "pentis" according to the usage of this word in 1625, on the basis of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, grounded on a Manchester Court Leet Record concerning "Erecting certain posts and covering them with large pentises". Roe has discovered and photographed in the Ghetto of Venice such penthouse, supported on three columns (the only structure in the Ghetto of this kind). Another description of the playwright (subtly woven into the story of his play), which highlights with startling precision an obscure place in Italy!

(vi) In *The Merchant of Venice* (part 1 of *Roe's search*) Bassanio makes reference to "Belmont" (Act I, Scene i) as follows: "*In Belmont is a lady richly left; And she is fair, and, fairer than that word, Of wondrous virtues*". In the play, Belmont is a country villa, and as is clear from the words of the playwright's characters, located somewhere not too far from the Venetian Lagoon. It is one of those classic villas, unfortified and standing in full view and impressive, on the Venetian mainland (Roe, pg. 142-143). In Act III, Scene iv, the playwright gives us further clues about the location of Belmont. Balthazar (according to Portia's instructions) has to use "*all th'endeavour of a man in speed to Padua*" where he will give Bellario a letter and will receive some "*notes and garments*" "*Unto the Tranect, to the common ferry Which trades to Venice ...*." Roe finds the word "Tranect" (from the Italian "traghetto") in Florio's *World of Words* (1598), with the meaning of "ferry" (Roe, pg.148).

We take the opportunity to explain **some of our very humble opinions** on the issue. Indeed Roe has discarded this conjecture as spurious, since the Play was written (the tardy dating for *The Merchant* is 1596-1597) before John Florio's dictionary, which was published in 1598. Such conjecture would have not been probably so easily discarded, if Roe have had the chance to take a very detailed particular of John Florio's life into account; indeed, in 1591 John Florio announced (in the epistle to the Reader of his *Second Fruits*) that "*I will shortly send into the world an exquisite Italian and English dictionary, and a compendious Grammar*"; furthermore, the idea (the light) to prepare such dictionary Italian-English was in John Florio's mind from 1577, when he saw a draft of an Italian dictionary prepared by his father Michelangelo (see epistle to the reader of Florio's dictionary dated 1598, and Tassinari, Shakespeare? E' il nome d'arte di John Florio p.127 as well as John Florio *The man who was Shakespeare*, p.103). We believe that Michelangelo and John were surely able (also in 1596) to write the word "Tranect" in the meaning of a "ferry". Furthermore, we point out that, according to Devoto -Oli (*Dizionario etimologico*, Firenze, 1968) the word "traghetto" has some affinities with the Latin verb "traiectare (which has the same root of the English word "trajectory") as well as with the latin verbs "transitare" and "trans-eo", which have the same root of the English noun "transit" and verb "to transit". In turn, "trans-eo" has some affinities with the English word "go-between" (to join two different locations, places, worlds, minds); "traghettatore" and "go-between" are connected by Montini (*John/Giovanni: Florio mezzano e intercessore della lingua italiana*, in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, VI, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008, pg. 47)⁵. In any case, Michelangelo Florio had preached the Gospel

5 Pfister (*Inglese Italianato-Italiano Anglizzato: John Florio*, in *Renaissance Go-Betweens. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, edito da Andreas Hofele, Berlin, New York, 2005, pg. 34) explains that the word "go-between" was firstly introduced by Shakespeare (in Act II, Scene ii, 232-233 of his *Merry Wives of Windsor*) and afterwards by John Florio (in his *Queen Anna's New World of Words* -1611-, where the expression 'go-between' [goeth between] is also linked to the Italian words *mediatore*, *mezzano*, *intercessore* (mediator, intermediary, intercessor).

in Venice, according to his *Apologia* (his Italian biography, published in 1557 – see also Yates, John Florio, 1934-2010, pg. 2 onwards) at page 13.

But, after this digression, let us come back to our excellent Roe!

According to Roe (pg. 151), the starting point of such ferry is a place called Fusina, also considering the calculation of miles (twenty) that are necessary, in the words of Portia, to arrive in Venice (at the very end of Act III, Scene iv). According to Roe (p. 152), it would be "Villa Foscari" on the Brenta Canal (also called Villa Malcontenta, near the homonymous village), one of the most famous Palladian villas, built circa 1560, with frescoes reminiscent of Giulio Romano's paintings; Henry III of France was hosted there in 1574 and it is the current seat of the University Ca 'Foscari in Venice.

(vii) The Othello, according to Roe (p. 159) would take cues from a from a collection of stories by John the Baptist said Geraldini Cinthio, published in 1565, the *Hecatommithi* (one of the books read by Florio for his dictionary of 1611). Roe (p. 160) points out that, according to the commentary "The Riverside Shakespeare", the author of Othello (also taking into account the astonishing number of the same coincident verbs used in Cinthio's play) should have read the original Cinthio's Italian works and not possible English versions (scholars say that there were, but lost). **In short, the playwright must be able to read Italian!**

Moreover, all that the playwright describes about Venice is not contained in the work of Cinthio.

The playwright also uses Spanish words ("Diablo" in Act II, Scene iii), while Iago is the Italian correspondent of James.

Roe says that in Act I, scene i, Iago refers to the "gown", Brabantio's "Senatorial gown". The Senatorial gown was the dress that all Senators in Venice were required to wear in public. The gown was worn by the Senators in the streets of Venice, so that people was aware of the continuous presence of their rulers. This practice was entirely foreign to England and the rest of Europe. It is interesting to ponder how **the author could compose such a precise line in his play about a Venetian Senator's gown unless he had personally seen its particularity**. In addition, Roderigo refers to the Venetian **gondoliers**, when it says that Desdemona might have in the night, as "guard ... a gondolier".

Iago, in turn, says that to find the Moor, Roderigo must "Lead the Sagittary raised to the search." But what is the Sagittary? Roe explains that the author intended to refer to Frezzeria, the street in Venice, where manufacturers of arrows had their shops: Frezzeria was its name in Italian, Sagittarius ("vicus sagittarius", according to De Situ Urbis Venetae cited by Violet M. Jeffery, Shakespeare's Venice 1932, *Modern Language Review*, Vol XXVII) in Latin and Sagittary in English.

In Act I, Scene iii, Brabantio turns to Desdemona to say: "God be with you ... For your sake, jewel, I am glad at soul I have no other child, For thy escape would teach me tyranny to hang clogs on them". Wooden clogs (zoccoli in Italian language) were a shoe that elevated the woman who wore them. They have been introduced in the fourteenth century in Venice because of the mud and puddles on many streets and squares that were not paved, including Piazza S. Mark (Roe, p. 173). The clogs grew to reach absurd heights and continued to be worn until the seventeenth century, becoming an element of ostentatious wealth. More women were rich, the higher were their clogs, some so high that the ladies could not walk alone without placing their hands on the shoulders or heads of their servants. Roe noted that examples of these zoccoli can be seen today in the Museo Correr in Venice. Clogs, high 18 and even 20 inches (one inch is equal to 2.54 cm.) were not unusual.

(Viii) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in Athens (see Act I, Scene i), and reference is made to (at the end of Act I, Scene ii) a meeting " **At the Duke's Oak.** "

All scholars had always thought that this could be an oak tree just outside Athens.

Through untold research, Roe succeeded in evidencing that all the traditional interpretations of the sites are completely wrong.

His conviction is that the work is set, in fact, in an Italian environment and in particular in Sabbioneta, a town in the south-east of Mantua and 40 km away from it, which was entirely built when Vespasian Gonzaga Colonna, a man of great erudition, was Duke of Mantua.

1) It was called Little Athens for his immediate reputation as hospitable gathering place for scholars and intellectuals.

2) The Oak Duke was called the Porta della Vittoria (which still exists in perfect condition) which for many years was the only passageway of Sabbioneta. It was called *La Quercia del Duca* because it opened onto an oak forest, which in the sixteenth century was the Duke's hunting ground. The literal English translation is just "the Duke's Oak."

3) Roe points out that the title of Duke derives from the Latin word "dux" (leader, chief). No Duke existed in Greece, while Italy was full of Renaissance dukes!

4) At the end of Act IV, Scene i, a "temple" is mentioned, where a wedding will be celebrated. Roe (p. 185) notes that this word was spelled with a capitalized "T" in the editions of Shakespeare's First Folio and Quarto. In Sabbioneta, the Temple was the Chiesa dell'Incoronata (The Church of the Corwned Virgin).

Just by "cracking the codes" of three small elements - The Little Athens, The Duke's Oak and the Temple - it is certain that the playwright visited Sabbioneta. Through these important discoveries, Roe has come upon yet another Italian setting for a Shakespearian play; and it was in Italy and not Greece, as the world had supposed.

From now on, thanks to Roe, **Sabbioneta can boast of being the place where *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the very celebrated Shakespearian play, was set!**

(ix) *All's well that ends well* is set, for a part, in Florence. At the end of Act II, Scene iii, Bertrand says: "I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her." What are these "Tuscan wars"? Roe (p. 195) makes clear that these are the wars between Florence and Siena, which ended in April 1555, when Siena had been completely subdued by Florence, under the Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. The playwright made reference to this final war of 1555. The events of that war, according to Roe (p. 197), were also treated by Boccaccio in his Decameron (on whose English translation [we note], published anonymously in 1620, John Florio was working); according to Roe, the playwright could take account of this work of Boccaccio, because his play was not published and printed prior to its inclusion in the First Folio of 1623.

At the beginning of Act III, Scene v, the Widow said: "Nay, as, for If They do approach the city, We shall lose all the sight." Again the "city" in the First Folio is written with the capital letter "C" ("City"), since in Florence the City is an area north of the Arno, which was once the Roman colony of Florentia, surrounded by walls.

Soon after, the Widow answers to Elena (who asked where the accommodation of pilgrims were): **"At the Saint Francis here, beside the port."** The Port of Florence, in Roman times, was an area within the walls of the City and the Arno; its principal purpose were the deliveries of iron, which was shipped from mines in the island of Elba; in the Middle Ages, the most important traffic had become that of the raw wool. The name of Carraia Bridge (the Bridge of the Carts, where the carts passed), where the widow waits, talks about the great activity of this City. So vital was the Port of Florence that the area continued to be called the port even when the vessels could no longer navigate the river to Florence (Roe, p. 208). The Widow provides a reference on where the accommodation of pilgrims was; in summarily referring to "At Saint Francis", the Widow implicitly referred to "At the sign of S. Francis". "The Port" was the ancient name of Piazza Ognissanti, All Saints' Square (according to Professor Corti of Florence) near the harbor; there is the Chiesa di Ognissanti (Church of All Saints), which belongs to the Franciscans since 1561.

Well, a few meters past the corner of All Saints Square, just past the walls of the Franciscan monastery, there is a simple building with a large doorway and above it, **"the symbol of Saint Francis"** (p. 210): a cross at the top and below it two crossed arms. In the foreground the bare arm of Christ shows the wounds of his crucifixion. Behind the arm of Christ, there is the arm (covered

by the sleeve of his Franciscan habit) and the hand of Saint Francis showing the stigmata. **Once again, the playwright was right.**

At this point we cannot refrain from pointing out that **in our opinion (and not in Roe's opinion!), Michelangelo Florio was the best person to know this little "symbol", he who was probably Florentine and certainly had been a Franciscan friar!**

(x) *Much Ado about nothing* is set in Messina, and drew inspiration from (Roe, p. 218) the *Novels* of Matteo Bandello (which- we precise - are among the books read by John Florio and precisely listed in his dictionary of 1611).

The opening scene of the play is set in front of the Governor's Palace, which is now the Royal Palace, which was in front of a square once called Piazza del Governolo, "Square Governolo".

The 1908 earthquake, which killed 84 000 people, has almost completely destroyed the city, so almost none of the places alluded to in the play they currently exist.

At the end of Act III, Scene iii, Borachio says that Claudius " would meet her [Hero, daughter of Lionato, Governor of Messina], as he was appointed, next morning at the temple ". Again, in the First Folio and the Quarto, the "temple" is spelled with a capitalized "T", "the Temple". This is the Doric Temple, built by the Greeks in 98 BC, called the "Temple of Hercules Manticolo". When the early Christians took possession of the Temple, it became a parish dedicated to St. Michael. Some centuries later, Florentine bankers and merchants were doing business in Messina, and they settled near the church, which was renamed John the Baptist, the favorite saint for the Florentines, who were baptized in the Baptistery of John the Baptist in Florence. In 1572, Prince Marco Antonio Colonna, commander of the papal forces at the Battle of Lepanto, was appointed Viceroy of Sicily, and declared that the Temple was comparable to the Pantheon in Rome. In 1580, it was officially renamed as "The Temple of San Giovanni Battista detto dei Fiorentini."

Hero, wrongly accused by Claudius, pretends to be dead and Friar Francis (Act IV, Scene i) advises Lionato to flaunt her death: "And on your family's old monument Hang mournful epitaphs." Roe (p. 229) notes that, while in England there is the custom of burying the dead in individual graves, in Italy there was the tradition of the family tomb or monument, where all family members found their eternal rest together. The Monumental Cemetery of Messina is filled with rows and rows of impressive and ancient family monuments.

Moreover, Roe (p. 231) points out that, at the end of Act IV, Scene I, Beatrix uses a typical Sicilian expression translated into English: "ti manciu 'u core" "I will eat your heart".

Don Giovanni is called bastard three times. He was the illegitimate son of Charles V and became famous as the commander of the fleet of the "Holy League" who defeated the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. He never had a throne, unlike his brother Philip II. **His misconduct** (he slanders Hero) **seems to be justified, in the play, from his being an illegitimate** (Roe, p. 239) and Roe repeatedly wonders why the playwright has three times called Don Giovanni "bastard".

In our opinion, this is something that makes you think. Michelangelo Florio had generated John outside of the holy marriage, but marriage occurred and John could not be surely considered a "bastard". However, the fate of an illegitimate child seems like something that profoundly affects the author (the sensitivity of Michelangelo, in our view); in other words, **what would the life of John have been if Michelangelo had not married the mother of him? What resentment John would have brooded? Thoughts and emotions are real! This is not a literary fiction.**⁶ In *The Merchant of Venice* (Act III, Scene v) it is claimed, on the same theme, echoing statements in the Bible, that: "Sins of the father are to be laid upon the children".

⁶ Santi Paladino, *Un italiano autore delle opere Shakespeariane* (published by Gastaldi, Milan, 1955, pg. 59), declares that he did not know "the content of the such play in five acts, with scenes in Messina, "*Tantu trafficu pe 'nenti*"; but the title, referred to in the chronicles of the time is perfectly equivalent to "*Much Ado About Nothing*", the famous work of Shakespeare, published in the English language in 1600, about fifty years later. "Indeed, Michelangelo Florio travelled almost over all Italy and before going to Greece (according to Paladino) he may well have been in Messina where he may have written a comedy with such a Shakespearean title" (Gerevini, *William Shakespeare, ovvero John Florio: un fiorentino alla conquista del mondo*, Pilgrim editions, 2008, pg.336).

(xi) *The Winter's Tale* contains the description of scenes near the Royal Palace, the Palace of the Normans in Palermo. In Act II, Scene i, reference is also made to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (Roe, p. 252). In Act II, Scene iii, reference is made to the return of Cleomenes and Dion to Sicily from Delphi in 23 days. Roe (p. 254) notes that the precise number of days (according to Roe, 10 days of voyage, 3 days in Delphi, another 10 days to return) **makes us confident that the playwright knew this route, having he himself followed the same course.**⁷

Roe (pp. 255-256) states that, unlike the English who sailed offshore day and night with the help of the magnet and the North Star, Italian sailors (as Fernand Braudel points out, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, University of California Press, 1966) applied the technique of 'costeggiamento', sailing near the coast, and ate and slept at night, avoiding the open sea. At the beginning of Act III, Scene i, Cleomenes and Dion arrived in Sicily and claimed: "The climate's delicate, the air most sweet, Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing The common praise it bears ". This is the **Temple of Segesta**, one of the finest examples of Doric architecture still existing among the best preserved temples in Italy, dated to the late 5th century before Christ (Roe, p. 260)."

In Act IV, Scene ii, Roe emphasizes that it is finally given the "**proof of Perdita's identity**". Indeed, the identity of Perdita (daughter of Leontes and Hermione) is unveiled; she actually was a princess who was found by some shepherds when she was a child. The playwright says: " there is **such unity in the proofs**. The mantle of Queen ...; her jewel about the neck of it; the letters; the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother...." (the terminology is proper of lawyers, such as the two Florios were!).

In our opinion, the Florio (especially the "bilingual John Florio"⁸) had fun here to let **further trace of their Italianism, with a play of words intelligible only to those who know both English and Italian.**

The Italian word "Perdita" (the name given to the character by the playwright) means in English "Loss". The Italian language does not contemplate the "Saxon genitive" and the Italian expression "l'identità di Perdita" can be translated into English as "the identity of Loss", which, with the Saxon genitive, becomes "Loss's identity", similar to "**Loss of identity** ", " Identity crisis "

This is a "pun", a "word game", which is "bilingual", since it presumes a bilingual person to be understood,. It is similar to the private information that Renaissance painters gave through their paintings (retracting, just like Luca Signorelli did in the cathedral of Orvieto, the features of his beautiful and faithless wife over a devil in hell). Three are the consequences of this **surprising finding**: (i) the playwright wants to warn the public that there is evidence (in Act V, Scene ii, we find the words "proof" and "evidence") of a loss of identity; **the writer is not he who appears!** (ii) If you want to fully understand the playwright, you must be bilingual and have a bilingual approach;(iii) with this approach, many other "bilingual puns" could be discovered. The playwright was definitely very fun in writing this passage, knowing that the British public (as the same Roe

7 We note that, according to Santi Paladino ("Un italiano autore delle opere shakespeariane", Gastaldi editore, Milano, 1955, pg. 19), Michelangelo Florio, "At a very early age he was in Athens giving lessons on Greek-Roman history, on which he was a great expert." Roe's findings might support Michelangelo's travels in Greece.

8 John was defined "Bilingual FLORIO" in one of the dedicatory poems (published in the opening of his *First Fruits*), who was composed by an anonymous poet R.H. "To FLORIO, his First Fruits"; see Manfred Pfister *Inglese Italianato-Italiano Anglizzato: John Florio*, in *Renaissance Go-Betweens. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Andreas Hofele - Werner von Koppenfels, Berlin, New York, 2005, pg. 36, footnote 17 and Donatella Montini, *John/Giovanni: Florio mezzano e intecessore della lingua italiana*, in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, VI, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008, pg. 47.

does) would have discussed on the Perdita's identity, which, as already noted, means **Loss's identity!**

(xii) *The Tempest* describes the arrival in the island (identified by Roe, as Vulcano in the Aeolian Islands) of Prospero and Miranda from Milan. Roe (p. 268) notes that the only credible route would have begun on the Arno in Florence. According to Roe, speaking of the Duke of Milan would have avoided disastrous consequences; in fact, the Duke Prospero is described with features too similar to the Grand Duke Francesco I de 'Medici. In Act I, scene ii, Prospero says: "The government I cast upon my brother And to my state grew stranger, being transported And rapt in secret studies." The Grand Duke is described by Roe as someone who "devoted all his time to secret arts", in addition to his love for Bianca Capello, firstly lover and later wife (Roe, p. 277). The Grand Duke was replaced by his brother Ferdinand I.

In Act II, Scene i, we know that the king Alonso traveled from Tunis to Naples. He **did the exact same path of Aeneas** from Carthage (near Tunis) to Cumae (near Naples), passing to Trapani, the Aeolian Islands and then along the Calabria and Campania.

It is not doubtful that Vulcano is the island where Miranda and Prospero arrived. In Act I, Scene ii, the playwright describes in incontrovertible way the Vulcano's "**fumaroles**": "The sky, it seems, would power down stinking pitch, But the sea, mounting the th welkin's cheek, Dashes to fire out" " In Act IV, Scene i, the author describes the pools of sulphurous of the vulcan: "I left them I the filthy-mantled pool beyond your cell, There dancing up to the chins, that the foul lake O'erstunk their feet."

In Act I, Scene ii, Ariel sings: "Come unto these **yellow sands**"; Roe (p. 283) points out that **the playwright had seen this marvel**.

In Act II, Scene ii, Caliban describes the spiny urchins (hedgeogs) who haunt the island of Vulcano. In Act I, Scene ii, Caliban speaks about the "berries" that are on the island. These are the mulberries (gelso, in the Italian) for the production of silk, necessary for the propagation of silkworms; they feed on soft mulberry leaves. In Vulcano still exists the locality of La Contrada del Gelso, The Mulberry District (Roe, p. 286).

Caliban is the son of a witch, Sycorax, blue-eyed (as Bianca Capello, Roe suggests, p. 288). According to Roe, Caliban means, in Catalan, Outcast, or Pariah. Even the name Ariel seems to derive from the Catalan (spirit of air and water, usually malignant)⁹.

Moreover, the deep bay (which is described by Ariel in Act I, Scene ii), would be the Horse Grotto(Grotta del Cavallo).

Again, in Act I, Scene ii, reference is made to Bermuda, but it would be a play on words aimed at referring to the slum of London "Bermoothes", where there were hidden prostitution and distilleries ("stills").

In the light of all the above, Roe's conclusion (p. 292) is that **there would be no place in the world, different from the island of Vulcano, which possesses the unique combination of so many features described in The Tempest** (fumaroles, yellow sands, the hot mud pools, the mulberry trees, the spiny hedgehogs and -as described in Act II, Scene ii - the scamels).

From now on, thanks to Roe, **Vulcano can boast of being the place where *The Tempest*, one of the most intriguing Shakespearian plays, was set!**

3. Everything was described in the play by the playwright, according to Roe, is really seen, touched, felt and smelled by a visit to this one magical island.

⁹ Tall these references to the Spanish language (already mentioned in this brief article) may, in our view, reinforce the argument by Lamberto Tassinari (*Shakespeare? E' il nome d'arte di John Florio*, 2008, pag. 18), who states that the origins of John Florio's family are in "that earthquake human, cultural and intellectual which had been the *expulsion of the Jews from Catholic Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492* ... It is almost certain that in this period Michel Angelo Florio's family members started wandering and came to Italy together with thousands of other Jewish families and, *at first, perhaps to Sicily* and then to other regions, such as Tuscany, Veneto and Lombardy".

In the play the Roman legends of Aeneas, the place, the history, the events of that time are included; Italy (country, history and current events) is the font of the playwright's inspiration.

Roe says that its purpose was to counter the views that the descriptions of the Italian Plays were not true in reality; **none had understood such descriptions for what they really were.**

No scholar had ever gone in the "field", following the itinerary of the places described by the playwright in the Italian Plays! Nobody understood what he read! The places, customs, history who were behind the descriptions of Italy! **None fully understood what he read!**

The result is that **the playwright has described with absolute accuracy, details not directly knowable to those who had not seen the places and lived with the inhabitants of those places.**

In our view, we can confirm that **only Michelangelo Florio was able to perfectly know these places of Italy, as he himself describes in his Apology (his autobiography in Italian language).**

In fact, **only considering the excerpts of the Apology** of Michelangelo Florio (which contains his autobiography; see Yates, p. 3 and 4, footnote 1 and p. 7-10), **cited by Yates** in her study on John Florio in 1934 (where the first chapter is entirely devoted to Michelangelo) and **known to me**, it results as follows. Michelangelo, in his capacity as a Franciscan preacher (under the name of Friar Paul Anthony), preached in **Florence** (Apology, p. 72-73, Yates, op.cit. P. 2 and 3, footnote 3), **Faenza, Padua, Rome, Venice and Naples** (Apology, p.13 and Yates, op.cit., p. 2 and 3, footnote 3 and p. 10, footnote 1). Then, "dismissed the the Franciscan habit", after his escape from the prison of Tor di Nona in Rome on May 4th, 1550, he was in **Abruzzo, Naples, Puglia, Venice, Mantua, Brescia, Bergamo, Milan, Pavia and Casal Monferrato** (Apology, pagg.76-77, and Yates, op.cit., page 4, footnote 4).

It should also be stressed, in conclusion, that from this astonishing roundup of Roe's "discoveries" many references emerge to churches, monasteries and symbols of the Franciscans; references that were obviously well aware of the (already) Franciscan friar Michelangelo. Indeed, Friars play "*an odd and unusual role in Shakespearian theatre*" (Tassinari, Shakespeare? pg. 36, John Florio, pg. 29). We need only mention the epilogue of "Romeo and Juliet", which features not one but two Franciscan Friars. Friar Laurence says, at the end of the drama: "Then gave I her,-so tutor'd by my art,- A sleeping potion; which so took effect As I intended, for it wrought on her The form of death: meantime I writ to Romeo That he should hither come as this dire night, To help to take her from her borrow'd grave, Being the time the potion's force should cease. But he which bore my letter, Friar John, Was stay'd by accident". (Act V, scene iii, 264-72). Another friar, Friar Francis, appears (as mentioned) in "Much Ado About Nothing".

In our view, the Italianism of the playwright from this book clearly emerges, since the amount of information gathered by the author clearly presumed a very thorough knowledge of cities, their history, customs, places!

Incidentally, we note that **some of these wonderful places**, according to cultural or natural criteria, are **inscribed by UNESCO among the World Heritage Sites** (**City of Verona** in 2000, **Sabbioneta** in 2008, **Venice and the lagoon** in 1987, **Historic Centre of Florence** in 1982, the **Aeolian Islands** in 2005)¹⁰.

¹⁰ To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of **outstanding universal value** and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria (six cultural and four natural criteria); see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

As for **Sabbioneta**, it was inscribed together with Mantua in 2008 (see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1287>); in the official justifications of such inscription you find the following: "Mantua and Sabbioneta offer exceptional testimonies to the urban, architectural and artistic realizations of the Renaissance, linked through the visions and actions of the ruling Gonzaga family. Mantua, a town whose traces stem from the Roman period, was renovated in the 15th and 16th centuries - including hydrological engineering, urban and architectural works. The participation of renowned architects like Leon Battista Alberti and **Giulio Romano** [the only Renaissance artist ever named by the playwright, in *The Winter's Tale*, Act V, Scene ii - see Roe, pg.79] and painters like Andrea Mantegna, makes Mantua a prominent capital of the Renaissance. **Sabbioneta represents the construction of an entirely new town according to the modern, functional vision of the Renaissance.** The defensive walls, grid pattern of streets, role of public spaces and monuments all make Sabbioneta **one of the best examples of ideal cities built in Europe, with an influence over urbanism and architecture in and outside the Continent.** The properties represent two significant stages of territorial planning and urban interventions undertaken by the Gonzagas in their domains.

That's all I want to say, except that Roe's work represents **a new way to approach the work of Shakespeare**, credible and objective, aimed at revealing the reality about the work of Shakespeare, which is addressed to all men in the world.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that Roe's findings are comparable, with regard to the 'Shakespearian question' to what were the "Shlieman's" findings for the 'Homeric question'. **Roe appears as the novel "Shlieman" of the "Shakespearian question"!**

Even for the literary works of Homer, it was believed that they contained references that were just a figment of the imagination of a poet.

Even for the works of Shakespeare, it was similarly believed that Italy, as described by an English poet who had never left England, was the mere result of the imagination of an artist.

In both cases, following strict empirical methods, it has shown **the precise historical reality of the places described** by Homer and by the playwright of the Shakespearian Italian Plays

Similarly to the findings of Shlieman related to the Homeric poems, even those of Roe opened a new chapter in research on the historical truth of the works of Shakespeare.

Un "fan" di Michelangelo e John Florio,
Massimo Oro

Nobili

Criterion (ii): Mantua and Sabbioneta are exceptional witnesses to the interchange of human values of the Renaissance culture. They illustrate the two main forms of Renaissance town planning: **the newly founded town, based on the concept of ideal city planning**, and the transformed existing town. Their importance relates also to architecture, technology and monumental art. The properties have played a prominent role in the diffusion of the Renaissance culture in and outside Europe.

Criterion (iii): Mantua and Sabbioneta are exceptional testimonies to a particular civilization during a specific period of history, with reflections on urbanism, architecture and fine arts. The ideals of the Renaissance, fostered by the Gonzaga family, are present in their urban morphology and architecture, their functional systems and traditional productive activities, which have mostly been preserved over time".

As for the **Aeolian Islands** see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/908> . The justification of their inscription is based on Criterion (viii): "The islands' volcanic landforms represent classic features in the continuing study of volcanology world-wide. With their scientific study from at least the 18th Century, the islands have provided two of the types of eruptions (Vulcanian and Strombolian) to volcanology and geology textbooks and so have featured prominently in the education of all geoscientists for over 200 years. They continue to provide a rich field for volcanological studies of on-going geological processes in the development of landforms".

As for **Venice and the lagoon**, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/394>

As for **City of Verona**, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/797>

As for **Historic Centre of Florence**, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/174>