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The English Ambivalent Attitude towards Italy in the Renaissance:
The Case of Gascoigne's *Supposes*

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Contents

Introduction	5
1 Historical and social context of sixteenth-century England	7
1.1 Anglo-Italian contacts in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period	7
1.2 Negative perceptions of Italy in England	14
1.3 The cultural significance of Italy in England	19
2 George Gascoigne's <i>Supposes</i>	25
2.1 Life of George Gascoigne	25
2.2 <i>Supposes</i> – a translation of Ariosto's <i>I Suppositi</i>	30
3 <i>Supposes</i> as source for <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	39
3.1 Shakespeare's sources for <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	39
3.2 <i>Supposes</i> in <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	45
Conclusion	50

Introduction

Premodern Anglo-Italian contacts provided cultural, political and economic exchange between England and Italy, whose interactions intensified significantly during the sixteenth century. The Elizabethan Era favored the emergence of a biased perception of Italy as a culturally rich, as well as ‘exotic’ and dissolute nation. Therefore, Italy was the target of great criticism by English writers, such as Roger Ascham, and was exploited by a number of authors of the English Renaissance, as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, who portrayed it as a politically chaotic and morally corrupting country. Nonetheless, it can be affirmed that English literature was highly inspired by Italian culture. In this thesis I will suggest that George Gascoigne’s *Supposes*, being a translation of Ludovico Ariosto’s play *I Suppositi*, is an example of how Italian literature and culture contributed to the development of Early Modern English Drama.

Chapter 1 examines the historical and social context of this dissertation, that is Anglo-Italian contacts in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. Taking into consideration both negative perceptions and positive influence, section 1.2 and 1.3 explain the reasons why the English attitude towards Italy during the sixteenth century can be described as ‘ambiguous’, on political, religious and cultural grounds.

Chapter 2 illustrates Gascoigne’s life as a student, a courtier and a prolific writer, and introduces the play *Supposes*. Section 2.2 focuses on how Italian literature influenced Gascoigne’s work and led to his translation of *I Suppositi*. The text analysis also addresses the impact that *Supposes* achieved on Gascoigne’s concurrent society and future English literature, in the context of the English biased disposition towards Italy, previously described.

Chapter 3 introduces William Shakespeare’s comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* as additional case of the beneficial impact of Italian culture on English literature. Section 3.2 examines *Supposes* as part of Shakespeare’s source material for *The Taming* and further demonstrates how the Italian tradition played a critical part in the success of the play.

I will now start investigating Anglo-Italian relations in the late-fifteenth and especially sixteenth century.

Chapter 1

Historical and social context of sixteenth-century England

1.1 Anglo-Italian contacts in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period

Many scholars have acknowledged England's historical fascination with Italy, especially in terms of its literature, drama, and culture as a whole. The Italian Renaissance began about a century before its counterpart in England, which started in the sixteenth century.¹ Florence had been the 'cradle of the Renaissance' since the early fifteenth-century and even in the Late Middle Ages, intellectuals' view of the world had been completely changed by Humanism; not only did this movement entail a re-evaluation of Greek, Latin and classical models, but it also 'unleashed new ideas, and new social, political, and economic forces that gradually displaced the spiritual and communal values of the Middle Ages'.²

Edward Chaney affirms that 'throughout the fifteenth century a growing number of English students travelled to Italy as would-be humanists'.³ Italy was viewed as a place of further education and enrichment, owing to its flourishing culture. Chaney also describes the Tudor period as an age of 'almost hysterical intensification of Anglo-Roman diplomatic relations', mainly caused by Henry VIII's demand for divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon; this led to the King's excommunication and the emergence of the Church of England, with Henry himself as its head. Subsequently, following this religious dispute, there was a decline in contacts between the two

¹ Mary Thomas Crane, 'Early Tudor Humanism', in *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, Vol. 1 (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010), p. 92.

² Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, 'The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors*, Vol. 1, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Alfred David, James Simpson, George M. Logan, Barbara K. Lewalski, Katharine E. Maus, Lawrence Lipking, James Noggle, Jack Stillinger, Dreide S. Lynch, Carol T. Christ, Catherine Robson, Jon Stallworthy and Jahan Ramazani (New York: Norton, 2013), p. 352.

³ Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (Newbury House: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), p. 41.

countries, until the early sixteenth century, after Queen Elizabeth I's coronation.⁴

Aside from being a time of political expansion and economic development, the reign of Queen Elizabeth I was 'a period of great popularity of Italian culture in England, which had long been in preparation since the time of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, the first conspicuous English example of a patron of the arts'.⁵ Humphrey of Lancaster, Duke of Gloucester, brother of King Henry V of England, was a central figure in regard to Italian Renaissance Humanism in fifteenth-century-England, to such an extent that he is believed to have promoted the proliferation of Italian Humanistic values in the country.⁶

Italy was England's foremost source of artistic inspiration, particularly as regards literature. A great number of courtiers, churchmen and scholars travelled between the two countries, allowing the cultures to meet.⁷ Michele Marrapodi argues that 'the reassessment of early modern drama has filtered through a variety of political negotiations with other cultural transactions, such as travel and courtesy books, the arts, fencing, dancing and fashions'.⁸ It was precisely this large variety of contexts that allowed the development of Anglo-Italian 'cultural transactions' and the emerging of the Elizabethan perception 'of "exotic" Mediterranean nations, and of Italy in particular, as a fundamentally double-faced vision of allurements and bias'.⁹ This confirms the point that Italy did in fact play a central role in England, also as model for the reformation of Early Modern English drama.

Frances Yates examined the achievements of John Florio, 'one of the most conspicuous Italian literary figures in London during Elizabeth's reign',¹⁰ especially in the context of Anglo-Italian relationships, owing to his compilation of dictionaries.¹¹ This illustrates that Italian humanists

⁴ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 42.

⁵ Soko Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue of Italian Books Printed in England 1558–1603* (New York: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1.

⁶ Alessandra Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 93.

⁷ Robin Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 23.

⁸ Michele Marrapodi, ed., 'Appropriating Italy: Towards a New Approach to Renaissance Drama', in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1.

⁹ Marrapodi, ed., 'Appropriating Italy', in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 3.

¹¹ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 3.

started to travel to England and helped spread their language for intellectuals to learn. Dictionaries, manuals and translations of Italian texts appeared.¹² George Gascoigne's *Supposes* (1566), a translation of Ludovico Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (1509) was considered a milestone 'in the process of Elizabethan appropriation of Italian drama'.¹³ Other notable mentions of illustrious translated Italian works were Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1532) and Count Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528). *Il Principe* was published as *Nicholas Machiavel's Prince* by Edward Dacres¹⁴ and served as a guide 'for lessons in the art of intrigue [...] with its cool guidance on how power may be gained and kept',¹⁵ whereas *Il Cortegiano* was 'the most influential of the sixteenth-century handbooks of courtesy' and was translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561.¹⁶ These translations were significant considering that life at Court was unpredictable, influenced by the Crown's will or conflicts of interest. It 'fostered paranoia, and an attendant obsession with secrecy, spying, duplicity, and betrayal',¹⁷ therefore courtiers, who were often also poets, needed models to imitate and learn from, in order to stand 'upon the slipper top', as Thomas Wyatt described it.¹⁸ Italian humanists portrayed the perfect example.

The aforementioned John Florio (born Giovanni Florio), Bernardo d'Ochino and Giordano Bruno 'were fleeing from persecution in their native land yet were to teach the fundamentals of the language and thought which Italy had itself produced'.¹⁹ As we have already established, Italian Humanism and Renaissance had the potential to change people's mindsets.

Soko Tomita proves how significant these communications were for the enrichment of the literary production, as well as the society of that period, explaining how early modern English intellectuals thrived through Italian models. 'Dramatists confronted the alien culture, compared it with their own, or even resisted it, and finally found expressions of their national identity',²⁰

¹² Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 23.

¹³ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 483.

¹⁴ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 267.

¹⁵ Greenblatt and Logan, 'The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 351.

¹⁶ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 96.

¹⁷ Greenblatt and Logan, 'The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 351.

¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, 'Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 386.

¹⁹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 23.

²⁰ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 11.

however, England already possessed a significant body of literature and history, so ‘Italy functioned as a catalyst with concrete significant materials for England to foster, nourish, and establish its ideological, social, political, and cultural identity’.²¹

English culture and literature did not radically change through these relations because, as stated above, drama during the Elizabethan Era was also a result of original artistic expression of English authors although they were indeed heavily and, one might say, positively influenced by Italy. Based on Tomita’s viewpoint, through authors’ original viewpoint and an intense confrontation with Italy, the English national identity came to a new expression. What he calls ‘concrete significant materials’ is the product of the Italian Renaissance that were adapted to a dissimilar culture. Marrapodi adds that ‘the enormous corpus of Italian material [was] subjected to a manifold process of transformation and adaptation to be gradually accommodated to English *mores*.’ Italian culture impacted European Renaissance as a whole, and it is clearly visible in the ‘intertextual dynamics that contributed to the composition of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic canon’.²²

During the troubled reign of Edward VI, Italian culture was still favored; nevertheless, ‘political and religious policies encouraged iconoclasm and further isolation from the Catholic continent’.²³ To aggravate the situation, in February 1570 Elizabeth I was excommunicated and in the 1580s England withstood war with Spain, a Catholic country with great influence on the Church. This ‘rendered travel to Italy a clandestine activity, engendering danger abroad and suspicion at one’s return home’.²⁴

The history of relations between these two countries and cultures had not been consistent throughout the decades, especially due to religious and political reasons, though it never led to an actual war. From the time England created its own Church, the Anglican Church, there were obvious conflicts with Rome. The Grand Tour of English scholars in Italy faced heavy complications, and so did the literary influence of Italy in England. A clear instance of this is the

²¹ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 12.

²² Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare* p. 2.

²³ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, Introduction, xiii.

²⁴ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, Introduction, xiii.

fact that even the ‘adjective “Italianate” would become a devastating pejorative’.²⁵

‘Italian’ was considered a distasteful word, associated with immorality. A notable example of this stigma is the myth of Venice, which ‘originated from the historical complexity of the city itself, characterized by extraordinary levels of magniloquence and grandeur in customs, festivities, and architecture strongly juxtaposed by racist and patriarchal forces of marginality and social differentiation’.²⁶ The concept of Italy being the focus of English disapproval will be further examined in 1.2.

In the 1560s, after Spain had taken control over most of the Italian peninsula, Queen Elizabeth attempted to re-establish a connection with the papacy: ‘nothing of any significance was achieved however [...]. Soon suspect Catholics [...] were being penalized by confiscation of their property if they stayed too long in Italy’.²⁷ These regulations and the effects of the Inquisition produced ‘anti-travel propaganda’, which aimed to associate any English traveler to Italy with the ‘*diablo incarnato*’.²⁸ Roger Ascham's negative view of Italy was reported in *The Scholemaster* (1570);²⁹ Joseph Hall warned English gentlemen about the ‘persuasive influences of Italian culture’, and how they better ‘restrict themselves to reading about the country’,³⁰ while Thomas Coryate described Venetian courtesans and Italian lechery in *Crudities*, published in 1611.³¹

As a consequence of the final English defeat of Spain in 1588, and also by means of the influence of the newly-elected Pope Clement VIII, who pursued a more liberal approach, in 1592 the situation began to improve; ‘though anti-Italianism continued to keep the conformist away during the 1590s, curiosity eventually broke down the effectiveness of negative topoi even where loyal Protestants were concerned’.³²

During this period of ever-changing sentiment, the image that English citizens had of Italy was

²⁵ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 76.

²⁶ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 8.

²⁷ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 78.

²⁸ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 79.

²⁹ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 66.

³⁰ Michael J. Redmond, ‘“I have read them all”: Jonson’s *Volpone* and the Discourse of the Italianate Gentlemen’, in *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Michele Marrapodi and A.J. Hoenselaars (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1998), p. 133.

³¹ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 67.

³² Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 83.

very much modelled on texts and translations by writers who worked primarily for the Crown.³³ More often than not, they included inaccurate details when lacking proper facts in order to depict this myth of a dangerous Italy; moreover, ‘the English were skillful in putting the myth to a wide range of patriotic or satirical purposes, especially in expressing the divisions between Protestant and Catholic causes’.³⁴

Chaney further illustrates how ‘ironically, the same period had also seen the development of a significant body of theoretical literature which sought to promote the educational value of travel. The steady growth of interest in antiquity and in the visual arts [...] guaranteed the ever expanding success of the Grand Tour’.³⁵ The denomination ‘Grand Tour’ was coined in the seventeenth century, referring to ‘travel as an essential part of good breeding’,³⁶ although it was a standardized habit of European intellectuals by that time, especially of English scholars, who ‘discovered [the] classical antiquity’ of the Italian Renaissance during their time abroad.³⁷ Around the 1630s, when Catholics in England and Protestants in Italy became more accepted, the Grand Tour was re-established, with Italy as the most significant destination for scholars to pursue an higher education.³⁸

According to Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, ‘the complex dialogue of intertextual relationships between these two countries was certainly anything but monolithic and stationary’.³⁹ This dynamic made it possible for stereotypes regarding both cultures to constantly alter, so much so that ‘for the English of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there was not one Italy; there were many Italies’.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it may be assumed that, ‘early modern English drama, mingling together both classical and Renaissance roots, greatly profited from cross-cultural encounters’,⁴¹ as the

³³ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 86.

³⁴ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 224.

³⁵ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 86.

³⁶ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 67.

³⁷ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, Introduction xi.

³⁸ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 86.

³⁹ David Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange: Gascoigne and Ariosto at Gray’s Inn in 1566’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 25.

⁴¹ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 2.

Italian culture was a source to imitate and adapt to English taste.⁴²

In light of what has been discussed, it appears that Italy had a strong, although inconsistent, influence on the English court throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century, whether under the reign of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and eventually James I. English culture and early modern English drama both benefitted from these relations, which emphasized Italy's rich literary production and England's remodeled identity.

The following section will be dealing with the unfavorable connotations associated with Italy in England.

⁴² Marrapodi, ed., 'Appropriating Italy', in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 2.

1.2 Negative perceptions of Italy in England

This section will analyse the reason why English society associated Italy with ambiguity, perversion and violence during the sixteenth century.

As I have discussed earlier, the English culture benefited from Anglo-Italian relations over the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Italian Humanism and Renaissance brought new social, political and economic ideas and values, which modernized medieval England.¹ The argument of Italy's fruitful influence on England will be examined to a greater extent in 1.3.

Despite this positive outcome, in view of the fact that Henry VIII created the Anglican Church, splitting from the Roman Catholic Church, relations between the two countries worsened² to such a degree that 'growing Protestantism in England and the nation's fascination with exoticism and foreignness were seen also as elements inspiring the spread of the negative image of Italy'.³ The situation was deeply problematic: suspected Catholics were sanctioned if they were to spend too much time in the peninsula.⁴ This eventually led to the emergence of 'anti-travel propaganda'⁵ and the further development or pre-existing stereotypes. A central instance of this is the fact that English scholars would often highlight this ambivalence of Italy, in order to elicit a 'moral response from the audience'.⁶

'According to [John] Hale, Elizabethans did not trust Italian character, were afraid of Italy's Church, and despised its political disintegration'.⁷ On account of this religious dispute, it was not unusual for English writers to attack the Pope and criticize Catholicism in their works, as Christopher Marlowe did, for instance. Marlowe was a leading figure in the development of English

¹ Greenblatt and Logan, 'The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 352.

² Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 42.

³ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 6.

⁴ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 78.

⁵ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 79.

⁶ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 6.

⁷ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 2.

Drama, a proper Renaissance man, a playwright and a poet.⁸ In his celebrated play *Dr. Faustus* (1590), it is Faustus himself who mocks and ridicules the Pope, along with Mephistopheles; in Act 3, scene 2, ‘the Pope is shown to be petty, self-aggrandizing, vain, cowardly, power-crazed and thoroughly corrupt’,⁹ since these were foremost flaws which the English associated with Catholicism, along with ‘multilayered hypocrisy; deliberate deception; poisoning; denigration of religious values; self-seeking ambition; and worldly cynicism’.¹⁰

In order to further investigate the English disposition towards Italy, it must be noted that, as regards theatrical production, Early Modern English drama was ‘founded on this intense, systematic exploitation of Italy's ambivalent iconology, encoded at the same time as the origin of poetry and art and as the site of intrigue, vice, and political corruption’.¹¹ The aforementioned Roger Ascham, scholar, teacher and tutor to Princess Elizabeth, was one of the most influential authors to condemn ‘the Italianate’. Tomita states that Ascham was bothered by the moral dangers of the country¹² and disapproved of translations from Italian.¹³ His aversion towards Italy was so heartfelt, that his renowned work *The Scholemaster* ‘contains a stern passage designed to discourage young men from travelling to Italy’.¹⁴ It appears that the author's opinion on Italy worsened after ‘a total experience of nine days in Venice in 1552, though they must have been very busy ones’, Chaney comments.¹⁵ During his sojourn, Ascham witnessed a world that was completely different from London and its apparent composure; he ‘was no less alarmed by the “maners of Italie”, or what he calls her “filthy living”’.¹⁶ His main concern was that English gentlemen would turn into Italians and take back lascivious habits to England.¹⁷ Venice was recognized for its liberty, given by its distance from the influence of the Church; Kirkpatrick argues that ‘there were, of course, notions of liberty available - in a political as well as a metaphysical sense - often cultivated in republican circles of Florence and

⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *The English Renaissance 1500-1620* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 85-86.

⁹ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 261.

¹⁰ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 261.

¹¹ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 3.

¹² Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 130.

¹³ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 96.

¹⁴ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 66.

¹⁶ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 262.

Venice'.¹⁸ There were indeed a number of registered brothels that corroborated the spread of the 'myth of Venice' and its corruption.¹⁹ As Marrapodi points out, Ascham rejected what Italy had become, not what it had been. That is, not the country which witnessed the glory of Rome and the Classics (he was a Greek and Latin scholar),²⁰ but the place of iniquity where his fellow countrymen could become an 'Italianate Englishman'.²¹ 'For Ascham, then, the problem at hand consists not in the imitation of foreign models per se, but in the type of models that travel offers to his compatriots'.²²

This widespread idea of a 'sinful Italy' was shaped and adapted by English authors, such as Shakespeare, Jonson or Middleton, in order to compliment the authority of the English monarchy, as they 'adopted both Italian modes and topoi as a structural constituent for their plays' dramatic construction and provided ironical caricatures of Italianate characters for parodic intent'.²³ 'There was a good deal of prejudice based on ignorance, fear and rivalry; curiosity about the exotic and the new; and admiration for cultures perceived to be more successful or superior'.²⁴

A striking example may be the fact that 'Ben Jonson exploited the legend [of Venice] in *Volpone* (1606), as did his rival, John Day, whose *Humour out of Breath* (1608) defined Venice as "the best flesh-shambles in Italy"'.²⁵ Further, because William Shakespeare made use of the myth of Italy in his writings, he 'may be expected to have looked upon Italy as, by turns, an exotic and sophisticated otherworld or as a target for patriotic satire'.²⁶ Shakespeare often added details from his own experience when describing Italy, and since Jonson took direct inspiration from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) when writing *Volpone*,²⁷ it is no wonder that Jonson would describe the

¹⁸ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 66.

²⁰ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 43.

²¹ Redmond, ' "I have read them all" ', in *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 122.

²² Redmond, ' "I have read them all" ', in *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 124.

²³ Marrapodi, ed., 'Appropriating Italy', in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 5.

²⁴ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 262.

²⁵ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 67.

²⁶ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 278.

²⁷ Richard H. Perkinson, ' "Volpone" and the Reputation of Venetian Justice ', *The Modern Language Review*, 35 (1940), p. 11.

Venetians as obsessed with material possessions,²⁸ cruel and manipulative.²⁹ Additionally, the Italian setting of the comedy was a choice that allowed Jonson to make the characters' punishments sound believable to an English audience, since Venice was 'notable not only for its 'sinister repute', but also for the integrity and severity of its republican courts'.³⁰ The society is degenerated and immoral; however, the law is strict and authoritarian. The setting permits the author 'to capitalize upon the customary Elizabethan idea of Italy as a land of lawless and criminal passions, and to utilize in his overwhelming denouement the reputation of the Venetian courts'.³¹

An additional example of this ambiguity is particularly noticeable in the fact that, on one hand Venice appears to be praised by Shakespeare in *Othello* (1604) where, unlike Cyprus, it is the city of political stability. The Council of the Republic meets in order to discuss Brabantio's accusations towards Desdemona and Othello, and the complaint is dismissed democratically.³² On the other hand, Desdemona's Venetian origin is the very reason why Iago is able to manipulate Othello into thinking that she is deceiving and cheating on him. Othello believes in the promiscuous and lascivious nature of Venetian women, which is proven to be inaccurate at the end of the play,³³ since it was Iago's intricate plan all along. Desdemona is killed by Othello, who 'dies kissing the wife whose innocence he knows he has fatally wronged'.³⁴

Another instance is the bloody tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (1594),³⁵ which was inspired by the Procne myth.³⁶ The latter had become extremely popular in Elizabethan Drama³⁷ and David Bevington affirms that this popularity might identify a clear admiration for Seneca and Ovid,³⁸ who represent Italy's classical heritage. Nonetheless, the Procne story was described as 'savage in its pagan fury and tragically serious'³⁹ for the dark and explicit plot involving both sexual abuse and

²⁸ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 282.

²⁹ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 265.

³⁰ Perkinson, 'Volpone', p. 12.

³¹ Perkinson, 'Volpone', p. 18.

³² Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, 'William Shakespeare', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 553.

³³ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 262.

³⁴ Greenblatt and Logan, 'William Shakespeare', in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 554-555.

³⁵ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 103.

³⁶ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

³⁷ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 27.

³⁸ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

³⁹ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

murder. In other words, the main themes of this ‘Italian’ story that fascinated English spectators were ‘political intrigue and instability, duplicity, rape, and mutilation’,⁴⁰ the very same negative characteristics that were the object of fear regarding the Italian and that have been discussed in this chapter. Bevington further illustrates how these degenerate contents, presented in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, ‘can play up horrors like those associated in the popular Elizabethan imagination with sixteenth-century Italy’,⁴¹ encouraging the accusations of English gentlemen and scholars against Italy.

Shakespeare was indeed one of the many authors who provided a number of works, which take place in Italy, that fueled the anxiety towards the Italianate; others were for instance, Thomas Middleton with *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607) and *Women Beware Women* (1657), and John Webster with *The White Devil* (1612).⁴²

On the basis of the points illustrated in this section, it can be inferred that Elizabethan criticism towards Italy was not solely based on religious ideas, derived from the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, but curiosity, fascination and prejudice played a major role as well. All of these aspects influenced Italy's reputation in the eyes of the English society, facilitating the spread of the myths and stereotypes that served as basis for a considerable amount of English literary works.

The following section will illustrate the positive reception of Italian culture in sixteenth-century England.

⁴⁰ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

⁴¹ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

⁴² Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 28.

1.3 The cultural significance of Italy in England

In this next section I will investigate the positive reception of Italian culture in sixteenth-century England and the reasons why it may be argued that English culture benefitted from its relations with Italy.

In 1.2 it was discussed that Elizabethan England had an overall binary perception of Italy. This arose from religious conflicts, stereotypes, prejudice, let alone fascination and curiosity. It has also been stated that Italian Humanism and the Renaissance contributed to modernize medieval England through new social, political and economic ideas and values.¹ This concept of Italy ‘as the centre of humanistic civilization was exported through the arts’² and presented to the English society, validating the point that Italian culture played a central role in England, also as a model for the reformation of Early Modern English drama.

During the course of the fifteenth century, English scholars and clerics travelling to Italy encountered a movement that promoted new beliefs and values that completely shifted from the medieval tradition and were rather based on the Classics. There was ‘extraordinary cultural and intellectual movement flourishing in the city-states’,³ later denominated ‘Renaissance’. Besides the fact that it generated ‘a rebirth of letters and arts stimulated by the recovery of texts and artifacts from classical antiquity’,⁴ it also inspired an original interpretation of the world, with individuality as the new focus, and Man as ‘the measure of all things’.⁵

Since the time of Henry V’s reign forward, English noblemen started to invite Italian scholars to work in their households, in order to ‘raise English intellectual life to the level of the famous European centres’.⁶ However, only during the reign of Henry VII did the Renaissance truly begin to

¹ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603’, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 352.

² Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 2.

³ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603’, in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 352-353.

⁴ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603’, in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 352-353.

⁵ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603’, in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 352-353.

⁶ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 4.

spread in England and thereafter, during Henry VIII's reign, it matured to become 'the intellectual program and literary vision known as humanism'.⁷ Humanists were new intellectuals since 'to be a humanist was a profession, not a vocation, and the concept of humanism was linked with teaching and with rhetoric, not with philosophy and scholarship'.⁸

English Humanism flourished through the imitation of Italian models⁹ and the commitment of some key-figures that some academics believe 'were not scholars or writers, but princes and politicians, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester being the most notable example'¹⁰ – taking into account the number of books he donated to the University of Oxford and that he might have been a tutor to King Henry VI.¹¹ Other pivotal figures of English Humanism will be examined to a greater extent in this section.

To consider this aspect of 'imitation' more closely, we may examine the development of translation and adaptation of Italian works in English. This was quite a widespread and celebrated activity during the Elizabethan Era. The main purpose of these translations was to carry into the English society the innovative and original notions that were shaping Italian culture and society, along with all Europe. As it happens, 'Italy represented the avant-garde of Europe not only in respect of art and literature but also in respect of political thinking and commercial expertise'.¹² Francis Otto Matthiessen considers the work of translators 'an act of patriotism', he specifically studied four renowned authors of the sixteenth century and their most influential translations: Thomas Hoby's *Courtyer* (1561), Thomas North's *Plutarch* (1579), John Florio's *Montaigne* (1603), and Plutarch's *Morals* by Philemon Holland (1603).¹³ As Matthiessen states, cultural and social differences between Italy and England are clearly visible in the translations whenever the writers tried to turn the originals into a 'wholly English'¹⁴ product, for the English audience.

If we take into account Thomas Hoby's *Courtyer*, we will find that the notion of *sprezzatura*,

⁷ Greenblatt and Logan, 'The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603', in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 352-353.

⁸ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 9.

⁹ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 7.

¹¹ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 15.

¹² Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 1.

¹³ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 2.

which was conceptualized by Castiglione in the original *Cortegiano* as the main point of his theory, does serve the same purpose in both versions, but with some changes in the actual connotation of the word. Based on the Italian original, *sprezzatura* ‘is the quality of the courtier; those who are themselves courtiers can recognize it when they see it, and would neither wish nor be able to divulge the formula to those outside their circle’.¹⁵ It is an attribute that the courtier must possess and employ to manage life at court, so it may be inferred that there is no specific definition of it. While Kirkpatrick suggests ‘nonchalance’ as a translation,¹⁶ Hoby presented it as ‘recklessness’ or ‘dis-gracing’,¹⁷ providing a slightly different meaning. Regardless of the accuracy of Hoby's translation, as it has been previously discussed in 1.1, *Il Cortegiano* was ‘the most influential of the sixteenth-century handbooks of courtesy’¹⁸ and due to its impact on English intellectuals and courtiers it could be considered a major Renaissance text, which was used ‘for advice on the cultivation and display of the self’.¹⁹

The history of English Renaissance translations from the Italian body of literature could not be examined without mentioning the achievements of Geoffrey Chaucer. Although he lived and worked during the fourteenth century, he did influence English scholars and intellectuals of later centuries. Chaucer had experience of the Italian Renaissance in 1372, and started to study the manuscripts of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio,²⁰ the three Crowns of Italian Medieval Literature and Poetry, who were to become key models for a number of Renaissance authors. He was inspired to translate Petrarch's sonnets,²¹ adapt Dante's *Commedia* (1472)²² and also various *novellas* by Boccaccio. Tomita affirms that ‘it was from the Italians that Chaucer learned what a modern vernacular was capable of achieving’.²³ Even before the Italian Renaissance reached its peak, it already elicited positive responses abroad.

¹⁵ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 107.

¹⁶ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 107.

¹⁷ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 107.

¹⁸ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘The Sixteenth Century 1485-1603’, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 351.

²⁰ James Simpson and Alfred David, ‘Geoffrey Chaucer’, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 190.

²¹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 52.

²² Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 39.

²³ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 25.

Chaucer was not the last to translate and emulate Italian poetry and style; as a matter of fact, Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder and Henry Howard Earl of Surrey are considered the first authors to introduce the Petrarchan sonnet to English literature.²⁴ Wyatt ‘took his subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure’,²⁵ whereas ‘Surrey established a form for these [Petrarch's sonnets] that was used by Shakespeare and that has become known as the English sonnet’.²⁶ For these very reasons, it can be assumed that the ‘significant departure’ that the authors made indicates that they needed to adjust the Italian examples to the English standard; however, the great popularity and impact that their work provided to the English literature was almost purely based on Italian Renaissance models circulating at Court.

As discussed, Wyatt's and Surrey's poem are for the most part interpretations of Petrarch's sonnets, they also appear in Richard Tottel's Miscellany, *Songes and Sonettes* (1557), which Hyder Rollins describes as ‘one of the most important single volumes in the history of English literature’.²⁷ Tottel's Miscellany stimulated what is known as English Petrarchism, and ‘introduced general readers to Italianate verse forms’ during the Elizabethan era.²⁸ Kirkpatrick states that ‘Tudor courtiers such as Wyatt and Surrey, and Elizabethans like Sir Philip Sidney - were all able to adapt their experience of Italian humanism to courtly as well as to intellectual and artistic purposes’.²⁹ Once again English intellectuals looked at Italy for inspiration, especially in order to survive life at Court.

The aforementioned Sir Philip Sidney, along with Edmund Spenser and John Florio, is renowned for his translations of Italian compositions. Sidney visited Italy as a diplomat and was so influenced by the culture, that when he returned to England ‘maintained close links with Italians, including most notably the refugee intellectual Giordano Bruno’.³⁰ As it appears, around 1570 poets

²⁴ Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, ‘Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder’ and ‘Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey’, in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 382-387.

²⁵ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder’, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 382.

²⁶ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey’, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 387.

²⁷ J. Christopher Warner, *The Making and Marketing of Tottel's Miscellany, 1557: Songs and Sonnets in the Summer of the Martyr's Fires* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 1.

²⁸ Warner, *The Making and Marketing of Tottel's Miscellany*, p. 1.

²⁹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 83.

³⁰ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 125.

developed a preference for a new lyric style in line with Serafino de' Ciminelli and Torquato Tasso, putting aside the study of Petrarch.³¹ Sidney followed Tasso's notions from *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1594) in his *Apology for Poetry* or *The Defence of Poetry* (1595),³² 'a formal rhetorical treatise on poetry',³³ which Sidney produced with the aim of proving the significant role that poets played in society.³⁴ About a decade later, 'a new interest arose which was reflected above all in ambitious attempts to emulate Petrarch in writing not only sonnets but also sequences or collections of lyric verse'.³⁵ Actually, Sidney began working on his 'finest literary achievement',³⁶ 'the first of the great Elizabethan sonnet cycles'³⁷ *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) in the 1580s.³⁸ The sonnets re-propose a number of Petrarchan themes, observed in *Il Canzoniere* (1470), as for instance an evaluation of the lover's psyche, physical desire and the pain and frustration which keeps him from appreciating his love.³⁹ Sidney embraced the original themes and genre chosen by another Italian poet while writing the prose romance of *The Arcadia* (1580), Jacopo Sannazaro, author of the lyrical narrative *Arcadia* (1504).⁴⁰ In particular, Sidney imitates the world that Sannazaro describes in his pastoral poem, 'a landscape which lay almost entirely beyond historical time, in a region of longings or lyrical desires'.⁴¹ *The Arcadia* would likewise inspire other poets of the 1590s and the following century.⁴²

The list of monumental English works which were influenced or were directly based on Italian models could continue; however, from the examples provided in this section it can be concluded that Italian culture and the Renaissance played a vital role in English Literature, contributing to some of the most famous and renowned English literary works.

As a case study in this thesis, I will consider one specific instance of the cultural influence Italy

³¹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 140.

³² Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 160.

³³ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 129.

³⁴ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 129.

³⁵ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 140.

³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, 'Sir Philip Sidney', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 490.

³⁷ Greenblatt and Logan, 'Sir Philip Sidney', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 490.

³⁸ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 140.

³⁹ Greenblatt and Logan, 'Sir Philip Sidney', in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 490.

⁴⁰ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 141.

⁴¹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 146.

⁴² Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 106.

had on English culture: George Gascoigne's *Supposes* was the first Italian comedy to be translated into English and the first English play to use prose dialogue,⁴³ other than possibly one of the sources for the subplot of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594).

Each of these literary works will be discussed to a greater degree in the next chapters.

⁴³ Ronald C. Johnson, *George Gascoigne* (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 137.

Chapter 2

George Gascoigne's *Supposes*

2.1 Life of George Gascoigne

This chapter will illustrate and discuss the life of George Gascoigne and his translation *Supposes*, in the context of Anglo-Italian relations during the sixteenth century.

The reason why *Supposes* was chosen as case study for this thesis is that it represents, as already stated, the first Italian comedy to be translated into English and first English play to use prose dialogue. Therefore, it demonstrates how Italian culture positively influenced English authors, enriching English literature.

It was mentioned that, by the time Italian humanists started to travel abroad, they began to spread their culture and language through dictionaries, glossaries and manuals. This eventually inspired English humanists to imitate or directly translate Italian publications. As a matter of fact, Gascoigne's *Supposes* is a translation of Ludovico Ariosto's prose comedy *I Suppositi* and was considered a great achievement in terms of 'Elizabethan appropriation of Italian drama'.¹ David Bevington links this work with the renewed interest of the English Court for Italian models after a period of fear and anxieties caused by the alleged dangerous effects of Italian culture on English noblemen,² as illustrated in 1.2.

George Gascoigne was a Renaissance poet who worked and pursued various literary styles and forms, as well as establishing new ones.³ His production was affected by Petrarch, Chaucer⁴ and Latin poets and satirists (for instance, Plautus, Terence, Horace);⁵ as a matter of fact, their influence

¹ Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*, p. 483.

² Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 26.

³ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 13.

⁴ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 13.

⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 96.

can be clearly observed in his lyrics on ‘love’⁶ and *The Steele Glass* (1576), one of his main satires in verse.⁷ Ronald Johnson describes him as ‘the major poet of the period just preceding Edmund Spenser and the High Renaissance’.⁸ It appears that Gascoigne was quite a patriotic poet and because of this, he meant to imitate mainly medieval and early modern English models, as Chaucer and Wyatt for instance,⁹ whose literary success and contribution were discussed in 1.3.

Gascoigne was born around 1535, even though the actual birth date is not certain, and had an eventful and dramatic life. Son to a wealthy landowner, he grew up as a gentleman and in 1555 was admitted to Gray’s Inn,¹⁰ a prestigious school of law in London, one of the four Inns of Court. Eventually he left Gray’s Inn, to return years later, after a period of unsuccessful attempts to become a distinguished courtier to Queen Elizabeth I.¹¹ A number of poets and scholars had tried to earn the Queen’s favour, in order to win her as their patron, for it meant not just protection, but essentially success and fortune. But despite that, as mentioned earlier, life at the English Court was uncertain and precarious – the slightest mistake could cost courtiers’ position and sometimes even their lives, as occurred to Sir Walter Raleigh.¹²

As his debts kept rising, Gascoigne left the Court and moved to the countryside. His failure as a courtier was not the sole reason why he needed to leave. He had married Elizabeth Bacon in 1561, who apparently was already married to Edward Boyes, unbeknownst to her, for she did not consider the marriage legal.¹³ This intricate situation led to both of them to be sued by Boyes, which represents the first of several legal cases that Gascoigne will have to manage, including a matter of inheritance related to his father’s will. Johnson reports that, other than not having any support at court, Gascoigne was being pressured to pay his debts ‘and his youthful escapades before his marriage and his continual trouble after it had given him an unsavory reputation in the eyes of the

⁶ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, pp. 18-55.

⁷ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 96.

⁸ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 13.

⁹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 14.

¹¹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 14.

¹² Stephen Greenblatt and George M. Logan, ‘Sir Walter Raleigh’, in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 487-488.

¹³ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 15.

church, the court, and the business community'.¹⁴

With the intention to solve his legal and economic problems, he became a soldier and fought for the Prince of Orange,¹⁵ which still did not bring any luck. Nonetheless, during this period he wrote and printed his first publication *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), a collection of poems that had him accused of offence and immorality¹⁶ in 1574, especially since it featured the 'scandalous version' of *The Adventures of Master F.J.* (1576),¹⁷ one of the first English prose narratives.¹⁸ Desperately trying to pay back his debts and restore his name, he published *The Posies* (1575) as a revision of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, as well as a number of works, as for instance *The Glasse of Governement* (1575), which provided proof of his 'repentance and moral reformation'.¹⁹ This play shows Ascham influence from his aforementioned work *The Scholemaster*, as 'Gascoigne may have been deliberately alluding to this model of English humanist education theory in order to demonstrate his understanding (and acceptance) of its tenets'.²⁰

As a result of his didactic publications, he ultimately received the recognition he deserved, a patron, Lord Grey of Wilton,²¹ as well as a position at Court as an agent for William Cecil, the Queen's chief minister. Unfortunately, Gascoigne fell ill in 1577 and died that same year. Johnson comments that his death appears quite ironic, since it happened just as he was reaching his coveted success.²² Despite that, his production will be celebrated for its influence and significance.

George Gascoigne's works initially presented the Petrarchan style, quite favored during the reign of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, as illustrated in 1.3, as well as influences from Chaucer, specifically as regards the proper English diction.²³ As a courtier, he employed the model of Petrarchan love and courtship in his poems, and the poetic form of the sonnet, although critics debate on whether he

¹⁴ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 16.

¹⁶ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 16.

¹⁷ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 98.

¹⁸ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 119.

¹⁹ Gillian Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne: Studies in Self-Presentation* (Oxford University, 1996), p. 165.

²⁰ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 167.

²¹ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 247.

²² Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 17.

²³ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 19.

took inspiration directly from Petrarch, Henry Howard or Sir Thomas Wyatt.²⁴ As his love poems demonstrate, Gascoigne translated Petrarch following Surrey and Wyatt's sonnet form; however, he would 'preserve the Italian organization of thought in several of his sonnets'²⁵ and maintain Petrarch's original rhyme scheme, unlike other English poets.²⁶ Moreover, according to Johnson, 'Gascoigne, who read Petrarch in the original Italian, recognized Petrarch's importance to English poets'.²⁷ This indicates once more the relevance of Italian authors for the English literature of the sixteenth century and after.

About Gascoigne's unsuccessful efforts as a courtier, Johnson comments that 'his time spent at court served, however, to awaken him to the vanity of such aspirations, and this newly found wisdom finds expression in many of his poems',²⁸ which started to feature a bitter and harsh tone towards the English society, the Court and warfare as well.²⁹ The satire *The Steele Glass*, which employs the myth of Philomela as a metaphor for his own misfortunes at Court, and the problematic reception of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*.³⁰

Upon his return to Gray's Inn in 1565, he gained 'both an entree to courtly circles and his first and most important literary forum',³¹ since he was able to perform there for the first time both the comedy *The Supposes* and the tragedy *Jocasta* (1566), 'the first Greek tragedy to be seen in England'.³² Apparently, the entire production was meant for one performance and a selected audience: his friends and colleagues;³³ critics debate on the actual occasion. Still, it can be assumed that the two plays were well accepted.³⁴ It was during this period that he started to employ a 'new dramatic technique – the use of prose dialogue',³⁵ which was essential for *The Supposes*.

Gascoigne produced only three plays, *Supposes*, *Jocasta* and *The Glasse of Governement*. The

²⁴ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 19.

²⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 23.

²⁶ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 23.

²⁷ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 19.

²⁸ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 14.

²⁹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 15.

³⁰ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 98.

³¹ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 31.

³² Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 15.

³³ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 34.

³⁴ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 78.

³⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 15.

latter alone is an original work, the other two being translations from Italian, which Johnson considered to be ‘exercises’ or ‘experiments’.³⁶ He translated *Jocasta* from Ludovico Dolce’s *Giocasta*, an adaptation of Euripides’ *Phoenissae*,³⁷ seemingly helped by a friend of his, Francis Kinwelmershe, and *Supposes* from the original *I Suppositi* by Ludovico Ariosto, all on his own.³⁸ His time at Gray’s Inn encouraged him to explore new literary styles and, with his colleagues, he influenced English drama, introducing Italian comedy and Greek tragedy in prose dialogue. Gascoigne ‘and his companions for a few years were the center of English drama’.³⁹

Gascoigne’s translation, although not particularly famous, is a remarkable literary work, which anticipated the use of prose dialogue in English literature, among other achievements. This validates the point that Italian Medieval and Renaissance models had a positive impact on English authors. To further prove Gascoigne’s influence on English literature, chapter 3 will discuss how Shakespeare used *Supposes* in *The Taming of the Shrew*, re-elaborating its characters, plot, scenes and themes.⁴⁰

The following section will deal with the play *Supposes* itself, analysing the plot, comparing it with the original Italian, and illustrating the reason why it constitutes an expression of fruitful Anglo-Italian relations.

³⁶ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 137.

³⁷ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 83.

³⁸ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 137.

³⁹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Lovascio, ‘Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*’, p. 91.

2.2 *Supposes* - translation of Ariosto's *I Suppositi*

In this section I will analyse the plot of *Supposes* and examine how this translation may be considered an example of positive outcome of the influence and relations between Italy and England during the sixteenth century, despite the ambivalent attitude of the English society of that time.

The plot of *I Suppositi/Supposes* does not revolve around a protagonist or hero, but rather around the various characters' ability to mask and disguise themselves, in order for them to meet their personal interests. It has been observed that the circumstances in which the characters find themselves, are more pivotal to the story than their 'personalities',¹ since they all represent 'stock figures in Italian comedy – two young lovers, two greedy old men, a two-faced servant, a faithful servant, a corruptible nurse, an interfering old crone, and several low-life comic figures'.² The story begins with Erostrato, a Sicilian gentleman studying in Ferrara, who meets the young Polynesta. The two become lovers and, to spend time together, Erostrato has to pretend to be his own servant Dulyppo and serve at Polynesta's father Damon's house. Dulyppo disguises himself as his master and studies in his place. Polynesta's nurse, Balia, is persuaded to participate into Erostrato's trick; however, Damon still intends to marry Polynesta to a suitor, unaware of her affair, and chooses the rich old doctor Cleander. The latter needs to find a woman, not for love, rather to secure his legacy with an heir (at the end, his dilemma will be solved, since will be revealed that Dulyppo is actually Cleander's lost son Carino, under false name). Fearing that Polynesta will be wedded to Cleander, Erostrato comes up with a plan to have someone, the Sænese, pretend to be his father Phylogano and offer a larger payment to Damon, so to win Polynesta and eventually admit the truth. The plot further tangles as Phylogano himself comes to Ferrara to meet his son, who is captured by Damon, informed of the whole artifice by Pasyphilo, the Parasite. Pasyphilo plays a significant role at the

¹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 139.

² Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 139.

end, since he is the one who explains to Phylogano and Damon the truth and settles the whole situation. Cleander is reunited with his son and Erostrato and Polynesta may marry, with Phylogano and Damon's blessing.

To analyse Gascoigne's translation more closely, we may begin by examining the original version by Ludovico Ariosto. *I Suppositi* was first produced in prose in 1508 and performed the following year during the Carnival in Ferrara.³ It is considered a *commedia erudita*, a type of stage comedy that emerged around the late fifteenth century. This was developed by humanists and was 'erudite' because it was 'constructed according to rules drawn from Latin models'.⁴ These models provided that the story was to be divided in five acts⁵ and had to follow the unities of time, space and action, based on Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁶ Furthermore, the *commedia erudita* used to be performed during Carnivals and was heavily influenced by Boccaccian *novellas*, as regards the unfolding of events and the characters' main traits.⁷

Ariosto published a second version of his comedy as well, between 1528 and 1532; it was written in verse, hendecasyllables, in order to imitate a style consistent with the Classics.⁸ The two publications by Ariosto present a few changes, specifically as regards some words or names, for the text had to be adapted to the different rhythmic structure, and presented a number of scenes that appear more comical or dramatic; however, the plot was maintained unaltered.⁹ Gascoigne's Prologue or Argument is not a direct translation of Ariosto's, rather a sequence of puns on the word 'suppose', namely: 'I suppose you are assembled here, supposing to reape the fruite of my travayles: and to be playne, I meane presently to presente you with a Comedie called *Supposes*'.¹⁰ Domenico Lovascio comments that, in doing so, Gascoigne distorted the actual meaning, thus confusing the reader even more¹¹ and Donald Beecher observes that Ariosto's prologue 'stresses

³ Domenico Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', *L'Analisi Linguistica e Letteraria*, 17 (2009), p. 73.

⁴ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 195.

⁵ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 72.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 196.

⁷ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 72.

⁸ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 73.

⁹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 73.

¹⁰ George Gascoigne, 'Supposes', in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. by G.W. Pigman III (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7. (This is my reference edition)

¹¹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 76.

disguise, trickery, and illusion' while Gascoigne's prologue stresses 'comic irony, errors of judgment, and rectification of confusion through experience'.¹²

As in the prologue, Gascoigne interpreted some characters' traits and elements of the story. This is particularly noticeable in the fact that he integrated the text with 27 comments in the margins, present in the second printed edition¹³ of 1575, *The Posies*. These comments are not, as one might think, stage directions (which are indeed present in the text): rather, they are glosses that appear beside the dialogue, to guide the readers and help them understand the story unfolding,¹⁴ as well as adding even more comedy to the play. For the audience viewing the performance it must have been clear whose character the actors were playing, even in disguise; however, Gascoigne preferred for the readers not to get lost in the deception, hence the comments that reveal every 'suppose' that is pretending to be another. For instance, when Polynesta is explaining to Balia Erostrato's trick to meet her in secret, Erostrato is described in the margins as 'the first suppose and grownd of all suposes' (1.1.75); the Sænese is 'a doltish suppose' (2.2.15), since he himself does not really know why he needs to pretend to be Phylogano and a 'stoute suppose' (4.5.27); and again Dulypo is a 'right suppose' (5.5.141), for he is not pretending to be someone else on purpose: he truly does not know to be Carino, Cleander's son. Therefore, it can be inferred that Gascoigne, first, committed to the translation and to the reader's experience; second, he focused more on their understanding of the scenes and the disguised characters, with the intention of having the readers and audience enjoy 'decoding deceit',¹⁵ instead of leaving them wondering, being fooled by the 'trickery',¹⁶ as might happen when reading Ariosto's original. Gascoigne did not in fact alter the structure or sense of the play, but took the Italian source and adapted it to his vision, with a positive outcome from the English audience.

As a matter of fact, *Supposes* follows Aristotle's unities as in *I Suppositi*:¹⁷ both plots happen over the course of one day, from Polynesta and Balia's initial conversation, to the final unravelling

¹² Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 76.

¹³ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 76.

¹⁴ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 75.

¹⁵ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 76.

¹⁶ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 76.

¹⁷ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 74.

of the disguises. All the previous events are told through the characters' dialogue, not to extend the length of the play; therefore, we know about Erostrato and Polynesta's affair through the aforementioned initial dialogue, and it is Cleander himself that narrates how he lost his son Carino/Dulyppo during the siege of Otranto. Moreover, the action takes place in one city, Ferrara, and there are no secondary storylines that layer the plot. Gascoigne remained true to the original Italian structure and Classical tradition, thus providing an accurate version of *I Suppositi*, without affecting the plot and the whole performance.

For his translation, Gascoigne studied both Ariosto's prose and verse version, developing a text with elements of each.¹⁸ As Lovascio reports, he did change some jokes from Ariosto's original, which could appeal more to an English audience; according to Lovascio, Gascoigne aimed to preserve the original meaning and purpose of the scenes and humor, instead of translating word by word, hence losing some comedy due to cultural differences or English preferences.¹⁹ To give an example, in Act 2, scene 2, when the Sænese is discussing with his servant Paquetto how not to be recognized as from Siena, the dialogue is undoubtedly different in the two languages:

SANESE [...] guardatevi tutti di dire che siamo sanesi, o di chiamarmi altrimenti che Filogono di Catania.
 SERVO Di questo nome strano mi ricorderò male; ma quella Castanea non mi dimenticherò già.
 SANESE Che Castanea? io dico Catania, in tuo mal punto.
 (2.2.300-301)

Gascoigne's translation presents a different joke, since English gentlemen would not have understood the pun with the words 'Catania', 'Castanea' and 'castagna' (chestnut). Hence, his version which includes the made-up name 'Haccanea', to highlight the simplicity of the servant:

SÆNESE [...] take heede that none of you saie we be *Sceneses*, and remember that you call me *Philogano of Cathanea*.
 PAQUETTO Sure I shal never remember these outladish words, I coulde well remember *Haccanea*.
 SÆNESE I say, *Cathanea*, and not *Haccanea*, with a vengeance.
 (2.2.16-21)

The two versions depict the same actions: still, Gascoigne, without sacrificing the humor, adapted it to the English public. In addition, it has been discussed how Gascoigne had to 'censor' the original Italian for the sake of the English audience, less prone to vulgar jokes. A clear instance might be the

¹⁸ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 74.

¹⁹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 75.

conversation between Dulyppo and Cleander, where the former is tricking the latter into thinking that Pasyphilo, the parasite, is making him appear repugnant to Damon and Polynesta, to have Cleander and Pasyphilo argue. After listing a number of offensive behaviors that Cleander allegedly displays, in Ariosto's version Dulyppo adds an homophobic reply:

DULIPPO Che con tale esca vorresti tirare li giovani a casa.

CLEANDRO Li giovani a casa io? A che effetto?

DULIPPO Che tu patisci una certa infermità, a cui giova et è appropriato rimedio a stare con li giovani di prima barba.

CLEANDRO Può fare Iddio, ch'egli abbia dette queste cose?

(2.3.305)

Gascoigne avoids details which might have led to more blasphemy, and simply lets the audience deduce it by themselves:

DULYPO Peradventure that by hir beautie, you would entice many yong men to your house.

CLEANDER Yong men? to what purpose?

DULYPO Nay, gesse you that.

CLEANDER Is it possible that *Pasiphilo* speaketh thus of me?

(2.4.109-113)

As it appears, Gascoigne interpretation and adjustments made it possible for an English audience to enjoy the play, while also being adequate to the society of sixteenth-century England.²⁰ As regards the inappropriate features, by modifying the text, Gascoigne eluded 'the traps of sensuality and eroticism which this type of situation comedy can so easily fall into'.²¹ Not to mention the explicit content of the original Italian jokes, which the author had to avoid as well; therefore, in Act 4, scene 3, when the Inn-keeper of Ferrara, Phylogano and his servant Lityo, reach Erostrato's house to meet him, Phylogano repeatedly asks the Ferrarese to knock at the door, who does so quite softly, to which Lityo comments: 'Se questa porta fusse tua madre, maggior rispetto non averesti di batterla. [...]' ²² ('If this door were your mother, you would not have more respect beating her'). Gascoigne's translation is far less indecent since Lityo says 'If this gate were your Grandefathers soule, you could not knocke more softly, [...]'. (4.3.72-73)

Taking into account that the English society during the sixteenth century did not completely

²⁰ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 138.

²¹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 142.

²² Ludovico Ariosto, 'I Suppositi in prosa', in *Le commedie di Ludovico Ariosto*, Vol. 1, ed. by A. Gareffi (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 2007), p. 319. (This is my reference edition)

approve of Italian culture and its practices, it is worth wondering why Gascoigne chose to translate for an audience of noble English law scholars an Italian play that contains, among other topics, deception and sexual desire, as we have discussed. Bevington notes that ‘in a city generally obsessed with fears of cultural invasion, to judge by its surviving popular drama, the production of Ariosto's comedy in translation could not be a neutral event expressing mere scholarly or humanist curiosity about a culture to the south of England’.²³ It is unknown whether Gascoigne wanted to shock his community or receive disapproval; indeed, the play was by itself unconventional, since some controversial aspects that it deals with are deception, on which the whole plot is based, and the fact that Polynesta is a young woman confident in her femininity. The character of Polynesta (as it will be further analysed, compared to Shakespeare’s Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*) differs from the traditional female characters; Hadfield states that ‘women were generally represented in literary works in accordance with contemporary misogynistic caricatures’;²⁴ therefore, they were expected to be portrayed as obedient and submissive, otherwise they were meant to depict the ‘unconventional woman’ – strong, confident and clever, which concepts were largely frowned upon. Indeed, Gascoigne acknowledged the English perception of said topics in Polynesta’s father reaction. When Damon is confronted with the truth about his daughter and Erostrato, both in the Italian and the English version, he delivers a soliloquy on how hopeless he is, now that his daughter has been ‘violated’:²⁵

DAMON Alas, what dower, what marriage shall I now prepare for my daughter? O poore doloro[u]s Damon, more miserable than miserie it selfe, [...]

(5.6.26-28)

Nonetheless, Polynesta’s course of action is revealed to be right at the end. Since the first scene in Act 1, it can be understood that Polynesta is not ashamed of her affair with Erostrato; as a matter of fact, she is confident in her choice, since she knows him to be a Sicilian gentleman and a worthy lover. When scolded for her improper behaviour by the nurse, Polynesta emphasizes how Balia is also to be blamed for her situation, since she helped the two lovers meet:

POLYNESTA And I pray you whome may I thanke but gentle nourse? That continually praying him, what for his

²³ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 35.

²⁴ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 252.

²⁵ Ariosto, ‘*I Suppositi in prosa*’, in *Le commedie di Ludovico Ariosto*, ed. by Gareffi, p. 336.

personage, his curtesie, and above all, the extreme passions of his minde, in fine you would never cease till I accepted him, delighted in him, and at length desired him with no lesse affection, than he earst desired me.

(1.1.26-30)

On this note, Bevington affirms that the fact that ‘a comic masterpiece of Italian Renaissance that was both foreign and challenging’²⁶ was produced and performed at Gray’s Inn was quite extraordinary.

As regards another controversial theme of the play, a recurrent joke in *I Suppositi* consists in mocking lawyers. The latter constitutes a respectable profession even though it was commonly associated with debts and financial problems; therefore, it was not uncommon for lawyers to be criticized by society. Austen reports that ‘*I Suppositi* satirizes the law, lawyers, and the legal profession as a whole’;²⁷ moreover, Gascoigne had to deal with legal issues during his life and the fact that he added from Ariosto’s version even more teasing on this topic is quite ironic, also considering that it was meant for the students of Gray’s Inn.²⁸ Indeed, it has been speculated that Gascoigne meant for it to be armless, rather than an actual critique.²⁹ To give an example, the whole character of Cleander, the doctor, is a caricature of lawyers, since he is often made fun of for his greed, the fact that does not offer meals to others, and is quite older than Polynesta, who he intends to marry. Furthermore, one of Gascoigne’s glosses reports ‘Lawyers are never weary to get money’³⁰ (5.5.48), and again Gascoigne presents Philogano’s comment: ‘[...] shall I give my selfe, as it were a pray to the Lawyers, whose insatiable jawes I am not able to feede [...]’³¹ (4.8.57-58). It appears more clearly that Gascoigne himself contributed to the satire, in Act 1, scene 2, when we are introduced to Cleander and Pasyphilo. The two are discussing the wealth of the former and, while Ariosto inserted a line in Latin:

CLEANDRO [...] *unde versus: Opes dat sanctio Iustiniana; Ex aliis paleas, ex istis collige grana.*³²
PASIFILO O buono! Di chi è? di Virgilio?
CLEANDRO Che Virgilio? È d'una nostra glosa eccellentissima.

(1.2.288)

Gascoigne changes the quote, preserving the meaning but intensifying the image:

²⁶ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 38.

²⁷ Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne: Studies in Self-Presentation*, p. 78.

²⁸ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, pp. 35-39.

²⁹ Bevington, ‘Cultural Exchange’, in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 39.

³⁰ Gascoigne, ‘Supposes’, in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. by Pigman III, p. 51

³¹ Gascoigne, ‘Supposes’, in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. by Pigman III, p. 45.

³² ‘Therefore the verse: the Iustinian law provides wealth; from other trades you collect hay, from this wheat’.

CLEANDER [...]
*The trade of Lawe doth fill the boystrous bagges,
They swimme in silke, when others royst in ragges.*
PASYPHILO O excellent verse, who made it? *Virgil?*
CLEANDER *Virgil?* tushe it is written in one of our gloses.

(1.2.53-57)

By translating and adapting Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, considering its intricate plot and improper language, Gascoigne produced a play that became a model for the English comedies to come.³³ Nevertheless, the Italian original was vital for Gascoigne to accomplish these goals.³⁴ On its own, Ariosto's play already focuses on how Erostrato and Polynesta can get married, despite Cleander's threat, rather than on the sexual component, which is instead present in the humor and puns. Ariosto 'brought to the scholars, nobles, and gallants a new, sophisticated comedy, not yet tainted by the eroticism which haunted such comedy during the following century and a half and which finally destroyed it'.³⁵

In the previous chapter I extensively discussed the notion of England's ambivalent attitude towards. I mentioned that the interactions between the two cultures were not consistent, because of religious and political conflicts, resulting in this opposed perception of Italy, or the idea of 'many Italies',³⁶ commented on by Marrapodi. On the one hand, the English society developed stereotypes, myths and prejudice, so much so that the 'adjective "Italianate" would become a devastating pejorative';³⁷ on the other hand, it was due to Italian Medieval and Renaissance models that the English Humanism, and its consequent literary production, could thrive.³⁸ In this context, Gascoigne challenged the values and ethics of his time deciding to translate Ariosto's play. Considering that the majority of English authors of the fifteenth and sixteenth century used to fuel the stereotypes linked to foreign countries, especially Italy, one would have expected Gascoigne to exploit the 'Italian component' of the play and portray the flawed characters and their inappropriate actions so to emphasize it as an Italian feature. The author could have highlighted the promiscuity

³³ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 142.

³⁴ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 141.

³⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 141.

³⁶ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 25.

³⁷ Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 76.

³⁸ Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 6.

of Polynesta, the natural duplicity and dishonesty of Erostrato, Dulypo and Pasyphilo, Cleander's lust and greed, Damon's selfness, and so on. However, Gascoigne never meant to condemn or criticize Italy; as a matter of fact, the audience and the readers were presented with a strong female character, clever protagonists, an unexpected twist and a merry turn of events. What the author was forced to do at the very least to be able to perform and later publish *Supposes*, was to shift the focus from the risqué, but kept the jokes and humor in order to benefit from the original play. Bevington affirms that the play's 'fun is of a familiar sort, but it is also of a sort that is hard to find elsewhere in the English drama of the early Elizabethan period',³⁹ since Gascoigne was the first to present such a play to the English audience and even 'the original motifs of Polynesta's premarital union and the comic handling of lawyers, [...] must have appeared positively challenging and refreshing to the gentlemanly spectators at Gray's Inn'.⁴⁰

George Gascoigne chose to translate an Italian play, one that, as discussed, could lead to controversy. When translating, he managed to avoid the more explicit and vulgar elements⁴¹ not to fuel prejudices, as we have said; however, the play still deals with characters and subjects unconventional to the English audience without marking them as carrying stereotypically Italian traits. Taking into account that *Supposes*, along with *Jocasta*, was praised when performed at Gray's Inn in 1566,⁴² we might argue that Gascoigne was able to benefit from Italian literature, despite the controversial judgement of his community. He was the first to translate an Italian comedy and, as a result, produced the first English play in prose dialogue.⁴³ George Gascoigne's *Supposes* may be considered 'a significant case of both Italian reception and appropriation in England'.⁴⁴

The next chapter seeks to examine all the sources that Shakespeare employed while composing his popular comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*; specifically, Ariosto's *I Suppositi* and Gascoigne's *Supposes*.

³⁹ Bevington, 'Cultural Exchange', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Michele Marrapodi, 'Prologue', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 17.

⁴¹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 138.

⁴² Austen, *The Literary Career of George Gascoigne*, p. 78.

⁴³ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 137.

⁴⁴ Michele Marrapodi, 'Prologue', in *The Italian World*, ed. by Marrapodi and Hoenselaars, p. 17.

Chapter 3

Supposes as source for *The Taming of the Shrew*

3.1 Shakespeare's sources for *The Taming of the Shrew*

This chapter will survey the sources of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*; however, particular attention will be given in the following section to *Supposes* as source material. This chapter will also examine the issue of the play's possible direct sources, taking into account the anonymous version of a comedy entitled *The Taming of A Shrew*, published in 1594,¹ which raised speculations over whether Shakespeare's version came first and elicited, among scholars, the dilemma of whether *A Shrew* was source material or an earlier draft of *The Shrew*.

Gascoigne's translation of *I Suppositi* represents a case of 'contaminatio'² between Italian and English literature, being influenced by Boccaccian novellas, as well as English culture, through Gascoigne's own interpretation. It can be inferred that, by itself, *Supposes* was the result of a number of different sources combined together. Indeed, it has been previously discussed how English authors frequently drew on Italy's vast literary tradition, as an 'inexhaustible font of borrowing, imitation, and adaptation'.³ Nonetheless, 1.2 also analysed how English scholars would manipulate some details about Italy, due to political and religious grounds.

In his abundant literary production William Shakespeare exploited the myth of Italy, so as to provide more emphasis to his characters and stories; as a matter of fact, it has been speculated that Shakespeare included elements from his own imagination and stereotypes already established by the English society of his time.⁴ Shakespeare was one of the English writers who 'adopted both Italian modes and topoi as a structural constituent for their plays' dramatic construction and provided

¹ Richard Hosley 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 27 (1964), p. 289.

² Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 215.

³ Marrapodi, 'Appropriating Italy', in Marrapodi, ed., *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 2.

⁴ Perkinson, "*Volpone*" and the Reputation of Venetian Justice, p. 11.

ironical caricatures of Italianate characters for parodic intent’,⁵ as examined in 1.2. On the one hand, Shakespeare depicted Italy as ‘a target for patriotic satire’;⁶ on the other hand, he presented it as ‘an exotic and sophisticated otherworld’:⁷ Venice as portrayed in Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* is a clear example of this ambiguity. As mentioned earlier, in *Othello* the Venetian government is just and impartial when it comes to judge Othello and Desdemona’s relationship during an hearing,⁸ requested by Desdemona’s (Italian) father Brabantio, on the basis of his racist convictions;⁹ nonetheless, the reputation of Venetian brothels is well established in the play, through Iago’s false accusations towards Desdemona.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare portrays a ‘mythic Venice’¹¹ where the ‘social and political contradictions’¹² are well established, particularly considering the Venetian Republic’s trial proceedings.¹³

The author’s portrayal of Italy appears not to be consistent in his works; still, regardless of how Shakespeare decided to represent Italy, it continued to be one of his prime choices of reference, whether as a source of inspiration or as a setting option. His interpretation of Italy was influenced by ‘the enticement of the arts, Petrarchan poetry, and *commedia*’,¹⁴ and it has been debated that he ‘rarely invented the plots of his dramas, preferring to work, often quite closely, with stories he found ready-made in histories, novellas, narrative poems, or other plays’.¹⁵ Therefore, Shakespeare followed the Renaissance process of adaptation from Roman New Comedy and novelistic literature and drama of the sixteenth century,¹⁶ producing new examples of comedies which included both original elements and ‘established ideas’¹⁷ derived from traditions. In doing so, the author managed to incorporate ‘strands of the romantic ideal of Italy into the texture of a new dramatic sub-genre’.¹⁸

⁵ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 5.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 278.

⁷ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 278.

⁸ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘William Shakespeare’, in *The Norton Anthology*, ed. by Greenblatt and others, p. 553.

⁹ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 261.

¹⁰ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 178.

¹¹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 282.

¹² Marrapodi, ed., ‘Appropriating Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 10.

¹³ Hadfield, *The English Renaissance*, p. 265.

¹⁴ Michele Marrapodi, ed., ‘Shakespeare’s Romantic Italy: Novelistic, Theatrical, and Cultural Transactions in the Comedies’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 51.

¹⁵ Greenblatt and Logan, ‘William Shakespeare’, in *The Norton Anthology*, ed. by Greenblatt and others, p. 538.

¹⁶ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Shakespeare’s Romantic Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Shakespeare’s Romantic Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 51.

¹⁸ Marrapodi, ed., ‘Shakespeare’s Romantic Italy’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare*, p. 51.

While writing *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare did work on already established plots, adapting them to Latin and Renaissance canons. A central instance of this idea of ‘*contaminatio*’¹⁹ in Shakespeare’s literary production is his selection of sources for the comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*. As it appears, academics debate on the alleged sources for *The Taming*, them being – the comedy *The Taming of A Shrew*, the ballad of *A Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe* (1550) and Gascoigne’s *Supposes*. Gascoigne provided a great deal of material for the subplot of the play;²⁰ this will be closely examined in 3.2. In order to overview the other sources, we may begin by illustrating briefly the plot first, then the issue of *A Shrew*.

The plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* includes three storylines: the ‘framework’²¹ or induction plot, the main shrew-taming plot and the subplot of love intrigue or of the ‘supposes’.²² Although the premises might seem intricate, ‘Shakespeare’s play is well unified and [...] the shrew plot is the force that draws a less vital subplot into this unity’.²³ Shakespeare created a fictional background for the main plot, involving the drunk tinker Christopher Sly, being mocked by some noblemen, who convince him of being a lord, give him an alleged wife (actually a disguised boy) and entertain him with a play – the shrew-taming story. Sly’s framework is quickly abandoned, after only one interlude and no epilogue, the reason is still obscure.²⁴ The main story, performed for Sly, is set in Padua and revolves around Katherina – the ‘shrew’, sister to Bianca. Their father has established that Bianca cannot marry until her older sister is wed, even if she already has three suitors: Hortensio, Gremio and Lucentio. Hortensio’s friend Petruchio arrives in Padua and decides to tame the wild Katherina and marry her, in order to turn her into a faithful wife. After the marriage, Petruchio forces her to undergo a number of torments, as humiliation and hunger, eventually succeeding in his intentions. The subplot focuses on Bianca’s courtship and the many characters pretending to be others to win her hand. Lucentio, after a few escapades, marries Bianca. During the

¹⁹ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 215.

²⁰ Lovascio, ‘*Ariosto, Gascoigne e The Taming of the Shrew*’, p. 77.

²¹ Brian Morris, ‘Authorship and sources’ in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Brian Morris (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1981), p. 76.

²² Cecil C. Seronsy, ‘*Supposes* as the Unifying Theme in *The Taming of the Shrew*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (1963), p. 15.

²³ Seronsy, ‘*Supposes* as the Unifying Theme in *The Taming of the Shrew*’, p. 15.

²⁴ Brian Morris, ‘*The Shrew and A Shrew*’, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 39.

final nuptial feast, Hortensio, Lucentio and Petruchio bet on whose wife is the most obedient and it is revealed to be Katherina, concluding the comedy on the note that she has finally been tamed and is now the most well-behaved wife.

On the account of the controversial themes that the play presents, the female submission and male wooing, *The Taming* has been the subject of criticism, especially if we take into consideration the progress of feminist studies²⁵ and general awareness regarding female rights; nonetheless, this thesis will not be examining this matter, though significant.

To give an idea of the various sources for Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the issue of the anonymous publication of the comedy *The Taming of A Shrew* needs to be addressed.²⁶ The dates documenting when the two plays were published do not clarify which version was the original, since *A Shrew* appeared in 1596,²⁷ but *The Shrew* was first published in 1594 and then revised and printed in the Folio in 1623.²⁸ Richard Hosley has studied many theories, some stated that *A Shrew* could be a direct source of *The Shrew*, others that it represents a 'memorial reconstruction'²⁹ or a 'bad quarto'³⁰ of the latter. It was argued that *A Shrew* itself was inspired by an alleged 'lost Shrew play'³¹ or 'Ur-Shrew'³², an alternative source for Shakespeare's version. Kenneth Muir welcomed this last theory, while Geoffrey Bullough, as Hosley reported, supported the idea that *A Shrew* is indeed a source of *The Shrew*, or even Shakespeare's first attempt.³³ This last speculation was also shared by Richard Warwick Bond, who printed the Arden edition of 1904.³⁴ In the 2001 revised Arden Shakespeare edition, Brian Morris commented that the two plays, sharing similar titles, could be related in some way, and that *A Shrew* may be considered as a shortened adaptation of *The Shrew*.³⁵ Morris identifies some main alterations between the two:

²⁵ Brian Morris, 'The play', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 144.

²⁶ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 289.

²⁷ Morris, '*The Shrew* and *A Shrew*', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 13.

²⁸ Brian Morris, 'The text', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 1.

²⁹ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 289.

³⁰ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 289.

³¹ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 289.

³² Morris, '*The Shrew* and *A Shrew*', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 14.

³³ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 290.

³⁴ Brian Morris, 'Preface', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. ix.

³⁵ Brian Morris, 'The Taming of the Shrew' in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan, (The Arden Shakespeare: London, 2001), p. 4226

while they both share the same plot and scenes progression, the dialogue does not always coincide; the characters' names, except for Katherina, have been changed and the setting is not Padua but Athens.³⁶ These similarities may be proof, that the two plays are not an older and later draft, but one the source for the other; nevertheless, the evidence is not sufficient to reach a conclusion and the list of theories could continue. This debate has raised a number of hypotheses, establishing that the subject cannot be unveiled yet.

An additional source for Shakespeare, although critics differ in opinion,³⁷ may be the ballad of *A Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe* (1550), printed by Hugh Jackson, which describes again the story of two sisters, of which the older is 'tamed' quite brutally by her husband.³⁸ As a matter of fact, the narrative including 'the victorious youngest daughter, the taming of the shrew, the bride test for obedience, and the wager on the most obedient wife',³⁹ was a common plot during medieval times,⁴⁰ considering that variants of these elements have been documented in folk tales from France, Italy, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Scotland, Ireland, Spain, Holland, Germany, Austria and the Balkans, and it was known in the United States, India and Spanish America.⁴¹ On the basis of the vast circulation of this plot, the idea that Shakespeare was in fact directly influenced by *A Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe* is debatable, also because the 'taming' scenes of the latter are much more cruel than Petruchio's methods towards Katherina, which seem closer to those described in other tales.

In light of what has been discussed in this section, it can be assumed that Shakespeare drew the plot for *The Taming of the Shrew* on some source, undoubtedly influenced by the themes and elements of the tales circulating in Europe. As regards the techniques employed by Shakespeare, the main source appears to be the Roman comedy,⁴² as well as the Renaissance romantic comedy and the *commedia erudita*,⁴³ previously mentioned in 2.2. Morris commented that 'woven into the

³⁶ Morris, 'The Shrew and A Shrew', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 14.

³⁷ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 296.

³⁸ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 296.

³⁹ Morris, 'Authorship and sources' in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 72.

⁴⁰ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 296.

⁴¹ Morris, 'Authorship and sources' in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, pp. 72-73.

⁴² Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 308.

⁴³ Hosley, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 308.

strong simplicity of these stories of shrewish wives and drunken tinkers is the fashionable complexity of Italian comedy, which has its roots in the Latin *commedia erudita*'.⁴⁴ As it appears, Italian literature influenced and shaped the brilliant work of William Shakespeare, who needed contents from Italy to refine his drama, even though he sometimes manipulated them for parodic purposes.

To effectively examine Shakespeare's sources for his comedy, a further and greater investigation needs to be conducted on the author's use of *Supposes*, and on its influence on the style and part of the plot for *The Taming*, which will be the content of the following section.

⁴⁴ Morris, 'Authorship and sources' in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 87.

3.2 *Supposes* in *The Taming of the Shrew*

This section will analyse how *Supposes* was incorporated and used as the main source for the subplot of Bianca's courtship in *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare.

As I have discussed earlier, George Gascoigne translated *Supposes* from the original *I Suppositi* by Ludovico Ariosto, adding and adapting the text to his audience.¹ His interpretation anticipated the use of prose dialogue in English plays, which might be considered an example of how Italian Medieval and Renaissance models had a positive impact on English authors. As I mentioned in 3.1, Shakespeare often drew inspiration from pre-existing plays or *novellas*,² and he did so for Bianca's plot in *The Taming*, where he re-elaborated Ariosto's characters and plot, and Gascoigne's scenes and themes,³ considering the alterations the latter executed on the original (see 2.2). Lovascio affirms that one should not minimize the value of literary works and texts adopted by Shakespeare, acknowledging them merely for being chosen by the author as models; Shakespeare purposefully selected *Supposes* as a source material, due to its artistic and stylistic significance.⁴

The impact of *Supposes* in *The Taming* is particularly noticeable because Shakespeare did not considerably divert from the original, reproducing almost all Gascoigne's scenes and characters' traits, as regards the subplot of Bianca and Petruchio. As I have noted, Ariosto worked on a prose and verse publication of *I Suppositi*⁵ and Gascoigne took elements from both versions for his prose translation.⁶ *The Taming of the Shrew* contains mainly verse dialogue, inspired in part by Gascoigne and, potentially, Ariosto's prose,⁷ although it is unknown whether Shakespeare read the original Italian or not.⁸ Charles Ross comments that 'most of *The Taming of the Shrew* is in verse, but there

¹ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 137.

² Greenblatt and Logan, 'William Shakespeare', in *The Norton Anthology*, ed. by Greenblatt and others, p. 538.

³ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 91.

⁴ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 92.

⁵ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 73.

⁶ Ross, Charles, 'Ariosto In Prose: Nuancing Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*', *Prose Studies*, 29 (2007), p. 336.

⁷ Ross, 'Ariosto In Prose', p. 337.

⁸ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 80.

is just enough prose to hypothesize a residual influence, through the hum of Renaissance rhetorical training, of Ariosto's brilliant prose on Shakespeare's style'.⁹ Therefore, Shakespeare made use of Italian literary style for the majority of his production.

In relation to the structure of the text, in *Supposes* Gascoigne adopted the unities of time, space and action of Aristotle from *I Suppositi*, so as to produce a close translation¹⁰ as illustrated in 2.2. However, Shakespeare was not required to follow the aforesaid paradigm, since he was not translating *I Suppositi*, but merely using it as a source and could 'expand the retrospective narrative'.¹¹ Therefore, previous events are not explained to the audience by the characters, as in *Supposes*, but they are actual scenes in the play. Considering that the plot of *Supposes* constitutes only a part of *The Taming*, it can be concluded that Shakespeare adapted the characters and actions to his narrative, to integrate them with the main Katherine/Petruchio plot; Morris stated that 'in terms of the larger strategy of *The Shrew* Shakespeare took only what he needed'.¹² As it appears, unlike the traditional Italian comedy and *Supposes*, where one character plans the disguises or mischief, Shakespeare in *The Taming* introduces multiple misleading characters that mock each other, further convoluting the already complex plot of *Supposes*.¹³ Bertrand Evans comments that *The Shrew* was 'the most elaborate framework for foolery that Shakespeare had yet devised',¹⁴ and would not have been the same without the model of Gascoigne's brilliant translation.

Both *Supposes* and *The Shrew* are set in Italy, although Shakespeare decided to place the action in Padua, rather than Ferrara, due to the fact that for the English audience the former was considered 'the typical Italian university town'.¹⁵ Regardless of the actual city, Morris stated that Gascoigne's translation provided 'a suitable "Italian" background of intrigue and suspense',¹⁶ given the ambivalent allure that Italy held for the English society in the sixteenth century, as argued in chapter 1.

⁹ Ross, 'Ariosto In Prose', p. 344.

¹⁰ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 74.

¹¹ Brain Morris, 'Authorship and sources' in Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Morris, p. 81.

¹² Morris, 'Authorship and sources', p. 82.

¹³ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 87.

¹⁴ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 87.

¹⁵ Morris, '*The Shrew* and *A Shrew*', p. 16.

¹⁶ Morris, 'Authorship and sources', p. 83.

Based on the plots of the two plays', illustrated in 2.2 and 3.1, we can identify the corresponding characters that were taken from *Supposes* and adjusted for *The Shrew*: Polynesta-Bianca, Erostrato-Lucentio, Phylogano-Vincentio, Damon-Baptista, Cleander-Gremio and the Sænese-Merchant of Mantua.¹⁷ So, almost the totality of characters coincide in both plays; nonetheless, Shakespeare altered some of them, as for example Dylipo, Erostrato's servant, who becomes both Lucentio's servant Cambio and Tranio, taking their master's place in different scenarios.¹⁸ Other characters that do not appear in *The Shrew* are Pasyphilo (the parasite), Balia (the nurse), the Inn-keeper and other minor servants,¹⁹ like Petrucio, although his name will be employed for the character of Katherina's husband, Petruchio.²⁰ Due to the absence of the nurse and the parasite, some circumstances cannot take place; for instance, there is no nurse with whom Bianca discusses her affair, since – as will be discussed below – Bianca is 'purer' than Polynesta. Hence the main difference between the two female characters.²¹ Moreover, Pasyphilo does not reveal that either Cambio or Tranio are Gremio's lost son, for Shakespeare did not include the Cleander/Dylipo storyline, perhaps since he had already incorporated it in *The Comedy of Errors* (1589-1594).²² Both *I Suppositi* and *The Comedy of Errors* drew inspiration from the comedies of the Roman authors Plautus and Terence.²³ Even though the main characters of *The Taming* appear to be more complex and layered, a trait of Shakespearean dramaturgy,²⁴ Shakespeare preserved, as in *Supposes*, the characters' attribute of being *maschere*, that is flat protagonists with specific personalities from the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*,²⁵ a type of comedy which appeared later than the *commedia erudita*, and 'though its influence was to be enormous, it drew the basic situations from those developed in learned works'.²⁶

Shakespeare's characters do not particularly differ from Gascoigne's. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's

¹⁷ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 81.

¹⁸ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 81.

¹⁹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 81.

²⁰ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 85.

²¹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 84.

²² Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 87.

²³ Morris, 'Authorship and sources', p. 83.

²⁴ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 85.

²⁵ Johnson, *George Gascoigne*, p. 139.

²⁶ Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature*, p. 197.

approach to the female character of Bianca was quite innovative for its time and rather dissimilar from Ariosto/Gascoigne's interpretation of Polynesta. Lovascio mentions that Polynesta stood apart from tradition, having a concrete personality²⁷— she wants to be with Erostrato and is aware that her situation is problematic, especially as regards her father. That being said, in *Supposes* Polynesta appears exclusively in Act 1, where her conversation with Balia functions as prologue for the audience, and Act 5, where she does not deliver any line or speech.²⁸ On the contrary, Bianca is present in a total of seven scenes,²⁹ considering that she is not the main heroine of *The Taming*, and there is no innuendo to the fact that she had extra-marital relations with one of her suitors or that she might be pregnant, as Polynesta: hence the aforementioned 'purer' attribute of Bianca.³⁰ Although she presents herself as submissive and tame, Bianca proves herself to be independent and, as a matter of fact, 'loses' to her sister the final bet between the husbands on the most obedient wife. Despite that, Lovascio states that Bianca's radical transformation suggests that the minor characters 'act according to predictable patterns',³¹ while the main protagonists, Katherina and Petruchio, possess a more elaborate persona.³²

Gascoigne's model can be considered 'an immediate dramatic source'³³ for *The Taming*, since the influence of *Supposes* is clearly evident even if Shakespeare introduced some alterations to the original plot. Morris comments on Shakespeare's talent to incorporate a number of sources in one play: 'the skillful weaving of these three [the shrew-taming ballads, the beggar-gulling device and *Supposes*] into a complex action is among the play's notable achievements'.³⁴ This shows that, once more, the Italian tradition was vital for English writers, along with their distinctive skills, to accomplish such masterly literary works. Shakespeare's selection of *Supposes* as one of his sources for *The Taming of the Shrew* was favoured by the fact that Ariosto and Gascoigne chose Italy as the setting, providing a framework which, by itself, already filled the imagination of the English

²⁷ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 84.

²⁸ Gascoigne, 'Supposes', in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. by G.W. Pigman III

²⁹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 84.

³⁰ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 84.

³¹ Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 85.

³² Lovascio, 'Ariosto, Gascoigne e *The Taming of the Shrew*', p. 85.

³³ Morris, 'The Taming of the Shrew' in *The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. by Proudfoot, Thompson and Kastan, p. 4226.

³⁴ Brian Morris, 'The Taming of the Shrew', p. 4226.

spectator with fascination and intrigue. Morris noted that Shakespeare was ‘aware of Roman drama and the *commedia dell’arte* tradition, as is clear from the very names and descriptions of his characters’;³⁵ therefore, *I Suppositi*, being an example of the typical Italian comedy, contributed to the author’s creation of *The Taming*. Taking into account that Italian literature was ‘fashionable’³⁶ and Italian comedy was considered ‘academically respectable’,³⁷ it can be assumed that the Italian source played a critical part in the success of *The Taming of the Shrew*, by means of the adaptation of the Italian source in Gascoigne’s *Supposes*.

³⁵ Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by B. Morris, p. 61.

³⁶ Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by B. Morris, p. 111.

³⁷ Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by B. Morris, p. 111.

Conclusion

The Italian influence on English literature and culture evolved throughout the centuries and was shaped by political and religious aspects in both Italy and England. Indeed, English scholars and gentlemen of the fifteenth and sixteenth century had a biased perception of Italy: on one hand it was a literary model for successful adaptations and translations; on the other, the source of religious or moral corruption and vice. Roger Ascham, Joseph Hall, Thomas Coryate, William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Day and John Webster are some of the authors that either criticized Italy, warned English gentlemen of its threat or exploited the stereotypes of and prejudices towards the Italians in their publications. During the sixteenth century it was not uncommon for English authors to imitate Italian drama; however, it was also frequent for them to manipulate popular beliefs about Italy by portraying vicious or untrustworthy Italian characters.

In this context of both fascination and discrimination, George Gascoigne made use of Italian models for his work, taking inspiration from poets and writers of the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance. Gascoigne was the first English writer to translate an Italian comedy and he chose *I Suppositi*, produced in prose and in verse by Ludovico Ariosto, which presents themes like deception, pre-marital affairs and eroticism. These same debated topics were precisely those which popularised the stereotype of Italy as a country of sinners; nonetheless, Gascoigne's translation *Supposes* does not emphasize these issues as 'Italian' features. Rather, the matter of deception is the main comedic point of the play and the erotic element is skillfully eluded by focusing on the humor of the scenes.

Gascoigne managed to introduce to the English audience an unconventional Italian play, without moralizing the source material. In addition to this, it can be affirmed that the author benefitted from the Italian tradition, since *Supposes* has been considered a significant and innovative example of English appropriation of Italian drama, while also being the first English play to present prose

dialogue. Moreover, to further confirm that, despite the ambiguous disposition of sixteenth-century England towards Italy, Gascoigne's translation is an example of the positive outcome of Italian influence on English drama, it can be noted that William Shakespeare included the plot of *I Suppositi/Supposes* in his own comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, adapting the material to his play, while preserving the essence of *Supposes*. With Gascoigne's translation of *I Suppositi*, the Italian tradition was adopted and incorporated in a timeless play by an illustrious author, Shakespeare, who chose *Supposes* as source material because of Ariosto's captivating plot and Gascoigne's artistic and stylistic interpretation.

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