

John Florio and Shakespeare: Life and Language

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Pour nous, Shakespeare a connu et approché l'Italie, sa langue, sa littérature et sa civilisation, par l'intermédiaire de John Florio. Car [...] les deux hommes, le poète et le grammairien, se connaissaient nécessairement.

Clara Longworth Chambrun

When, in his 1747 annotated edition of Shakespeare's works, William Warburton declared that "by *Holofernes* is designed a particular character, a pedant and schoolmaster of our author's time, one *John Florio*, a teacher of the *Italian* tongue in *London*"¹, he certainly could not have imagined that he had inaugurated one of the most intriguing threads within the never-ending quest to find Shakespeare's 'traces of life', literally opening the proverbial Pandora's box. With his hypothesis Warburton suggested a close connection between the playwright and John Florio (1553-1625), an Italian teacher (*Firste Frutes*, 1578; *Second Frutes*, 1591), lexicographer (*A World of Words*, 1598; *Queen Anna's New World of Words*, 1611), translator (*Montaigne's Essays*, 1603; *Decameron*, 1620), recognized as one of the most outstanding interpreters of Italian humanistic culture in Elizabethan England.

After Warburton, many other modern critics have been haunted by a sort of 'magnificent obsession' to prove the existence of a liaison, both in a biographical and/or in a linguistic perspective, between these two giants of Elizabethan culture². Gentlemen and courtiers in Queen

¹ William Warburton and Alexander Pope, eds, *The Works of Shakespear*, London, J. and P. Knapton, 1747, vol. II, p. 227. Interestingly, the comment goes on to describe Florio as someone "who has given us a small dictionary of that language under the title of *A world of words* [...]. From the ferocity of this man's temper it was that *Shakespear* chose for him the name that *Rablais* gives to his Pedant of *Thubal Holoferne*" (pp. 227-28).

² Shakespeare's connection to Florio has been repeatedly explored along two main lines, "pseudo-scholarly and intertextual", as has been summed up by Sergio Costola and Michael Saenger in "Shylock's Venice and the Grammar of the Modern City", in *Shakespeare and the Italian Renaissance. Appropriation, Transformation, Opposition*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 147-62; p. 152. Among the classic contributions on the topic see Clara Longworth Chambrun, *Giovanni Florio, un apôtre*

Elizabeth's entourage, like the earl of Southampton, have often been mentioned in order to provide historical dates and events which might have hosted Florio and Shakespeare together; parallels have been sought between Shakespeare's plays and Florio's didactic dialogues. Some have gone so far as to suggest merging the two figures into one by imagining Florio to be Shakespeare himself, thus giving a new twist to the authorship question. However, any effort in this direction has been fruitless and no solid facts have been put forward but only conjectures about a possible, at best probable, acquaintanceship.

In the wake of this failure to find historical dates and documents linking Florio's and Shakespeare's lives, I would like to start again from what is extremely historical and factual, the real commodity which joins them indissolubly and which plays such a relevant role both in their biographies and in their careers, that is the Italian language. A language that was at the time in dialogue and confrontation with Early Modern English, itself a developing language, malleable and fluid as it was, not yet standardized, and veritably steeped in a linguistic culture "that existed without dictionaries of English, where there was no 'authority' on the shelf and which therefore had a very different relationship with language"³.

On the relationship between the English and the Italian language at the time, Florio himself writes in the "Induction" to his *Firste Fruites*: "I am sure, that no language can better expresse or shewe foorth the liuely and true meanyng of a thing, then the Italian"⁴: the English language, like a waste land, will only become fertile and rich through Florio's Italian flowers, and the Italian culture and its *civil conversazione* are to be taught and spread, as English "but passe Douer, it is woorth nothing" (FF, chap. 27, p. 50).

de la Renaissance en Angleterre à l'époque de Shakespeare, Paris, Payot, 1921; Frances Yates, *John Florio. The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1934; Frances Yates, *A Study of Love's Labour's Lost*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1936; Carlo Maria Franzero, *John Florio a Londra ai tempi di Shakespeare*, Parma, Guanda, 1969; Mario Praz, "Shakespeare's Italy", *Shakespeare Survey*, 7 (1954), pp. 95-106; Rinaldo C. Simonini, *Italian Scholarship in Renaissance England*, Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1952.

³ Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare and Language. Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in the Renaissance*, London, Methuen, 2010, p. ix.

⁴ John Florio, *His Firste Fruites: which yeelde familiar speech, merie Proverbs, wittie sentences, and golden sayings. Also a perfect Induction to the Italian and English tongues*, London, Thomas Woodcock, 1578, p. 114. From here onwards: FF.

As many studies have shown, in Elizabethan London Italian was conceived as a *lingua franca*, the object of pedagogical strategies whose linguistic and performative force passed through “the courteous conversational exchange as a mode of imparting knowledge and civility”⁵, in the wake of the legacy of Stefano Guazzo’s *Civile conversazione*⁶. Italian was taught by private teachers, and the first generation of refugees, such as Michelangelo Florio, had been employed as private tutors to aristocratic as well as royal pupils: until the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Italian language remained an ornament for the elite, a way of engaging with a rich cultural tradition. Moreover, in the sixteenth century England witnessed a significant rise in the number of translations of continental printed books, and, in particular, there was an ever increasing demand for texts of specifically Italian origin, as “by the second half of the century Italian had overtaken French as the prestigious language to be acquired by the elites, due in no small part to Elizabethan Italophilia”⁷. Italian, in other words, was conceived as the key to social accomplishment and John Florio presented himself as a crucial mediator of these modes, a teacher of Italian language and conversation, a compiler of Italian words and sayings, spreading his knowledge and taste like a contagion, in brief, the ideal subject to be in charge of Shakespeare’s education to Italian fashion and modes⁸.

Shakespeare and Florio are to be framed precisely in this rich network of interdiscursive relations which connect the Italian human-

⁵ Keir Elam, “‘At the Cubiculo’: Shakespeare’s Problems with Italian Language and Culture”, in *Italomania(s). Italy and the English Speaking World from Chaucer to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Giuseppe Galigani, Firenze, Mauro Pagliai, 2007, pp. 111-22; p. 115.

⁶ Sergio Rossi, *Ricerche sull’Umanesimo e sul Rinascimento in Inghilterra*, Milano, Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1969; Silvana Sciarrino, “Da John Florio a Giovanni Torriano: l’insegnamento della lingua italiana nel Rinascimento inglese”, in *Intertestualità shakespeariane. Il Cinquecento italiano e il Rinascimento inglese*, ed. Michele Marrapodi Roma, Bulzoni, 2003, pp. 31-46; Michael Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England. A Cultural Politics of Translation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁷ Guyda Armstrong, “Paratexts and Their Functions in Seventeenth-Century English Decamerons”, *Modern Language Review*, 2007, pp. 40-57; p. 42.

⁸ See Manfred Pfister, “Inglese Italianato – Italiano Anglizzato: John Florio”, in *Renaissance Go-Betweens. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, eds Andreas Höfele and Werner von Koppenfels, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 32-54; Donatella Montini, “John/Giovanni: Florio mezzano e intercessore della lingua italiana”, in *Memoria di Shakespeare, 6 Shakespeare e l’Italia*, ed. Rosy Colombo (2008), pp. 47-59.

istic language and culture with the early modern English language and culture. My contention is that it is in the exchange between the two languages – in particular in speech-based and speech-purposed textual forms, such as didactic and dramatic dialogues – and specifically through borrowings and acquisitions, but also borrowings and rejections, that the real link between Shakespeare and Florio and the Renaissance “great feast of languages” should be investigated. An approach to language as introduced by such recent trends in modern linguistics as historical dialogue analysis and historical pragmatics – areas of linguistics that emphasize language use in context – can be particularly helpful to analyze dialogues and answer “the call for historicisation and contextualisation” at the heart of current debates on the topic⁹: indeed, these fields of studies have been emerging as a productive place of intersection between literary studies and linguistics, and particularly between the literary interpretation of Shakespeare and linguistic work on early modern English. I will thus attempt here to integrate the history of early modern English with the history of its context, and to combine a historical-pragmatic study of early modern dialogues with a historical framework which might account for ‘the Shakespeare and Florio connection’, tentatively reaching a partial appeasement of the magnificent obsession.

Life: an ‘Italianated’ fantasia

The first connecting link between Shakespeare and Florio emerges from their historical lives. Rather than subduing interest in the historical figure of the national Bard, the well-known lack of evidence of Shakespeare’s biographical data seems, over the years, to have fuelled the quest to discover his real identity, resulting in a flourishing of biographies, fictional and non-fictional, which persist in trying to find traces of his human presence, surfing through conjectures and hypotheses¹⁰.

⁹ For an exhaustive survey on recent trends and theories on Shakespeare’s language see Iolanda Plescia, “Shakespeare, Linguistics and a New Philology”, *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 *On Authorship*, eds Rosy Colombo and Daniela Guardamagna (2012), pp. 79-94; p. 82.

¹⁰ In the last decade there was an explosion of books on Shakespeare for the general reader and at least a dozen biographies. For a thorough and updated survey on this

Of course, all the issues related to Shakespeare's uncertain biography merge into and intermingle with the authorship controversy¹¹. It is beyond the aim of this article to review the vast repertory of multifarious perspectives which have induced hundreds of scholars 'in arms' to reconsider the credibility of Shakespeare's existence and authorship, putting forward more than seventy candidates: Stratfordians and anti-Stratfordians, Oxfordians, Marlovians, Baconians, orthodox and anti-orthodox critics have been fighting and debating about the identity of an author who only really exists on the page and on the stage.

Among the negationist theorists, one of the elected candidates is the famous John Florio. *In quaestione vexata quaestio*, as Holofernes might comment, connected to Shakespeare's supposed knowledge of Italian. The doubts and queries are well-known: how did Shakespeare know so much about Italy? Could he read Italian or did he need a mediator? Did Shakespeare and Florio know each other? Did the Italian teacher influence Shakespeare's knowledge of the Italian language, geography and culture? Let me try to give some order to the facts. Since Florio was Shakespeare's contemporary (he was eleven years older, in fact), it is possible to argue quite plausibly that they knew each other: both the teacher and the actor/playwright pursued professions and belonged to a social class that needed the patronage of powerful aristocratic figures, and the presence of both may be traced to the household of Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton at the time when Shakespeare dedicated his poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* to him, that is between April 1593 and May 1594¹². Probable connections may also be suggested as far as the world of publishing is concerned: Edward Blount, best known for the publication of Shakespeare's *First*

aspect of Shakespeare's criticism, see Paola Pugliatti, "The Burden of Proof: From New Biographism to New Disintegration", in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 (2012), pp. 133-48, and as a definitive analysis of the never ending story of Shakespeare's life see Stephen Greenblatt, "The Traces of Shakespeare's Life", in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds Margreta de Gratia and Stanley Wells, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 1-13 (and rpt. in this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare*).

¹¹ One of the most interesting and innovative books on the authorship question is the recent William Leahy, ed., *Shakespeare and His Authors*, London, Continuum, 2010. As for myself, I confess that I entirely agree with Brian Vickers's vision of those who strive to deny Shakespeare's very existence defining them as "the legion of misguided souls" (Brian Vickers, "Shakespeare and Authorship Studies in the Twenty-First Century", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 62:1, Spring 2011, pp. 106-42; p. 114).

¹² Yates, *John Florio*, pp. 124-25.

Folio, registered in 1608 in the Stationers' Register as one of the owners of *Pericles* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, had also published Florio's dictionary and translation of Montaigne¹³. Improbable, though more intriguing, are the amorous affairs which would seem to link Florio and Shakespeare: in fact, a theory has been advanced by a professional Shakespearean scholar such as Jonathan Bate (in *The Genius of Shakespeare*), who suggests that Florio's wife was Shakespeare's lover and the *dark lady* of the *Sonnets*¹⁴.

The legendary gaps in Shakespeare's biographical data, together with authorship theories and the recurrent presence of Italian scenarios in his plays, have allowed "the occasional dilettante researcher to give Shakespeare an Italian identity", writes the inflexible Desmond O'Connor in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*¹⁵. The first hypothesis put forward by a certain Santi Paladino dates back to the Italian fascist 'roaring twenties', when Shakespeare became Italian, Sicilian in fact: he was supposed to be Michael Angelo Florio, born in Messina to Giovanni Florio and Guglielma Crollanza; by virtue of his Calvinist creed, he had fled to England to avoid religious persecution, and here he was to assume his mother's anglicized surname becoming Guglielmo Crollanza, hence in English, William Shakespeare.

A few decades later, Santi Paladino re-formulated the story in his *Un italiano autore delle opere shakespeariane*¹⁶: in this new version John Florio is seen translating his father Crollanza-Shakespeare's works from Italian into English, or according to another version, John collaborated with an actor, a certain William Shakespeare, who would become a co-author of his plays.

A few years ago, as a new contributor to the Shakespeare-Florio connection, Lamberto Tassinari, who has taught Italian at Montreal University, published his *John Florio. The Man Who Was Shakespeare*¹⁷:

¹³ Franzero, p. 185.

¹⁴ Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, London, Picador, 1997, pp. 54-58.

¹⁵ Desmond O'Connor, "John Florio", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, vol. XX, pp. 165-68; p. 168.

¹⁶ See Santi Paladino, *Un italiano autore delle opere shakespeariane*, Milano, Gastaldi, 1955.

¹⁷ Lamberto Tassinari, *John Florio. The Man Who Was Shakespeare*, Montreal, Giano Books, 2009 (e-book 2013), <http://www.johnflorio-is-shakespeare.com/> (last accessed 13 February 2015).

among his “fifteen reasons for John Florio, the man who invented Shakespeare” which are presented as final evidence to validate his theory, he ranges from Florio’s and Shakespeare’s common knowledge and interest in Italian humanistic culture, to a similar “bombastic style”, from a vast knowledge of the Bible and liturgies as well as of music, to an identical linguistic creativity; the most reasonable and historically proven argument among these being that both Shakespeare and Florio were part of the same entourage, the least reasonable and most fanciful, the fact that Shakespeare, in spite of his origins, possessed a “strong aristocratic persona”. The climax, however, of Tassinari’s theory is what he defines as his “ontological and sociological proof”: “If two such characters [...] had lived in London at the same time, they would have certainly met, perhaps even clashed, leaving behind visible traces. Instead a total void! If Florio shared with Shakespeare the same patrons, the same friends, the same interests, passions and abilities and yet never met him, nor mentioned him, this proves once more that William Shakespeare never existed as the scholarly, multilingual, aristocratic Italianizing author of the works penned (when they were) by *William Shakespeare*”¹⁸.

Over the years other people have joined the group of Florio’s supporters, advancing other hypotheses and suggesting other explanations in a desire to provide evidence of the superimposition of Florio’s identity on Shakespeare’s¹⁹: such evidence, however, has always proved to be circumstantial rather than direct, allowing more than one explanation. Again, I would comment, with Greenblatt, “there is nothing amiss with this desire [...] its satisfaction, however, lies in the imagination”²⁰.

Language: “Who the devil taught thee so much Italian?”

Parallel to the attempt to link Shakespeare and Florio’s lives and make them one, there is quite a long list of scholars who have

¹⁸ Tassinari, <http://www.johnflorio-is-shakespeare.com/> (last accessed 10 March 2015).

¹⁹ Even for the name of Florio, as pointed out in Pugliatti’s survey, non-orthodox theories are usually advanced by non-academic critics, such as Saul Gerevini, Massimo Oro Nobili, Martino Iuvara.

²⁰ Greenblatt, p. 12.

tried to connect them on a linguistic and stylistic level, finding traces of Florio's Italian and his supposed knowledge of Italy in Shakespeare's plays, seeing Florio's didactic dialogues as contributing to Shakespeare's dramatic dialogues and conversational exchanges, or crediting his dictionaries as well as his translations with the enrichment of the playwright's vocabulary.

Borrowings and intertextual connections between Florio's writings and Shakespeare's plays have been accurately investigated and selected²¹, and the first and probably best known reference is the origin of the title of Shakespeare's comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*, supposedly coming from *First Fruits*:

<p>Non accade parlar tanto di amore, ogni libro è pieno di amori, con tanti Autori che sarebbe pena persa, a parlar di amore.</p>	<p>We neede not speak so much of loue, al books are ful of loue, with so many authours, that it were labour lost to speak of Loue. (<i>FF</i>, chap. 31, p. 71)</p>
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Notoriously, Gonzalo's commonwealth speech in *The Tempest* (II.i.147-165) echoes "Of the Caniballes", one of Montaigne's *Essays* in Florio's translation²², and in *Othello*, Iago's attack on women recalls the long debate between Silvestro and Pandulfo in the last chapter of *Second Frutes*²³:

²¹ Longworth; Yates, *John Florio*; Yates, *A Study of Love's Labour's Lost*; Simonini; Franzero; Elam, "'At the Cubiculo'". Many quotations and references are reviewed in a recent book on Florio's linguistic and stylistic influence on Renaissance English authors: Jason Lawrence, *"Who the Devil Taught Thee So Much Italian?": Italian Language Learning and Literary Imitation in Early Modern England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005. Lawrence, treating the issue at some length, breaks new ground in favour of Shakespeare's competent reading knowledge of Italian, via the mediation of Florio's works.

²² The parallel was first noted by Edward Capell in his *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare*, London, Henry Hughes, 1779-80, 2 vols, vol. II, p. 63. On Shakespeare's knowledge of Florio's translation before 1603, year of publication, see also Yates, *John Florio*, p. 243; Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 49-50; William M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Days*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

²³ "It is more than analogy and Shakespeare must have had this passage in mind when he wrote Iago's speech" (Simonini, pp. 97-98). See also Longworth, pp. 144-45, and Lawrence, who points out how Shakespeare with this reference also recalls Florio's dialogical method to put forward positive and negative views, as typical of rhetorical procedures (Lawrence, p. 168, note 28).

IAGO

Come on, come on, you are pictures out of door,
 Bells in your parlours, wildcats in your kitchens,
 Saints in your injuries; devils being offended,
 Players in your housewifery, and hussies in your beds.
 (*Othello*, II.i.110-13²⁴)

Le donne sono Sante in chiesa,	Women are in churches, Saints:
Angele in strada, Diauole in casa,	abroad, Angels: at home, deuills: at
Sirene alla finestra, Gazze alla porta,	windowes Syrens: at doores, pyes:
e Capre nei giardini.	and in gardens, Goates.

(*Second Frutes*, chap. 12, pp. 174-75²⁵)

Naseeb Shaheen also highlights a similarity between some lines in the Osric scene in *Hamlet* and a passage in *Second Frutes*, chapter 7, pointing out an identical use of “for my ease”²⁶:

HAMLET

Put your bonnet to his right use, 'tis for the head.

OSRIC

I thank your lordship, it is very hot.

[...]

HAMLET

I beseech you remember.

OSRIC

Nay, good my lord, for my ease, in good faith.

(*Hamlet*, V.ii.92-94, 104-5)

²⁴ All Shakespeare references to *Teatro completo di William Shakespeare*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori, Milan, Mondadori, 1976.

²⁵ John Florio, *Second Frutes* [1591], ed. Rinaldo C. Simonini, Jr., New York, Delmar, 1977. From here onwards: *SF*.

²⁶ Naseeb Shaheen, “Shakespeare’s Knowledge of Italian”, *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994), pp. 161-69; p. 162. Other allusions or paraphrases are traced in various plays: in the Duke of York’s description of Queen Margaret in *3 Henry VI* (I.iv.138): “O tiger’s heart wrapped in a woman’s hide!” which recalls Florio’s “her heart of Tiger”, in *FF*, chap. 14, *Parlar amoroso*, rewording in turn Petrarch’s “cor di tigre o d’orsa”; in *Romeo and Juliet* the Nurse’s comments on Friar Laurence’s advice to Romeo: “O Lord, I could have stayed here all the night / To hear good counsel! O, what learning is!” (III.iii.158-59) echo *Sentences divine and profane* in *FF*, chap. 18: “Certis if you wyl beleuee me, I coulde staye night and daye, to heare such sentences, you have much reioiced my hart”. Portia’s description of the monolingual and monocultural English suitor, “a proper man’s picture, but alas, who can converse with a dumb show?” (*The Merchant of Venice*, I.ii.57-61) parallels Florio’s “When I arriued first in London, I coulde not speake Englishe, and I met aboue fiue hundred persons, afore I coulde find one, that could tel me in Italian, or French, where the Post dwelt” (*FF*, sig.51r; and also sig.62v).

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| G. Perché state così scoperto? V.s. si fa torto. | G. Why do you stand barehededd? you do your self wrong. |
| E. Perdonimi v.s. io lo faccio per mio agio. | E. Pardon me good sir, I doe it for my ease. |
| G. Copriteui di gratia, voi siete troppo cerimonioso. | G. I pray you be couered, you are too ceremonious. |
| E. Io stò tanto bene, che mi par d'esser in paradiso. | E. I am so well, that me thinks I am in heauen. |
| G. Deh metteui il cappello, se mi volete bene. | G. If you loue me, put on your hat. |
| E. Io lo farò per ubidir v.s. non gia per voglia ch'io n'habbia. | E. I will doe it to obay you, not for any pleasure that I take in. |
- (*SF*, chap. 7, pp. 110-11)

There is more. Like Holofernes (whose very name was read as a supposed – and imperfect! – anagram of John Florio), other characters have been interpreted as his parodical portraits: Armado in the same comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*, Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well*, but also Falstaff has been suggested as modelled on the Italian lexicographer²⁷.

Allusions, borrowings, paraphrases, quotations, parodies, the list is very long, but in all these cases Florio's bilingual texts could have allowed even the monolingual English reader to access his writings. Things change when the Italian language is taken into consideration. French, both in amorous conversation and in a didactic setting, is extensively displayed in Shakespeare's plays, as in *Henry V* (III.iv and V.ii.98ff); the Italian language, however, plays a different role and has a different function. Certainly the plots of many of Shakespeare's plays are set in Italy, and closely adhere to their Italian sources²⁸; what is less adamant is Shakespeare's knowledge of

²⁷ See Arthur Acheson, *Shakespeare's Lost Years in London, 1586-1592*, London, Bernard Quaritch, 1920 (chap. 8 is entitled "John Florio as Sir John Falstaff's Original").

²⁸ About eleven plays are referred to Italian scenarios; *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are based on various Italian narratives: from Giraldo Cinthio to Bandello, from Ser Giovanni Fiorentino to the anonymous play *Gl'ingannati*. "Without necessarily relying on any precise knowledge of Italian history or geography, this iconology of Italy was mostly derived from the works of Renaissance historians and humanists such as Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Castiglione, Ariosto, Tasso, and from the influence of *novelle* and of Cinquecento Italian theatre – Bandello, Aretino, Cinthio, Guarini – whose sometimes lurid stories of deceit, intrigue, jealousy, and passion provided a perfect setting for both comedy and tragedy" (Michele Marrapodi *et al.*, eds, *Shakespeare's Italy. Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 3). See also Harry Levin, "Shakespeare's Italians", in *Shakespeare's Italy*, pp. 17-29; *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 6 (2008); Michele Marrapodi, ed., *Intertestualità shakespeariane*.

Italian and the presence, function, and relevance, of Italian words in his plays. Could Shakespeare read and/or speak Italian? Even those critics who have tried to put forward positive answers introduce their arguments by using mitigating phrases and hedges, such as ‘it would be mere conjecture to assert’, ‘it is possible to argue quite plausibly’, ‘it appears safe to conclude’, therewith admitting the uncertainty which pervades this area of study.

In the end, “the question of whether Shakespeare could read Italian remains uncertain”²⁹, as Shaheen resolutely opens his article – so is the issue of whether he could read sources for his plays in Italian or in French. John Lievsay in his turn has no doubts and provides a clear and undisputable answer to the query:

Was Shakespeare caught up in the conventional views of Italy? Undoubtedly, even though his settings and incidental knowledge of Italian scenes and customs are such as to have prompted speculation that he had himself visited Italy. But he is clearly no ‘Italianate’ Englishman. He sprinkles his plays with a smattering of broken Italian, although rarely in complete copybook sentences, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* (I.ii). Such individual words, dubiously Italian, as appear here and there throughout the plays – *punto, fico, basta, magnifico, duello, zany, mandragora, via, nuncio, bona roba, fantastico, signior*, etc. – are the common counters of the time. They indicate no particular proficiency in the language, no particular penchant for Italian culture³⁰.

In their recent and authoritative *Shakespeare’s Words*, David and Ben Crystal list no more than 30 Italian words in Shakespeare’s entire corpus, half of them taken from *The Taming of the Shrew*, vs. more than 300 in French and in Latin³¹. Still less verifiable is whether those words may be the effect of the playwright’s possible acquaintance with John Florio and his writings.

However, in his investigation into Italian language learning and literary imitations in early modern England, Jason Lawrence assigns

²⁹ Shaheen, p. 161.

³⁰ John L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan Image of Italy*, Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press, 1964, p. 25.

³¹ David Crystal and Ben Crystal, *Shakespeare’s Words. A Glossary and Language Companion*, London, Penguin, 2002, p. 647. Quite surprisingly, Italian and Spanish words are presented in the same page without trying to distinguish between them and are preceded by French (pp. 638-41) and Latin (pp. 643-46).

a paramount role to Florio's language manuals, putting a premium on Shakespeare's good reading knowledge of the target language as a sufficient skill to engage with literature in Italian. While denying the possibility of a fluent speaking competence, Lawrence argues for "Shakespeare's gradual acquisition of an adequate reading ability in Italian, given the frequent indebtedness to Florio's manuals and his uncontested Italian sources in many of his plays"³²; it would be possible that by the early 1590s Shakespeare started learning Italian through Florio's *Firste Frutes* and *Second Frutes*, without necessarily developing an acquaintance with the author.

In fact, a few lines in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-93) offer the longest (and only) example of Shakespeare's use of Italian in his plays, greetings and exclamations which may be referred to the first dialogues in Florio's *Firste Frutes*:

TRANIO

Me pardonato, gentle master mine.
(*The Taming of the Shrew*, I.i.25)

LUCENTIO

Basta, content thee, for I have it full. (I.i.195)

PETRUCHIO

Signor Hortensio, come you to part the fray?
Con tutto il cuore ben trovato, may I say.

HORTENSIO

Alla nostra casa ben venuto,
Molto honorato signor mio Petruchio. (I.ii.23-26)

Shifting the focus away from didactic dialogues, Keir Elam argues that "Florio's most powerful impact on Shakespearean discourse and on Shakespeare's imagination was undoubtedly exercised through his great dictionaries, which the dramatist demonstrably turns to on numerous occasions"³³.

³² Lawrence, p. 11. Again, Lawrence's claim seems based on Shakespeare's familiarity with Florio which in fact is only a supposition. He also points out that "the method by which Shakespeare tends to use his Italian models, seems to develop directly out of the insistent parallel-text focus of the bilingual dialogues in *all* the contemporary language manuals" (Lawrence, p. 11).

³³ Elam, "At the Cubiculo", p. 118.

Borrowing from other languages in the early modern period was certainly one of the most effective means of English vocabulary enrichment: sixteenth-century loans from Italian include terms related to products (for example *artichoke*, *majolica*, *parmesan*), or architecture and music (*balcony*, *grotto*, *villa*, *portico*, *opera*, *solo* and *sonata*). There are loan words that might be called 'social' which include *gala*, *gusto*, *regatta*, *carnival*³⁴. However, Elam argues for an interlexical exchange as form of micro-intertextuality, a dialogic relationship between two languages and two cultures set up within the space of a single lexical item. In this perspective, Florio may be recognized as an important contributor to the expansion of the early modern English language: Italian and English words are contrasted, the two languages shaped through reciprocal influence, as in the language of a comedy like *Twelfth Night* (1601-2) which is imbued with the vocabulary of *A World of Words*, both with the Italian lemmas and their English definitions, like the term 'interceptor', an Anglicisation of 'intercettore'³⁵.

Another extensive example of linguistic and stylistic interconnectedness between Shakespeare's and Florio's style is probably displayed in their use of proverbs and maxims, which were one of the most relevant devices used by Florio to teach Italian and which abound in Shakespeare's plays³⁶. In Renaissance England, in fact, proverbs were extremely popular, "highly prized rhetorical arms that distilled traditional oral as well as prestigious literary wisdom, the *vox populi* but also highly cultivated textual discourse"³⁷. Many

³⁴ See Giovanni Iamartino, "La contrastività italiano-inglese in prospettiva storica", *Rassegna italiana di linguistica applicata*, 33:2-3 (2001), pp. 7-130; Terttu Nevalainen, *An Introduction to Early Modern English*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 45-57.

³⁵ According to Elam, "[t]erms from the dictionary appear throughout, but especially in the play's more intensely farcical moments, as in Sir Toby's attempts to get Sir Andrew to dance, urging him 'to come home in a coranto' (I.iii.117)" (Elam, "'At the Cubiculo'", p. 120). In the introduction to the Arden edition, Elam provides also a short list of lemmas and definitions from Florio's *World of Words* which may have influenced the comedy; see William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Keir Elam, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008, pp. 66-67. See also Desmond O'Connor, "John Florio's Contribution to Italian-English Lexicography", *Italica*, 49 (1972), pp. 49-67; Dewitt T. Starnes, "John Florio Reconsidered", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 6:4 (Winter 1965), pp. 407-22.

³⁶ Wyatt, pp. 174-80. Spartaco Gamberini, *Lo studio dell'italiano in Inghilterra nel Cinquecento e nel Seicento*, Messina-Firenze, D'Anna, 1970.

³⁷ Elam, "'At the Cubiculo'", p. 115.

collections were published throughout the period, like Erasmus' *Adagia*, James Sandford's *The Garden of Pleasure* (1573), a translation of the Italian *Detti e fatti piacevoli* by Ludovico Guicciardini, Charles Merbury's *Proverbi volgari* (1581), the adages in romances like George Pettie's *Petite Palace* and, especially John Lily's *Euphues*.

Florio inserted proverbs within his didactic dialogues and as an appendix to *Second Frutes* he even compiled *Giardino di Ricreazione* (1591), thus recalling Sanford's collection: the same proverbs are often included in Shakespeare's dramatic dialogues, especially in the comedies³⁸. The proverb used in Italian by Holofernes to display his knowledge of foreign languages in *Love's Labour's Lost* is well-known and Shaheen points out that "the fact that Shakespeare quotes the proverb in Italian rather than in English strongly suggests that Florio's manuals were his source"³⁹:

HOLOFERNES

Ah, good old Mantuan, I may speak of thee as the traveller doth of Venice:

Venetia, Venetia,

Chi non ti vede, non ti pretia.

Old Mantuan, old Mantuan! Who understandeth thee not, loves thee not.

(*Love's Labour's Lost*, III.ii.94-99)

which in Florio's didactic copybooks occurs both in *Firste Fruites* and *Second Frutes*:

Venetia, chi non ti vede, non ti pretia, ma chi ti vede, ben gli costa.

S. Venetia, chi non ti vede non ti pretia,
Ma chi ti vede ben gli costa.

Venise, woo seeth thee not, praiseth thee not, but who seeth thee, it costeth hym wel.

(*FF*, chap. 19, p. 34)

S. Who sees not Venice cannot esteeme it,
But he that sees it payes well for it.
(*SF*, chap. 6, pp. 106-7)

³⁸ Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse. Language-Games in the Comedies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 275-89.

³⁹ Shaheen, p. 163.

Another frequently quoted example of Florio as a source seems to occur in Lucentio's speech, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, borrowing, with minor changes, the admiring comment on Lombardia from the dialogues between Peter and Stephen:

LUCENTIO

Tranio, since for the great desire I had
To see fair Padua, nursery of arts,
I am arrived for fruitful Lombardy,
The pleasant garden of great Italy [...] *[...]*
Here let us breathe, and haply institute
A course of learning and ingenious studies.
(*The Taming of the Shrew*, I.i.1-4, 8-9, my emphasis)

<p>P. Doue, faccio pensiere di fermarmi un pezzo, a vedere le belle Città di Lombardia. S. La Lombardia è il giardino del mondo.</p>	<p>P. Where I purpose to stay a while, to view the fair Cities of Lombardy. S. Lombardy is the garden of the world. (<i>SF</i>, chap. 6, pp. 106-7⁴⁰)</p>
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The list of borrowings may certainly be longer⁴¹, comprising both words and proverbs, phrases and sayings; these are other allusions, other echoes which, however, risk being merely juxtaposed one over the other only to find similar examples in other authors, like Samuel Daniel or John Marston, or John Ford⁴². Moreover, the question of Shakespeare's Italian inevitably criss-crosses and overlaps with the similarly never-ending and complex debate on Shakespeare's

⁴⁰ Lawrence collects a list of proverbs which occur both in Shakespearean plays and Florian manuals: "Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace" (*Richard III*, II.iv.13) recalls Florio's "An yl weede growth apace" (*FF*, sig.31v); the inscription in the gold casket in *The Merchant of Venice* (II.vii.65) echoes Florio's "Al that glistreth is not gold" (*FF*, sig.32r), and Shylock's "Fast bind, fast find / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind" (II.v.53-54) is *SF*, chap. 1, "H. Faste binde, faste finde. T. And he that shuts well, auoydeth ill luck" (p. 15). Westmorland's description of the Scots "playing the mouse in absence of the cat" in *Henry V* (I.ii.172) brings to mind Florio's "When the cat is abroad the mice play" (*FF*, sig.33r). See also Longworth, pp. 141-42. It is worth mentioning that according to Gamberini the "proverbs in the Italian of the dialogues of *Second Frutes* are starred to indicate that they are listed among the proverbs collected in the *Giardino*" (Gamberini, p. 63).

⁴¹ See notes 26 and 40.

⁴² See Lawrence, pp. 62-117, 127-35. For a survey of the use of Italian in early modern drama, see A. J. Hoenselaars, "'Under the Dent of English Pen': The Language of Italy in English Renaissance Drama", in *Shakespeare's Italy*, eds Marrapodi *et al.*, pp. 272-91.

language, its 'myths and realities', thoroughly explored in many important studies⁴³. Certainly the age is pervaded by 'a circulation of *linguistic energy*', to paraphrase Stephen Greenblatt, in which both Florio and Shakespeare are immersed and which they in turn cherish as outstanding interpreters. Both of them also partake of and foster a cult of *civil conversazione* and elect dialogue, either didactic or dramatic, as a privileged form of expression, an issue which has apparently reinforced the theory of a connection.

Indeed, Florio's didactic dialogues are close to Shakespeare's dramatic ones as far as communicative strategies are concerned: they are speech-based and also speech-purposed texts, the emphasis is on spoken language and oral skills, the speakers respect precise turns in conversation and often deal with themes and topics belonging to the same Renaissance culture of courteous manners. The equation, however, cannot be taken very far. I do not here raise the question of the basic distinction between the literal and the figurative use of words in fictional and non-fictional texts, or the 'heightening' strategies in Shakespeare's dramatic language in order to mark the distance from Florio's stichomythia⁴⁴. No matter how many significant similarities may have been detected in terms of lemmas, proverbs, or paraphrased concepts, things change radically as a result of different textual and linguistic contexts, and different addressees: in other words, if dialogues are statutorily built on the 'intersubjective force of discourse', the language in action typical of dialogic exchanges necessarily varies in terms of communicative strategies depending on different pragmatic contexts and text-types. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a thorough investigation into the different pragmatic effects in Shakespeare's and Florio's dialogues, but a few suggestions from the tool-kit of conversation analysis and pragmat-

⁴³ David Crystal, *"Think on My Words". Exploring Shakespeare's Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008; Jonathan Culpeper and Mireille Ravassat, eds, *Stylistics and Shakespeare's Language. Transdisciplinary Approaches*, London, Continuum, 2011.

⁴⁴ Ann Thompson, "Heightened Language", in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language. A Guide*, eds Sylvia Adamson et al., The Arden Shakespeare, London, Cengage Learning, 2001, pp. 5-16; p. 8. See also Giovanna Perini, "Dialogo didattico e dialogo drammatico: John Florio e William Shakespeare", *Studi secenteschi*, 33 (1992), pp. 167-82. Perini denies a true stylistic contamination between Shakespeare and Florio, arguing that Florio's aim is exclusively to provide lexically and syntactically simple exchanges and that only casually do Florio's dialogues pursue a dramatic effect.

ics of drama may be put into service and refresh, if not reset, the perspective and try to dispel some generally held as well as patchy beliefs⁴⁵.

Early modern English language teaching books in dialogue form have been the subject of recent studies by historical pragmatics who have wished to assess their linguistic and didactic aspects. They are all key features which make them significantly different from dramatic exchanges: for example, the focus on the needs of the learner, either as a member of the aristocracy or as a refugee, the standardized conversational flow, the absence of overlapping in the exchanges and the lack of interrupted insertion sequences in the two-way exchange⁴⁶.

'Informational intensity', which is a necessary feature of dramatic discourse to carry the action forward, in pedagogical dialogues may be associated only with an enrichment of lexical or syntactical forms, more relevant targets in a didactic process.

The teaching perspective as a main communicative goal also needs perspicuousness, and long lists of words are inserted and repeated in textbooks for the enrichment of vocabulary. In a dramatic exchange, however, this would produce a dangerous weakening of the dialogic turn-taking, even in a similar setting. Compare, for example, the 'French lesson' about the parts of the human body in *Henry V* with any excerpt from Florio's dialogues designed to teach and enrich a semantic area: the graphic and phonic play-on-words,

⁴⁵ Some important and pioneering contributions to the analysis of speech-based texts and in particular of Shakespeare's dialogues in a historical-pragmatic and pragmatic approach are Juhani Rudanko, *Pragmatic Approaches to Shakespeare*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1993; Andreas H. Jucker, Gerd Fritz and Franz Lebsanft, eds, *Historical Dialogue Analysis*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999; Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 74-91.

⁴⁶ See Werner Hüllen, "A Close Reading of William Caxton's *Dialogues*", in *Historical Pragmatics. Pragmatic Developments in the History of English*, ed. Andreas H. Jucker, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995, pp. 99-121; Gabriella Di Martino, *Cento anni di dialoghi. La lingua inglese dal 1573 al 1685*, Napoli, CUEN, 1999; Richard Watts, "'Refugiate in a Strange Countrey'. Learning English through Dialogues in the Sixteenth Century", in *Historical Dialogue Analysis*, eds Jucker, Fritz and Lebsanft, pp. 215-42; Jonathan Culpeper and Merja Kytö, *Early Modern English Dialogues. Spoken Interaction as Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; Donatella Montini, "Teaching Italian as a Foreign Language: Notes on Linguistic and Pragmatic Strategies in Florio's *Fruits*", *Textus*, 24 (2011), pp. 517-36.

the use of puns and sexual innuendos of the famous Shakespearean scene radically differ from Florio's didactic exchanges where "vocabulary-building works against realism"⁴⁷.

The point is that early modern pedagogical dialogues, as examples of 'face-to-face spoken interactions embedded within written text', may provide great functional richness because the functions of the oral interactions add to the interactive functions with readers; however, dramatic dialogues are *pre-texts* to a performance and interact with the complex, multi-layered and multidimensional semiotic model of theatrical communication.

Indeed, what is still more evident is the different role played by what is said and unsaid in the two text-types, to frame the issue in pragmatic terms, by the different presence and use of implicatures, a recurrent and powerful device in Shakespeare's dialogues. In a dialogic exchange, particularly in a conversation, speakers are conventionally engaged in a cooperative effort to communicate with each other effectively and coherently: in dramatic dialogues, what is of greater interest is precisely the breaking of those rules, either for a comic or a tragic effect. In teaching dialogues, conversational implicatures are rarely seen at work, and, paraphrasing Grice's words, "the characters seem to make their conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage it seems, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged"⁴⁸.

Let us compare Shakespeare's short and simple exchange of salutations in *The Taming of the Shrew*⁴⁹ with Florio's "Parlar familiare" in *Firste Fruites*:

Dio vi dia il bon giorno.	God geue you good morrow.
E a voi anchora sign.mio	And to you also, my lord.
Dio vi salui signore. [...]	God saue you sir. [...]
Bentrovato caro fratello	Wel met deare brother.
	(<i>FF</i> , chap. 1, p. 1)

⁴⁷ Culpeper and Kytö, p. 469.

⁴⁸ H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation", in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. III *Speech Acts*, eds Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, New York, Academic Press, 1975, pp. 41-58; p. 45.

⁴⁹ See p. 120 above.

Venite, voi sarete il ben venuto.	Come, and you shalbe welcome. (<i>FF</i> , chap. 4, p. 4)
Ben trouati signori miei. Ben venuto signor B.	Wel met my sirs. Welcome sir B. (<i>FF</i> , chap. 13, p. 10)

Here the traits typical of everyday conversation are standardized, conversational turns and adjacency pairs are regularly respected, greetings answered by greetings; the salutations may even be omitted without jeopardizing the subsequent parts of the dialogue, as they are functional to the didactic aim of showing examples of polite greetings. Differently, the dialogue in *The Taming of the Shrew*, short and simple as it is, is to be framed in the scene and offers more than one semiotic enrichment: Petruchio is quarrelling with Grumio and the Italian fragment can be interpreted as a means “to establish the locale shortly following the transition from the Cotswolds of the Induction to the Padua location”⁵⁰. Moreover, Grumio’s ensuing confusion between Italian and Latin is functional to the characterization both of the servant and of his relationship with Petruchio and Hortensio.

Eventually, I would like to suggest a pragmatic perspective to investigate the role and function of proverbs, recurrently presented as one of the most effective examples of similarity and intertextuality between Shakespeare’s and Florio’s dialogues.

In his characteristic style, Florio does not elaborate any theories on the use of proverbs, either cultural or didactic, nor does he seem to share the aims of the Latin or other English collections, their pedagogical strategies or their moral teachings. Rather, he casts proverbs within dialogues, apparently rendering them functional to his didactic and communicative strategy (which will not be confirmed in *Giardino di Riconoscimento*, a mere repertory of Italian proverbs). In *Firste Fruites*, he inserts proverbs only in about thirteen chapters out of forty-four, but what is interesting is that his mode of use essentially reflects the two most typical forms of presentation of proverbs of the time, both graphic and dialogic: either a long list in alphabetical order (see chap. 19), or inserts which carry on a small portion of conversation between the two speakers. In *Second Frutes*,

⁵⁰ Hoenselaars, p. 280.

he makes a much greater use of proverbs in almost every chapter, and tries to change his conversational strategy, now tending to integrate proverbs into the didactical conversation. However, in these dialogues, proverbs are not part of a narrative strategy, the opening and closing frames are only intended to catch the readers'/listeners' attention, and proverbs maintain their role of inserts. Indeed, when he tries to embed them within dialogues as arguments in a discussion, the conversational exchange loses its flow and reverses into a mere didactic sequence.

In Shakespeare things are different. Proverbs become full titles (*Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*), or compact quotations meant to express ethical admonitions. As an example of copiousness and amplification, they are fragmented or paraphrased, or they are part of comic paroemiological struggles with which the rhetoricians of the time were familiar. In Shakespeare's comic dialogues, a proverb is rarely employed as a mere ornament: instead, it is enclosed in the narrative development of discourse, or used to mark the character's sociolinguistic identity, as it occurs for Holofernes. In any case the syntactical and semantic integration into the dialogues tends to include the proverb and negate its role as quotation. Fragmentation is one of the most interesting devices used in weaving proverbs into the dramatic dialogical interaction, consisting in "the *disintegration* of the proverbial syntagm, its reduction to one or two key words dropped, as it were, into the dialogue and acting by way of allusive pointers, without bracketing off a continuous stretch of discourse as in the full citation"⁵¹. The force of those proverb splinters, or better, of the parts left out, produce an effect of defamiliarization and a smooth and natural integration into the dramatic discourse. Again, the dramatic exchange seems to differ systematically from any didactic equivalent: Shakespeare can borrow Florio's proverbs but the dramatic setting and discourse radically change the communicative as well as the stylistic target⁵².

⁵¹ Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, p. 279. Interestingly, Elam notes how "the very propositional completeness and autonomy of the *allegorical maxim* render it hard to digest within the flux of dramatic discourse, where it tends to lie precisely like a precious collector's item brought out for the occasion" (p. 282).

⁵² Donatella Montini, "Proverbs in John Florio's *Fruits*: Some Pragmatic Aspects", in *Historical Perspectives on Forms of English Dialogue*, eds Gabriella Mazzon and Luisa Fodde, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012, pp. 248-64.

Other issues and theories could be employed to further investigate dialogues, such as a systematic analysis of particular speech acts, or of politeness issues related to address terms: in fact, launching an accurate pragmatic comparison between the two text-types, didactic and dramatic, has never been attempted so far, and it would certainly be worth the effort. This general survey on the topic, however, provisional and limited as it is, seems to highlight a significant divergence between the two genres as far as pragmatic effects are concerned: similar words, similar sentences, also similar exchanges turn into utterances playing different roles and performing different functions. In these terms, Florio's influence on Shakespeare's dramatic language, observed through a new lens, proves to be much less pervasive than suggested, and if the Elizabethan culture may have been conquered by the Florian cultural project to teach knowledge and civility through conversational forms following Italian models, the communicative energy rising from Shakespeare's dramatic and theatrical language seems to derive from other sources.

In other words, we could also imagine Florio and Shakespeare walking together along the streets of London, or dancing with the same *Madonna*, or even engaged in *civil conversazione*, and firmly believe, like Clara Longworth, that "Shakespeare a connu et approché l'Italie, sa langue, sa littérature et sa civilisation, par l'intermédiaire de John Florio. Car [...] les deux hommes, le poète et le grammairien, se connaissaient *nécessairement*"⁵³. When they went back to their linguistic laboratories, however, Shakespeare and Florio, the playwright and the linguist, were evidently interested in and applied themselves to a different use of the language. *Necessarily*.

⁵³ Longworth, p. 100, my emphasis.