

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Politics of Intertextuality

There is a real sense of liberation in recent intertextual studies of the Italian background of the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, with prominent scholars competing to provide obituaries for the oppressive methodologies of the past. As Louise George Clubb has made clear, ‘The method traditionally employed to account for Shakespeare’s Italophilia is a long and instructive, but now exhausted, practice of source study that has pursued specific parallels in innumerable Italian texts’.¹ Metaphors of critical exhaustion recur in Alessandro Serpieri’s account of how ‘critici e filologici si [sono] trovati in una sorta di *impasse*, dato che la fase *descrittiva e compilativa* dei debiti shakespeariani verso le fonti si presentava ormai esaurita’.² By abandoning the rigid methodological constraints imposed by the search for verbal echoes, Robert Miola has discovered ‘a new freedom’ and ‘a joyful abundance’ of potential textual relationships to explore.³ With ‘the radical twist in what constitutes an “intertext”’, Michele Marrapodi notes, there is now the opportunity to ‘embrace such broader intercultural factors as semantic *topoi*, genre models, ideological codes, and interdiscursive relationships’.⁴ Yet, despite all the claims about the death of traditional source criticism, the focus of most research about early modern English drama’s engagement with Italian culture is still the identification of more or less specific parallels with Cinquecento verse, prose narration, and theatre. Even though the rules and the rhetoric have changed, the effective critical orientation has not. Like the post-structuralism craze in English studies of the 1980s, where every article opened with a citation from Derrida or Foucault, many scholars have tended to acknowledge the latest academic fashion

¹ Louise George Clubb, ‘Italian Stories on the Stage’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 33.

² ‘Critics and philologists found themselves in a sort of *impasse*, given that the phase of the *description* and *collection* of Shakespearean sources was now exhausted’ (my translation). Alessandro Serpieri, ‘L’oggetto della ricerca e il percorso tecnico-operativo’, in *Nel laboratorio di Shakespeare: Dalle fonti ai drammi*, ed. Alessandro Serpieri (4 vols. Parma: Pratiche, 1990), vol. 1, p. 28.

³ Robert S. Miola, ‘Seven Types of Intertextuality’, in *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 23.

⁴ Michele Marrapodi, ‘Appropriating Italy: Towards a New Approach to Renaissance Drama’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 5.

and then went on doing exactly what they did before. For although there is no longer the obligation to demonstrate direct correspondences, Shakespearean intertexts continue to serve as ‘a textual lens through which we can approach and see his plays’.⁵ The use of intertextuality as a close reading technique perpetuates the assumption that each canonical work is the final product of a specific cultural transaction, where obscure sources and analogues are subsidiary to the masterpiece we know and love. The perspective is retroactive, based on ‘whatever the literary critic perceives as revelatory of cultural poetics’.⁶ History comes into play as a static literary and social context, not as a continuous process uniting dramatists and audiences. The objectives of such a criticism, where even Douglas Bruster claims that ‘early modern plays seldom attributed their quotations’, have little, if anything, to do with the perception of textual and ideological patterns in the theatre of the time.⁷ The interpretive premise remains the transmission of ideas to Shakespeare, rather than the provisional place of his works within the ongoing circulation and transformation of Anglo-Italian discourses on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.

In focusing upon the use of Italy to generate political meanings in period drama, this book argues that early modern intertextuality was a dynamic process of allusion, quotation and revision. The representation of Italian culture in the London theatre was never an isolated gesture. Playwrights interrogate textual precedents, reworking identifiable stylistic and ideological trends. It is not a coincidence that Francis Beaumont opened *The Woman Hater* with an acknowledgement of the dramatic conventions established in previous plays: ‘a Duke there is, and the Scene lyes in Italy, as those things lightly we never miss’.⁸ The self-reflexive stance of Beaumont is consistent with the attitudes of his contemporaries towards the rhetorical implications of using Italian material. Italy was synonymous with intertextuality in early modern English culture. Apart from the persistent place of Italianate drama in the theatre, involving the creation of specific genres and conventions, Italy occupied a privileged place in domestic libraries. What stands out in period accounts of the literature, politics and history of the peninsula are the constant references to the act of reading. The warning to aspiring tourists in Thomas Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveller* foregrounds the sheer number of Italian texts available to curious English readers: ‘What is here but we may read in books,

⁵ Stephen J. Lynch, *Shakespearean Intertextuality* (Westport: Greenwood, 1998), p. 114.

⁶ Miola, p. 23.

⁷ Douglas Bruster, *Quoting Shakespeare: Form and Culture in Early Modern Drama* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 18.

⁸ Francis Beaumont, *The Woman Hater*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966-1989), ll. 17-19.

and a great deal more too, without stirring our feet out of a warm study?’⁹ When asked about her familiarity with Italian literature in *Volpone*, the response of Lady Would-be is indignant: ‘Which o’ your poets? ... I have read them all’.¹⁰ As educational practices based on textual reproduction combined with the remarkable proliferation of the printed word in Tudor and Stuart England, it was obvious ‘that such a culture would increasingly conceive of experience in terms of books’.¹¹

The circulation of Italian texts is especially significant in the development of domestic political discourses. In reacting to the turmoil of Cinquecento Italy, the works of influential writers like Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, and Baldassare Castiglione provided a unique opportunity to learn about statecraft. The definition John Florio offered of the word *politica* in his landmark 1598 Italian dictionary concentrates on the textual transmission of political theory from Italy to England: ‘a booke written of policie, or touching the civill government of a state’.¹² The typography of the volume sets the meaning apart as a separate entry from other words in the language referring to the practicalities of ‘governance and rule or policie’.¹³ There is no definition of political thought. Florio’s use of the term ‘booke’ emphasizes the publication and dissemination of political concepts, rather than their production.¹⁴ For English students of state affairs, as I will show, Italian *politica* provided the vocabulary and historical examples for the persistent domestic debates about sovereignty, crisis, and national identity. The prominent references to Italy in English political drama were inevitable.

Insufficient attention has been devoted to what it meant to read and write about Italy in the London theatrical community. Even less attention has been devoted to what the highly allusive plays of the period demanded from their original audiences. The argument of this book is the manner in which, as dramatists engaged with the controversies of the time, the intertextuality of Italian culture became a fundamental part of the rhetorical and ideological strategies of Jacobean drama.

⁹ Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller. The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 343.

¹⁰ Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Brian Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 3.4.79-81. I discuss the intertextual implications of her choice of Italian reading in Chapter 2, pp. 56-9.

¹¹ Frederick Kiefer, *Writing on the Renaissance Stage: Written Words, Printed Pages, Metaphoric Books* (Newark, 1996), p. 106.

¹² John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, or Most Copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London, 1599), p. 283.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁴ Compare with the definition of *politica* in a current Italian dictionary on historical principles like *Lo Zingarelli: Vocabolario della lingua Italiana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2001), p. 1366.

The discursive microcircuitry of the darkened Italian palace

While there is an extensive scholarly tradition dealing with Italian narrative sources, centred on the plot construction of individual plays, the place of Italy in the cultural politics of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has never been the subject of a book-length study. The historical connection between the example offered by period accounts of the violent upheavals of the Wars of Italy and the Italian themes of the London stage has seemed much too obvious for critics to pursue in any systematic detail. In his influential survey of ‘The Debt of English to Italian Literature’, J.A. Symonds took it for granted that ‘The Italy of the Renaissance fascinated our dramatists with a strange wild glamour – the contrast of external pageant and internal tragedy, the alternations of radiance and gloom, the terrible examples of bloodshed, treason, and heroism emergent from ghastly crimes’.¹⁵ Symonds established a tradition of dealing with Cinquecento Italian political history as an evocative setting, distinct from the literary transactions related to the textual legacy of Petrarch and the *novella*. For the female scholar known as Vernon Lee, the infamous reputation of bloody Renaissance tyrants made it inevitable for representations of statecraft to be set in ‘the darkened Italian palace, with its wrought-iron bars preventing escape; its embroidered carpets muffling the footsteps, its hidden, suddenly yawning trap-doors; its arras hangings concealing masked ruffians; its garlands of poisoned flowers’.¹⁶ Lee’s ornate description of the Italian court setting was frequently cited in the prolific writing of Mario Praz, the most prominent figure in the development of Shakespearean studies in Italy.¹⁷ Praz interpreted the theatre’s fascination with the peninsula in terms of a persistent English taste for exotic locales: ‘Italy made very good copy, being considered the academy of manslaughter, the sporting place of murder, the apothecary shop of all nations’.¹⁸ Even in later studies consciously engaging with the politics of early modern drama, Cinquecento Italy remained a vague and self-evident context. J.W. Lever’s *Tragedy of State* became an important model for cultural materialist criticism through its effort to highlight the relevance of Jacobean drama to the social debates of the 1960s. However, albeit the majority of the plays in his book are set in the peninsula, Lever’s brief treatment of Italy does not depart from previous generalizations: ‘The annals of the Italian age of despots describe tyrannies and atrocities, plots and revolts, which make the inventions of the

¹⁵ J.A. Symonds, ‘The Debt of English to Italian Literature’, in *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece* (1898, London, John Murray, 1914), p. 267.

¹⁶ Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Euphorion* (1899, London, 1885), pp. 78-9.

¹⁷ See Mario Praz, ‘Shakespeare’s Italy’, *Shakespeare Survey* 7 (1968): p. 95. See also Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart: Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies in the Relations between Italian and English Literature from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966). Many of the essays collected in this volume open with the same passage from *Euphorion*.

¹⁸ Praz, ‘Shakespeare’s Italy’, p. 95.

Jacobean rather pedestrian'.¹⁹ There is no discussion of the rhetorical implications of Italian settings in Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy*, the seminal work for a generation of politically aware students and scholars. For although Dollimore acknowledges Machiavelli's decisive contribution to the ideological concerns of Jacobean court drama, the intertextual specificity of radical plays like *Antonio and Mellida*, *Antonio's Revenge*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The White Devil* is not taken into account.²⁰

Contemporary critics may be loath to be caught using the impressionistic prose of Victorian scholars, but the freedom of current intertextual methodology is not always conducive to a greater understanding of the transmission and reception of Italian political writing in the theatre. What comes to the fore in two recent books comparing Machiavelli and Shakespeare is a deliberate refusal to address the issue from the interpretive perspective of the early modern London stage community. At the start of *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, John Roe makes it clear that the Florentine's direct or indirect influence on Shakespearean drama is not the focus of his study: 'This is an old question which can never be decided with any certainty; nor do I intend to provide an answer in this book'.²¹ Instead, Roe's concern is what the political theories of Machiavelli can tell the modern reader about Shakespeare's plays 'when they are brought together for comparison'.²² Hugh Grady adopts the same approach as Roe, also choosing to privilege the latent discursive parallels between the English dramatist and the Italian theorist. However, he expresses greater misgivings about the lack of a compelling account of the textual mediation of Machiavelli's works:

Without our being certain of quite how it happened, several sets of discourses of Machiavellian provenance somehow got transmitted into the remarkable theatre of late Tudor, early Stuart London. ... [E]ven if we cannot be certain what microcircuitry was responsible for each specific transmission. In the end, it matters little whether Shakespeare directly read either Machiavelli or Montaigne. What matters is that we can observe the discursive parallels among them, parallels which help us to read the plays in new (and sometimes old) ways.²³

From such a perspective, underlined by the repeated warnings that 'we cannot be certain' about the circulation of the Florentine's texts, the best current scholarship can hope for is to exploit the critical potential of what Shakespeare has in common

¹⁹ J.W. Lever, *Tragedy of State: A Study of Jacobean Drama* (rpt. London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 19-20.

²⁰ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (2nd ed. London: Harvester, 1989), pp. 11-17.

²¹ John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), p. ix.

²² *Ibid.*, p. ix.

²³ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 29-30.

with Machiavelli on a conceptual level. Yet, even though there may be no acknowledged textual references to the Florentine in any of his plays, Shakespeare was not the only dramatist in Elizabethan and Jacobean London. Roe and Grady do not consider the extent to which the textual transmission of Machiavelli is an explicit theme in the works of other early modern playwrights. The obvious precedent for a theatre conscious of the intertextuality of Machiavelli is *The Jew of Malta*, where the Prologue emphasizes his status of an author of books available 'here in Britany': 'Though some will speak openly against my books, / Yet will they read me'.²⁴ Despite the willingness to compare Shakespeare to every social and cultural discourse imaginable in current criticism, there remains a surprising reluctance to interpret his plays in light of the dramatic and allusive strategies of his professional contemporaries even among critics committed to the latest discursive approaches.

As the technological changes in printing began to condition the perception and circulation of knowledge, books would have been the most obvious way of transmitting Machiavelli's ideas. The unambiguous connection between Machiavelli and the act of reading stands out in many of the '395 references' to the Florentine Edward Meyer catalogued in his *Machiavelli and the Renaissance Drama*, a book characteristic of industrious nineteenth-century source scholarship.²⁵ In *The London Prodigal* (1605), a city comedy once attributed to Shakespeare, Master Flowerdale calls attention to his exotic choice of reading:

By my troth, gentlemen, I have been reading over Nick Machiavel, I find him good to be known, not to be followed. A pestilent inhuman fellow! I have made certain annotations on him, such as they be!²⁶

In period performance, the humour of the allusion to 'Nick Machiavel' would have come from the foolish gallant's pretensions as a political insider. Like Sir Politic Would-be in *Volpone*, the most famous example of the self-proclaimed annotators of Machiavelli in Jacobean comedy, Flowerdale makes suspect claims about his knowledge of illicit statecraft.²⁷ For modern scholars, the reference here to 'certain

²⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), Prologue, ll. 29, 10-11. See my discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 81-9. Roe argues that the Prologue's main target is Rabelais, see *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, pp. 8-9. Marlowe does not appear in Grady's book.

²⁵ Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the English Drama* (1897, New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), p. xi. Ironically, Meyer's argument is that Machiavelli arrived in England via the influence of Gentillet's *Contre-Machiavel*. For the scholarly debate about Gentillet, see Chapter 3, pp. 83-6.

²⁶ *The London Prodigal* in *The Supplementary Works of William Shakspeare, comprising his poems and doubtful plays*, ed. William Hazlitt (London: Routledge, 1852), 3.2, p. 225.

²⁷ For *Volpone*, see pp. 46-59.

annotations' is important because it introduces a logical association between reading and writing about Machiavelli. The intertextuality of the annotation, where the original text is reproduced in the reader's own marginal commentary or commonplace book, is indicative not only of the circulation of Italian political theory in the culture at large, but also of how detailed quotations from writers like Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and Castiglione made their way into period plays. The objective of the commonplace book in Renaissance humanist pedagogy, as Ann Moss has underlined, was to provide a store of striking phrases and provocative ideas when pupils 'came to construct compositions of their own', a process which imposed 'habits of reading and writing which characterised literate culture in Western Europe over a remarkably long period of time'.²⁸ The intertextual legacy of many books derived from the circulation of specific colourful and politically salient quotations. In the case of Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*, for example, his scornful representations of the Italianate Englishman and the dangers of translated Italian books became an obligatory citation in subsequent texts about Anglo-Italian relations.²⁹ The most controversial arguments of the *Principe*, reproduced with and without direct attribution, are a constant feature of period writing about politics. Of course, as we see in Flowerdale's allusion, the name of Machiavelli had a semantic currency of its own. The rhetorical premise of such citations and allusions is suggestive of the expectations writers have about the interpretive competence of their final audiences. It would be grossly overstated to assert that every playgoer watching *The London Prodigal* had read Machiavelli, just as modern references to the catchphrase 'To be, or not to be' do not demonstrate a mass readership of Shakespeare. The demands the allusion makes upon the collective audience are much more limited. To achieve its comic effect, the scene requires only a widespread idea of the political and cultural implications of reading Machiavelli's books.

References to reading and authorship are unequivocal intertextual signals, different from the customary recycling of narrative sources. Through the citation of particular names and books, early modern plays demand that spectators become complicit in their intertextuality. Another conspicuous allusion to annotations on Machiavelli comes in Robert Greene's *Scottish History of James the Fourth* (ca. 1588-1594). When the villain Ateukin returns home after insinuating his way into the graces of the unwary King of Scotland, he asks his servant to find his notes:

Ateukin. Where be my writings I put in my pocket last night?
 Andrew. Which, sir? Your annotations upon Machiavel?³⁰

²⁸ Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. v.

²⁹ See Chapter 2, pp. 29-45.

³⁰ Robert Greene, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, ed. Norman Sanders (London: Methuen, 1970), 3.2.52-3.

By demonstrating Ateukin's familiarity with the works of the notorious Florentine, the brief passage serves to underscore the devious tendencies of the character. Greene's play has attracted a certain amount of attention in recent intertextual studies because its main narrative source is a *novella* from Giraldo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, the same volume that provided Shakespeare with the plots for *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*.³¹ The precedent set by Greene's use of Cinthio demonstrates the ability of dramatists to adapt such material even in the absence of a published English translation, given that the *Hecatommithi* were available only in the original Italian or in the 1583 French translation by Gabriel Chappuys. Greene retains many of the features of Cinthio's tale of court lust, including the Scottish setting. The story forms part of the same group of ten narratives about marital infidelity where Shakespeare found the model for *Othello*. Nonetheless, despite the character's similarities with Iago, there is no equivalent of Ateukin in the original Italian prose story. In Cinthio's version, desire for another woman leads Astatio to kill his wife.³² Greene's Scottish king gets the idea of murder from Ateukin: 'Hear me, O king, 'tis Dorothea's death / Must do you good'.³³ What Greene does by adding the villain, complete with a direct allusion to Machiavelli, is to make a play based on an Italian story overtly Italianate in terms of the emerging stereotypes of the London theatre.

George Chapman would go on to employ the same strategy of characterization through explicit allusion to Machiavelli in *All Fools* (1604). Based on a plot from Terence, the play recasts the heavy father of conventional New Comedy as a 'wretched Machiavellian'.³⁴ The pride Gostanzo takes in his astuteness, marked by frequent references to the Florentine political theorist, gives added comic resonance to the humiliation of the 'old, politic, dissembling knight' in the play's finale.³⁵ However, in updating his narrative source, Chapman does not limit himself to exploiting Machiavelli's general reputation. The advice Gostanzo provides his supposedly ingenuous son comes straight from the notorious eighteenth chapter of *Il Principe*:

³¹ See Barbara Majelli, 'Riscrivendo "l'alfieri": Cinthio, Greene e la figura di Iago in *Othello*', in *Intertestualità shakespeariana*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), pp. 255-74 and Jason Lawrence, "'The story is extant, and writ in very choice Italian": Shakespeare's Dramatizations of Cinthio', in *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, pp. 91-106. I discuss Shakespeare's use of Cinthio in Chapter 4, pp. 143-53.

³² In the original, although the action takes place in Scotland, the central character is the king of Ireland. See Gio. Battista Giraldo Cinthio, *Gli Ecatommitti, ovvero cento novelle di Gio. Battista Giraldo Cinzio* (Torino: Cugini Pomba, 1853), decade 3, novella 1.

³³ Greene, 2.2.190-91.

³⁴ George Chapman, *All Fools*, ed. Frank Manley (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 1.1.148. For the citation of the *Principe* in period drama, see Chapter 3, especially pp. 79-97.

³⁵ Chapman, 1.1.401.

Promises are no fetters. With that tongue
 Thy promise pass'd, unpromise it again.
 Wherefore has a man a tongue of power to speak,
 But to speak to his private purpose?
 Beasts utter but one sound, but men have change
 Of speech and reason, even by Nature given them,
 Now to say one thing and another now,
 As best may serve their profitable ends.³⁶

The starting point of the speech is Machiavelli's account of 'In che modo i Principi debbono osservare la fede'.³⁷ Gostanzo's comparison to beasts recalls the metaphors for tactical deceit in the original text: 'Essendo adunque un Principe necessitato saper bene usare la bestia'.³⁸ However, in arguing that 'Honesty is but a defect of wit', the vain father far exceeds Machiavelli's own political agenda.³⁹ Here, instead of a brutish necessity of statecraft, deceit becomes an essential quality of being human. The interdiscursive integration of Machiavelli into the play's dramatic agenda is self-evident. An aside from a concealed onlooker emphasizes the questionable morality of the precepts: 'By'r lady, sound instructions to a son'.⁴⁰ For the well-informed Jacobean spectator, able to pick up Chapman's intertextual signals, the speech would have functioned as a parody of the excesses of domestic readers of the *Principe*. The problem for the modern critic is how to provide an authentic historical account of the play's hypothetical ideal audience.

³⁶ Chapman, 2.1.69-76. Compare with Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe* (Palermo [London], 1584), pp. 30r-32r. Throughout this book, given the focus on the English scene, I cite John Wolfe's surreptitious London edition of the Machiavellian text. The idiosyncratic text of this version is acknowledged in the printer's own postscript where the presumed Sicilian compositors apologize in advance for errors deriving from their unfamiliarity with the 'favella toscana' (Tuscan language). For the circulation of the edition in England, see Chapter 3, pp. 86-9.

³⁷ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 30r. 'How princes should honour their word', *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 56. All English translations are taken from this edition.

³⁸ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 31r. 'a prince is forced to know [well] how to act like a beast'.

³⁹ Chapman, 2.1.84. The Florentine is careful to represent deceit only as a necessity for great leaders.

⁴⁰ Chapman, 2.1.77.

Playwrights and Audiences

In dealing with intertextuality as a rhetorical strategy, where playwrights exploited the presumed reputation of individual authors, texts and certain widely quoted passages, it is necessary to think about the experiences of the Londoners that watched and read these plays at the time. Yet there is little evidence to reconstruct how Tudor and Stuart spectators interpreted specific works in performance. It is ironic that many studies of period audience response end up discussing anti-theatrical polemics like *The Schoole of Abuse* and *Histrion-Mastix*, rather than the reactions of frequent playgoers.⁴¹ For although a number of general references to dramatists and their works have been preserved, there are only ‘four major accounts of performances’ of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries available for theatre historians to work with.⁴² Reports such as the diary entries of Dr Simon Forman about the staging of *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale* at the Globe in 1611 tend to provide only plot summaries, useful primarily for confirming performance dates and the ability of playgoers to remember the overall storylines of the works they had seen. The most compelling answer stage orientated criticism has offered to this quandary is to treat ‘the text as a blueprint for performance (independent of any particular performances), viewing the audience as an entity the playwright sets out to construct with each play’.⁴³ The critical model of an ideal audience presupposes, as Jeremy Lopez has put it, ‘one can better understand the audiences of the English Renaissance if one better understands the plays they watched’.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, as we will see with Shakespeare’s focus on miscomprehension in the metatheatrical scenes of *Hamlet*, the subjective responses of the recalcitrant playgoer would not have always coincided with the collective responses envisioned by an ambitious dramatist. John Webster blamed the failure of the theatrical version of *The White Devil*, filled with verbal echoes of Italian courtship literature, political theory, and historical accounts of the fate of Vittoria Accoramboni, upon ‘those ignorant asses’ who attended its first performances at the Red Bull.⁴⁵ Webster’s

⁴¹ For example, see the opening chapters of Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Conventions and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Thomas Cartelli, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Economy of Theatrical Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

⁴² Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 132.

⁴³ Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 29. See also Cartelli, p. xiii.

⁴⁴ Lopez, p. 7.

⁴⁵ John Webster, ‘To the Reader’, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), l. 8. See my account of Webster’s complaints about the original audience, pp. 118-20.

complaints about the lack of ‘a full and understanding auditory’ make manifest the extent to which dramatic intertextuality takes for granted the interpretive sophistication of a well-read and theatrically astute spectator, an expectation the citizens and apprentices who frequented the ‘open and black’ playhouse in Clerkenwell clearly did not live up to.⁴⁶

Given the reception of *The White Devil*, the complexities of Italianate drama may seem to be more suited to the type of audiences we tend to associate with the private theatres. There is a longstanding critical debate about the social exclusivity of the indoor playhouses, where the best argument for the standard paradigm of a clientele composed primarily of courtiers and Inns of Court students is the expensive price of admission.⁴⁷ The search for a corporate aesthetic of an ‘early modern theatre industry’ in recent repertory studies has reinforced claims the private companies tailored their works to the tastes of a socially and culturally coherent target market, exploiting the commercial potential of specific genres and themes.⁴⁸ Significantly, most of the parodies of established generic conventions I discuss in this book originated with the children’s companies. Plays like *The Fleire*, *Humour Out of Breath*, and *The Woman Hater* foreground their relationship to previous representations of Italian court politics, complete with extensive metatheatrical references and direct allusions to more famous works. The intertextual premise of such parodies anticipates the predictable responses of regular playgoers, aware of the pattern established by the dramatic repertory. However, when we look at what many private theatre dramatists had to say about their audiences, we find the same complaints Webster had about the Red Bull patrons.

The case of John Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), an Italianate tragicomedy staged by the Children of the Queen’s Revels, marks the ease with which dramatists overestimated the sophistication of the private theatre clientele.⁴⁹ The play draws on the aesthetic principles of Battista Guarini’s *Il pastor fido*, as the similarity between the titles of the two works suggests. Ben Jonson had already mocked the tendency of ‘English writers’ to copy the Italian pastoral drama in *Volpone* (1606):

⁴⁶ Ibid., ll. 6, 4-5.

⁴⁷ See Gurr, p. 89. The studies of Alfred Harbage and Ann Jennalie Cook represent the extreme positions in the debate about period audience composition. However, both critics privilege the model of an elitist private theatre. Harbage argued the private theatres intentionally excluded the lower classes. See *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1952). Cook maintained the social elite dominated both types of theatre, just as they dominated ‘the rest of the cultural world’. See *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare’s London 1576-1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 272.

⁴⁸ Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 12. The most influential example of this approach is Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ I discuss the influence of Italian theories of tragicomedy in Chapter 4, p. 143-53.

Here's Pastor Fido ...
 All our English writers,
 I mean such as are happy in th'Italian,
 Will deign to steal out of this author.⁵⁰

The allusion to widespread plagiarism in Lady Would-be's catalogue of Italian reading is borne out by the influence Guarini had upon prominent figures in the domestic literary community like Samuel Daniel and John Marston.⁵¹ Yet, notwithstanding the evident enthusiasm of Fletcher's immediate peers, *The Faithful Shepherdess* seems to have failed because the Blackfriars audience had no previous acquaintance with pastoral tragicomedy. In the preface to the published version of the play, Fletcher warns his potential readers

If you be not reasonably assured of your knowledge in this kinde of Poeme, lay downe the book or reade this, which I would wish had been the prologue. It is a pastoral Tragi-comedie, which the people seeing when it was plaid, having ever had a singular guift in defining, concluded to be a play of country hired shepherdes In their error I would not have you fall, least you incurre their censure.⁵²

Here, the private theatre customer is not always right. The responsibility for the fiasco belongs to the spectators, guilty of a lack of literary 'knowledge'. Such complaints help us to understand more about the expectations of period dramatists, unrealistic or otherwise. Francis Beaumont's commendatory verse reinforces the idea that the play demands an intertextual sensibility. He underlines the consumers of the book 'must have the quallitie / Of reading, which I am afraid is more / Than halfe your shrewedest judges had before'.⁵³

Of course, Beaumont had his own grievances towards the Blackfriars patrons. The metatheatrical experimentation of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) may delight modern scholars, but his play was another flop for the Queen's Revels. Like Fletcher, Beaumont seems to have succumbed to the temptation to write for the more refined tastes of his colleagues and a restricted literary coterie. While his parody of stage-struck citizens and apprentices stages the perceived socio-cultural distinctions between the public and private theatres, flattering the comparative sophistication of his intended audience, the original playgoers did

⁵⁰ Jonson, *Volpone*, 3.4.86-9.

⁵¹ See Jason Lawrence, *'Who the Devil taught thee so much Italian': Italian language learning and literary imitation in early modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 62-100, 140-64. See also Munro, pp. 97-105.

⁵² John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. Florence Ada Kirk (New York: Garland, 1980), p. 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

not get the theatrical in-jokes. The dedication the printer Walter Burre added to the 1613 quarto edition represents it as an abandoned child: ‘by his parents (perhaps because he was so unlike his brethren) exposed to the wide world, who for want of judgement, or not understanding the privy mark of irony about it ... utterly rejected it’.⁵⁴ The fate of Beaumont and Fletcher’s innovative plays suggests the interpretive competence of the collective Blackfriars audience was not necessarily all that far from the ‘understanding’ grocer portrayed at the start of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ridiculed for his resistance to the theatre’s ‘study for new subjects’.⁵⁵

Whatever the responses in the playhouse, aspiring dramatists were keen to gain the appreciation they thought their works were due. An alternative outlet for the misunderstood play was publication, as the authorial prefaces to *The White Devil* and *The Faithful Shepherdess* make clear. From the end of the sixteenth century onwards, there were ‘an ever-increasing number of printed playtexts available for purchase, reading, and circulation’.⁵⁶ The emerging market for printed plays has considerable implications for our understanding of the relationship between dramatic intertextuality and period reception. In his recent study of the existing references to early modern drama, Charles Whitney argues the primary evidence from the period ‘cuts across the venerable binary of stage *vs.* page, of theatrical presentation *vs.* literary art, performance *vs.* text, play going *vs.* reading’.⁵⁷ The minimal discussion of ‘in-theatre experiences’ in the descriptions of identifiable plays suggests they ‘may have just as well come from reading as from playgoing’.⁵⁸ The reading experience would have been very different from that of the playhouse. Unlike the hustle and bustle of Webster’s Red Bull, a quiet room offered readers the leisure necessary to appreciate the literary qualities of complex and highly allusive dramatic works. Publication was also an opportunity for authors to revise and expand their performance versions, producing texts unconstrained by the limits of theatrical representation. Even as the title page of the quarto edition of *The Devil’s Charter* (1607) invokes the prestige of a court performance, it promises a text designed specifically for reading: ‘As it was plaid before the King’s Majestie *But more exactly reviewed, corrected, and augmented by the Author, for the more pleasure and profit of the Reader*’.⁵⁹ In a performance context, as I will show in Chapter 4, the role of the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini as the on-

⁵⁴ Francis Beaumont, *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Induction, ll. 24, 17.

⁵⁶ David M. Bergeron, *Textual Patronage in English Drama, 1570-1640* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 2.

⁵⁷ Charles Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil’s Charter*, ed. Jim C. Pogue (New York: Garland, 1980), p. 37.

stage chorus immediately introduces the play's sophisticated intertextual agenda.⁶⁰ Barnabe Barnes' depiction of Pope Alexander VI draws on the most famous contemporary works of political theory, consistent with Niccolò Machiavelli's use of the pontiff as an exemplar of the pragmatics of statecraft in *Il Principe*. Barnes had already discussed Machiavelli at length in his *Four Bookes of Offices*, a political treatise published a year earlier, but his limited experience as a dramatist would have made it difficult for him to accomplish his challenging agenda on-stage. The rhetorical density of the prolonged speeches of the Borgia pope, subversively juxtaposing verbal echoes from Machiavelli and James I, may have been more effective on the printed page.⁶¹

For successful playwrights like William Shakespeare and John Marston, however, publication was secondary to the economic and aesthetic satisfactions of the stage. The enduring value of Shakespeare's plays as theatrical properties may explain his notorious disinterest in their printed versions, even though the market demand ensured he would go on to become 'the period's leading published playwright'.⁶² Marston's preface to *The Fawn* (1606) represents the volume as an attempt to forestall an unauthorized edition, claiming to 'print a comedy' only because 'it cannot avoid publishing'.⁶³ He privileges the experience of the playtext in performance: 'Comedies are writ to be spoken, not read. Remember the life of these things consists in action'.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, on an intertextual level, there is no fundamental difference between the rhetorical strategies of Marston and Barnes. *The Devil's Charter* may be remarkable for the scope of its verbal echoes, in line with the play's declared revision for readers, but Marston had already exploited Italian political writing for dramatic effect in *The Fawn*, *Antonio and Mellida*, and *Antonio's Revenge*.⁶⁵ Each of these popular plays foregrounds the cultural associations of the 'A, B, C, of courtship' in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*.⁶⁶ Marston's representation of 'Castilio' as a stage character in the two *Antonio* plays follows the precedent set by his printed satires, where the Italian author incarnates the flattery and deceit of courtiers. Whether on-stage or on the page, all of Marston's caricatures of Castiglione count on the immediate recognizability of their allusions to the contested domestic reputation of the *Cortegiano*.

⁶⁰ See pp. 81-2.

⁶¹ This would also explain why the dramatist did not face any form of punishment after the presentation at Whitehall.

⁶² David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 21.

⁶³ John Marston, *The Fawn*, ed. Gerald A. Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5. The argument recurs in his prefatory material for *The Malcontent*.

⁶⁵ See my discussion of these plays, pp. 101-5, 131-2.

⁶⁶ Marston, *The Fawn*, 4.1.167.

The historical evidence suggests many contemporary observers had a wide-ranging awareness of the importance of Italian culture in the London theatrical repertory, notwithstanding the complaints of overambitious dramatists about audience incompetence. Even notorious anti-theatrical polemics offer informed commentary about Italianate drama. Stephen Gosson represents the theatre's links with Italy as a symptom of its moral corruption: 'Compare London to Rome and England to Italy, you shall find the theatres of the one, the abuses of the other, to bee rife among us'.⁶⁷ In a passage which has become 'a cliché of theatre history', given its perceptive survey of conventional narrative and dramatic sources, he mocks the lack of originality on the early modern stage:

I have seen it that the *Palace of Pleasure*, the *Golden Ass*, the *Ethiopean History*, *Amadis of France*, the *Round Table*, bawdy comedies in Latin, French, Italian and Spanish have been thoroughly ransacked to furnish the playhouses of London.⁶⁸

Here, starting from the same premise as Lady Would-be's remarks about the *Pastor fido* in *Volpone*, Gosson evokes persistent anxieties about England's lack of cultural autonomy. His reference to William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, a 1566 collection of *novelle* adapted from authors such as Boccaccio and Bandello, highlights a text eponymous with the 'Italian literary conquest of England during the sixteenth century'.⁶⁹ Roger Ascham had already devoted particular attention to the domestic circulation of 'bawdy books ... translated out of the Italian tongue' in *The Schoolmaster*, equating the phenomenon with the dangers posed by travel to Italy itself.⁷⁰ The *Palace of Pleasure* was a perfect example of the influence these translations acquired. Painter's volume became a source for the plots of as many as 43 Tudor and Stuart plays, in the estimation of Mary Augusta Scott.⁷¹

Since the indebtedness was obvious enough to catch the attention of the most reluctant playgoers, we should not be surprised to find references to Italian source material among the accounts of the habitués of the theatre. What comes to the fore in the diary entry of the Inns of Court student John Manningham, reporting on the performance of *Twelfth Night* at Middle Temple Hall in 1602, is his attempt to interpret the play intertextually:

⁶⁷ Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* in *Shakespeare Society of London Publications* vol. 15 (Nos 14, 2) (rpt. Nendeln, Kraus, 1966), p. 24.

⁶⁸ Clubb, p. 32; Stephen Gosson, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), D6v (quoted in Clubb, p. 32).

⁶⁹ Mary Augusta Scott, *Elizabethan Translations from the Italian* (1916, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), p. xli.

⁷⁰ Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 68. See Chapter 2, pp. 29-30.

⁷¹ Scott, p. 12.

at our feast we had a play called Twelve night or what you will / . / much like the comedy of Errores / or Menechmi in plautus / but most like to that in Italian called Inganni / a good practice in it to make the steward believe his Lady widowe was in Love wth him. by counterfeiting a letter / as from his lady in generall termes / telling him what shee like best in him / and prescribing his gesture in smiling his apparaile / etc. and then when he came to practice making him believe they tooke him to be mad.⁷²

Manningham adopts a comparative approach, locating the new play within a network of dramatic precedents. Prior to the usual synopsis, he notes the resemblance of the comedy to Shakespeare's own *Comedy of Errors*, the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, and, in particular, an Italian drama he terms *Inganni*. His identification of an Italian source is problematic, since the most likely analogue for the main female disguise plot is the anonymous *Gl'ingannati*.⁷³ The inaccuracy leads Andrew Gurr to conclude that 'Manningham's knowledge of Italian drama seems to have been less solid than his studies of Plautus at school'.⁷⁴ To be fair, Manningham's plot summary concentrates on Malvolio, a comic steward who has little to do with any of the potential Italian models for the crossdressing of Viola. In the context of a brief diary entry, however, his source attribution is more insightful than it might seem. There are at least two Cinquecento plays with the title *Gl'inganni*, including a relatively well-known work by Niccolò Secchi.⁷⁵ Each of these comedies features a woman disguised as a man.⁷⁶

As a member of the Inns of Court, Manningham formed part of the most vibrant literary community in London. He would have had the opportunity to discuss *Twelfth Night* with erudite colleagues like John Hoskyns, acclaimed for his extempore performance of the 'Fustian Answer to a Tufftaffeta Speech' at the 1597-1598 Middle Temple Revels.⁷⁷ Manningham entered into a traditional contract of fellowship with Hoskyns at the start of his studies at the Middle Temple and often copied his companion's witticisms into his diary.⁷⁸ Law students were a prominent part of the local theatrical clientele, frequenting both the public

⁷² John Manningham, Diary entry for Candlemas Day, in 'Records, Documents and Allusions', *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1966.

⁷³ For the relationship of the play to Italian drama and prose, see Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 132-5.

⁷⁴ Gurr, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Michael Shapiro suggests the earlier *Gl'ingannati* may have influenced the portrayal of the disguised heroine in Secchi's play. See *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 219-20.

⁷⁶ See Muir, pp. 132-4.

⁷⁷ See Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

and private playhouses.⁷⁹ Apart from commissioning special presentations from professional companies, the Inns organized their own dramatic productions and provided a starting point for many of the period's playwrights, including Marston, Beaumont, George Chapman, Thomas Sackville and Edward Norton, and Edward Sharpham. In dedicating the 1616 folio edition of *Every Man Out of His Humour* to the Inns of Court, commended as 'the Noblest Nurseries of Humanity, and Liberty, in the Kingdom', Ben Jonson praises 'a worthy succession' of law students who have distinguished themselves 'as being born the judges' of the theatre.⁸⁰ The original 1599 playtext had already advertised its relationship to the community by drawing on Hoskyns's celebrated mock-oration for the 'fustian' talk of the foppish Clove.⁸¹

Manningham's diary provides an important historical precedent for the representation of audience response and awareness in period plays. The Induction of *Every Man Out of His Humour* demonstrates that an intertextual approach was just what dramatists wanted from their spectators. The comedy opens with the search for an ideal audience, as the satirist Asper invites his companions Cordatus and Mitis to witness the ensuing performance. In his role as a proxy for Jonson, Asper is keen to recruit 'Attentive auditors, / Such as will join their profit with their pleasure, / And come to feed their understanding parts'.⁸² What makes Cordatus such a desirable spectator is his 'discreet and understanding judgement', an ability which permits him to become 'a man inly acquainted with the scope and drift of [Asper's] plot'.⁸³ The repeated emphasis on the word 'understanding', as we have seen in the complaints of Webster, betrays the anxieties of early modern playwrights about the fate of their texts in the theatre.⁸⁴ Through the commentary of his meta-audience, explicitly compared to the Grex of Aristophanic comedy, Jonson positions the performance as a collective experience that demands the approbation and participation of an exclusive interpretive group. Like Manningham, the on-stage spectators pay particular attention to the play's sources:

Mitis. You have seen his play, Cordatus? Pray you, how is 't?

⁷⁹ For the existing records of the relationship between the Inns of Court and the theatre, see Whitney, pp. 123-33. See also Gurr, pp. 80-82.

⁸⁰ Ben Jonson, 'Dedication to the Folio', *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ed. Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 383.

⁸¹ Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, 3.1.169. See Ostovich's introduction to the play, p. 35 and O'Callaghan, p. 24.

⁸² Jonson, 'Induction', *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ll. 199-201.

⁸³ Jonson, 'Characters', *Every Man Out of His Humour*, p. 110.

⁸⁴ For a survey of the word's use in period drama, see William N. West, 'Understanding in the Elizabethan Theaters', *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006): pp. 113-44.

Cordatus. Faith, sir, I must refrain to judge. Only this I can say of it: 'tis strange and of a particular kind by itself, somewhat like *Vetus Commedia*: a work that hath bounteously pleased me.⁸⁵

The allusion to the '*Vetus Commedia*' introduces a lengthy discussion of the play's affinities with classical comedy, highlighting the established conventions of the 'Terentian manner' and the innovations of 'Menander, Philemon, Caecilius, Plautus, and the rest'.⁸⁶ Jonson goes on to acknowledge the fashionable role of Italian material in the theatre, supplementing the classical references with the choice of character names like Puntarvolo, Sordido, and Carlo Buffone. The rhetorical strategy at the start of *Every Man Out* forestalls audience error, in line with Fletcher's regrets about the absence of an explanatory 'prologue' in *The Faithful Shepherdess*.⁸⁷ By setting out the generic context in an unequivocal way, Jonson simultaneously educates his actual spectators and provides them with a model for their own responses.

'Written in very choice Italian': Hamlet's intertextual commentary

When we turn to the metatheatrical scenes in *Hamlet*, featuring the Danish prince's production of *The Murder of Gonzago*, intertextuality takes centre stage. As Hamlet observes the court performance at Elsinore, the most notable playgoer in the works of Shakespeare offers a running commentary on the action. Audience understanding is essential to Hamlet's project. To use the Italian court tragedy as a political weapon against Claudius, the prince needs to ensure the prospective references to the death of his father are apparent. Here, what should stand out for an intertextual critic is Hamlet's explicit attribution of the play within the play to an Italian source:

'A poisons him i' th' garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago, the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murtherer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.'⁸⁸

The passage is unique for its implicit allusion to Shakespeare's customary use of Italian prose narratives as the basis for dramatic plots. The only instances where we find Shakespeare's narrative sources cited on-stage are the Prologues to *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, acknowledging the appropriation of

⁸⁵ Jonson, 'Induction', ll. 225-9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., ll. 234, 256-7.

⁸⁷ Fletcher, p. 15.

⁸⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.261-4. This and all subsequent quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans. 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). The passage is unique to the Second Quarto.

English tales from Gower and Chaucer.⁸⁹ Yet it is rare to find a play Shakespearean source studies have not linked to the *novella* and *romanzo* traditions, although the academic rigour governing the pursuit of obscure parallels has often been questionable. Ironically, one of the exceptions to the rule is *Hamlet*. Critical attention has concentrated on the elusive *Ur-Hamlet*, a domestic text routinely postulated as the direct predecessor of the entire work.⁹⁰ Despite the overt discussion of the narrative provenance of ‘The Mouse-Trap’ on-stage, there has been little interest in finding a specific fictional story to confirm Hamlet’s claim. The Italianate metadrama does not feature, for example, in Kenneth Muir’s *Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays*.⁹¹ Geoffrey Bullough’s approach to the Gonzago story focused on potential historical analogues.⁹² The absence of any obvious traces of direct textual transmission cannot rule out the possibility a relevant Italian story was extant at the time. The play within the play’s depiction of court intrigue and murder recalls the Italian political drama of the London repertory, consistent with the theatrical context created by the references to the rivalry between adult and children’s companies in the preceding rehearsal scenes. Apart from the question of philological accuracy, however, Hamlet’s Italian source attribution has significant dramatic implications. Like a clever playwright, the prince uses intertextuality to make certain his spectators get the message.

Shakespeare’s staging of *The Murder of Gonzago* is secondary to his representation of the meta-audience. In an influential study, Cesare Segre described the play within the play in *Hamlet* as a *mise en abyme*, where ‘Abbiamo due specchi di fronte, e le immagini rimbalzano dall’uno all’altro, all’infinito, così da sovrapporre fantasmagoricamente realtà e finzione’.⁹³ Yet the disruptive commentary of Hamlet foregrounds the interpretation of the performance by the fictional spectators, rather than the pragmatics of theatrical mimesis. Ophelia is right when she says Hamlet is ‘as good as a chorus’ (3.2.245). The prince’s explanation of the narrative and dramatic sources of the murder scene is characteristic of the manner in which his constant interruptions seek to condition the responses of the Danish aristocracy. The provocative exchanges between Hamlet and the court spectators overshadow the players. A significant analogue for the scene is the royal mockery of the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisby in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the responses of the great and good take precedence over the plebeian metadrama. For although critics have often focused on the capacity of the itinerant actors to influence the court in *Hamlet*, finding a ‘prominent image of the power

⁸⁹ For the intertextual implications of Gower’s appearance in *Pericles*, see pp. 77-8.

⁹⁰ For the standard account of the sources of *Hamlet*, see Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7 (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 3-188.

⁹¹ See Muir, pp. 158-70.

⁹² See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7, pp. 29-33.

⁹³ ‘We have two mirrors and the two images reflect from one to the other, to infinity, phantasmagorically superimposing reality and fiction’ (my translation). Cesare Segre, *Teatro e romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), p. 58.

of theatricality', the dominant role of the authentic prince as producer, director, author, and critic leaves little space for the speeches of the player king and queen.⁹⁴ It is Hamlet's commentary which catches 'the conscience of the King', not 'The Mouse-Trap' itself (2.2.605). Unmoved by the two representations of the murder, Claudius only abandons the performance 'Upon the talk of pois'ning' as the prince explicates the Italian background of the play (3.2.289).

Hamlet's obsessive concern with audience response dominates the preparation and enactment of *The Murder of Gonzago*. What motivates the prince's sudden passion for Italianate court drama is the expectation that the reaction of Claudius to the poisoning scenes will confirm his responsibility for the murder:

I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been strook so to the soul, that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions. (2.2.588-92)

The prince has chosen the pre-existing play because of its resemblance to the ghost's narrative: 'One scene of it comes near the circumstance / ... of my father's death' (3.2.76-7). He encourages Horatio to watch the reactions of Claudius during the performance: 'Give him heedful note, / For I mine eyes will rivet to his face' (3.2.84-5). Hamlet's rhetoric represents the theatre as a powerful moral influence upon the spectator. Nonetheless, he does not trust the players to convey his message to the new king. In his final backstage instructions, the prince worries that the clown will distract the audience from the significance of the drama: 'there be some of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the mean time some necessary question of the play is then to be consider'd' (3.2.40-43). The failure of the 'excellent play' featuring the speech about the slaughter of Priam looms as a cautionary example of the risks of the theatre (2.2.439). Its merits may have been 'receiv'd' by Hamlet but 'it was caviary to the general', a conclusion demonstrated by Polonius' complaints that the actor's recital is 'too long' (2.2.437, 498). The initial response of the meta-audience does little to relieve such apprehensions. Hamlet finds himself obliged to explain 'what this show meant' after the assembly at Elsinore fails to grasp the significance of the opening dumb show (3.2.142). The only response to the first representation of regicide comes from a puzzled Ophelia: 'What means this, my lord?' (3.2.136). Consequently, Hamlet intervenes to remove any indeterminacy or complexity by offering overt indications to guide the reactions of the spectators. It is not a coincidence that, as the aggrieved prince betrays his personal investment

⁹⁴ Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 27. There is a significant power imbalance between the prince and players, keen to retain his patronage. See Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 103.

in the play, Claudius begins to address his questions about ‘the argument’ and potential ‘offense’ of the tragedy directly to him (3.2.232).

Given the emphasis on the need to manage audience response during Hamlet’s presentation of the play within the play, it is imperative to consider his explicit reference to an Italian source in terms of how it would have helped to create meaning in the early modern London theatre. By foregrounding the production of an Italianate court drama, featuring the first of the many ill-fated dukes I will discuss in this book, the prince’s commentary appeals to the pre-existing knowledge of a genre that was already becoming a standby of the domestic repertory. A prominent example was *Antonio’s Revenge*, a tragedy with a remarkable resemblance to the main plot of *Hamlet*.⁹⁵ Each play features the aggrieved ghost of a poisoned head of state who calls upon his son to avenge his assassination and prevent his wife’s remarriage. John Marston wrote the sequel to *Antonio and Mellida* for the Paul’s boys, taking advantage of the tragic potential of the original comedy’s representation of Italian state intrigue. However, as with the parallels between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, the critical consensus is that Shakespeare influenced Marston or that the two dramatists independently adapted the *Ur-Hamlet*.⁹⁶ The resistance to Marston’s potential influence on the main plot, as G.K. Hunter pointed out, is symptomatic of a residual assumption that ‘Shakespeare was too transcendent a genius to copy other people’ in the theatre.⁹⁷ Yet there are also significant affinities between Marston’s Italianate tragedy and *The Murder of Gonzago*. The possibility Shakespeare’s metadrama parodies the style and setting of works like *Antonio’s Revenge*, providing a foil for the greater complexities of his overall drama, is coherent with the discussion of theatrical competition in the 1623 folio version of *Hamlet*.⁹⁸ Artistic quality has nothing to do with the prince’s choice of play. The opening speech of the play within the play scene, where Hamlet instructs the actors, emphasizes the prince’s contempt for ‘inexplicable dumb shows’ (3.2.12). Marston employs three separate dumb shows, each serving to highlight crucial plot developments.⁹⁹ Despite the parallels with the death of old Hamlet, the crude dumb show presented at Elsinore fails to capture the attention of Claudius. The hackneyed repertory of the itinerant players also recalls Marston in its use of Italian material. As the representation of the villainous Venetian duke in both of the *Antonio* plays makes clear, the standard argument of Italianate court drama was illegitimate rule. The ideological associations of the Italian character

⁹⁵ I discuss the play in detail in Chapter 3, see pp. 101-5.

⁹⁶ See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7, pp. 16-26.

⁹⁷ Introduction to John Marston, *Antonio’s Revenge*, ed. G.K. Hunter (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. xx.

⁹⁸ For the references to the London theatre market, see Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 13-30.

⁹⁹ For Marston’s dumb shows, see Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (rpt. London, Methuen, 1982), pp. 125-32.

names and source of *The Murder of Gonzago* supplement Hamlet's open challenge to the new king.

Beyond any individual narrative source, the underlying influence upon the theatre's portrayal of state crisis was the pervasive circulation of Cinquecento political writing in early modern England. The centrality of Italian precedents in domestic discourses of courtiership and statecraft, as Marston's caricatures of Castiglione suggest, made it inevitable for playwrights to deal with these arguments in an Italian context. Shakespeare's on-stage depiction of an interpretive community of nobles and courtiers reflects the appeal such drama would have had for genuine and would-be court insiders. The theoretical concerns of Machiavelli and his contemporaries were inextricable from the fate of Italy during the sixteenth century, when the ambitions of France, Spain, and the papacy had disastrous consequences for the autonomous city-states of the peninsula. Even the *Cortegiano*, famous for its placid debates about the qualities of an ideal courtier, opens with an embittered account of the humiliation of 'poore Italy'.¹⁰⁰ By the time Castiglione wrote his nostalgic portrait of Duke Guidobaldo da Montefeltro's court, the dukedom of Urbino had already lost its independence.¹⁰¹ The strategic errors of Guidobaldo's successor, Francesco Maria I della Rovere, earned him the disdain of Castiglione and Francesco Guicciardini, two of the most influential political theorists in early modern Europe.¹⁰² Some critics have read the courtly manners in the main plot of *Hamlet* in terms of the *Cortegiano*, although Shakespeare offers none of the distinct references or verbal echoes found in other plays from the period.¹⁰³ A more compelling approach finds a potential historical analogue for *The Murder of Gonzago* in the presumed murder of Francesco Maria I.¹⁰⁴ After the reviled duke died in mysterious circumstances in 1538, his family and followers claimed he had been poisoned via a lotion administered in the ear.¹⁰⁵ Francesco Maria's barber-surgeon confessed under torture to committing the murder on behalf of Luigi Gonzaga, a member of the ruling family of Mantua and immediate relative

¹⁰⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London: Dent, 1974), p. 286.

¹⁰¹ See my discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 97-100.

¹⁰² For Guicciardini's personal quarrels with the ruler, see James Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1851), pp. 415-19.

¹⁰³ In particular, see Barbara Johnson, "'The Fabric of the Universe Rent': *Hamlet* as an Inversion of *The Courtier*", *Hamlet Studies* 9 (1987): 34-52.

¹⁰⁴ See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7, pp. 29-33 and 'The Murder of Gonzago: A Probable Source for *Hamlet*', *Modern Language Review* 30 (1935): pp. 433-4. See also Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 140-41.

¹⁰⁵ Some period reports of the murder allegations appear in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7, pp. 172-6.

of the widowed Duchess.¹⁰⁶ The surname and alleged *modus operandi* of Gonzaga seem too close to Shakespeare to be entirely coincidental, leading many textual scholars to argue that the Second Quarto's references to 'a murder done in Vienna' must derive from a compositor's misreading of Urbino.¹⁰⁷ There is also a relevant parologue in a later work by Marston. In depicting a Duke of Urbino in *The Fawn*, a Jacobean disguised ruler play mocking the failed state's reputation for courtiership, he also used the name Gonzago.¹⁰⁸ What we find in *The Murder of Gonzago*, therefore, is that the overt reference to an Italian story is suggestive of a multifaceted array of discourses related to the tumultuous history of the peninsula in the sixteenth century and the use of Italianate drama as a vehicle for political commentary on the English stage. The intertextual accumulation of such material over time created stage conventions which subsequent dramatists could exploit for purposes of parody, political realignment, or simply to mislead their audiences.

Intertextual Chronology

In considering the place of intertextuality in period performance, it is necessary to look at canonical works from the perspective of the dynamic evolution of theatrical genres and domestic political debates. For although Italianate drama stages complaints which began to surface towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth I, neither the dramatic nor the political climate in early modern England remained constant. The intertextual tension between past and present theatrical traditions is fundamental to the rhetorical strategy of John Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble*, a play interrogating the ideological premises of Italianate revenge drama. The play seems to depict the efforts of an Italian marquis to amass a seraglio of attractive young maidens, rehearsing the sexual politics of Jacobean plays like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The White Devil* and *Women Beware Women*. By rewriting the stock figure of the lascivious Italian ruler in 1635, when such characters had already become a fixture in his own plays, Ford anticipates audience expectations of the association between court drama and the staging of aristocratic vice. The opening scene introduces the familiar predicament of what Jonathan Dollimore has

¹⁰⁶ The best account of the controversy in English remains Dennistoun, vol. 3, pp. 66-8. For the most recent research on the life and death of Francesco Maria, see C.H. Clough, 'La successione dei Della Rovere nel ducato di Urbino', in *I Della Rovere nell'Italia delle corti*, eds Bonita Cleri et al., vol. 1 (Urbino: Quattro Venti, 2002), pp. 35-61.

¹⁰⁷ 3.2.238-9. For a survey of the critical debate about the location of the play within the play in period editions, see Patricia Parker, 'Murder in Guyana', *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000): 169-75. Doubts have also been raised about the Viennese setting of *Measure for Measure*, see Gary Taylor, 'Shakespeare's Mediterranean *Measure for Measure*', in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, eds Tom Clayton, Susan Brock and Vicente Forés (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 243-68.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 4, p. 131.

called ‘the dispossessed intellectual’, encouraged to betray his sister to the ruler in exchange for preferment.¹⁰⁹ The Marquis of Siena’s favourite, Troylo-Savelli, makes the usual appeal to the brother’s penury and frustrated ambitions:

Could’st thou consider *Livio*
The fashion of the times, their study, practice,
Nay, their ambitions, thou would’st soone distinguish
Betwixt the abject lownesse of a poverty,

And the applauded triumph of abundance,
Though compast by the meanest service.¹¹⁰

The response of the brother is conventional: he begins to plot his revenge. Yet what makes such an openly derivative play stimulating is its ultimate *coup de théâtre*. Instead of a sexual predator, the marquis turns out to be a friend to impecunious virgins. The sister reappears accompanied by her new companions in the ruler’s academy for the moral edification of attractive young women. The Epilogue underlines the play’s conscious challenge to audience presumptions: ‘Fancie and judgement are a Playes full matter: / If we have er’d in one, right you the latter’.¹¹¹ Although most recent studies have agreed ‘the drama is essentially a trick played on its viewers’, Ford’s approach tends to be characterized in terms of a bored playwright writing for a jaded audience.¹¹² On an ideological level, however, what is at stake here is Ford’s revision of the political agenda of the Italianate revenge play. Ford explicitly represents the unexpected finale as a lesson to people who assume the worst of their leaders: ‘Great men may be mistooke when they meane best’.¹¹³ In the dedication, the dramatist proclaims his deference to authority: ‘I have ever honoured virtue, as the richest ornament to the noblest titles’. Significantly, the patron of the first edition of the play was the Earl of Antrim, the second husband of the widow of the notorious Duke of Buckingham. The play’s subversion of preconceived expectations may have been particularly appealing to the wealthy widow and younger impoverished Irish noble whose liaison had been

¹⁰⁹ Dollimore, p. 242.

¹¹⁰ John Ford, *The Fancies, Chaste, and Noble*, ed. Domenick J. Hart (New York: Garland, 1985), 1.1.15-18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Epilogue, ll. 7-8.

¹¹² Donald K. Anderson, Jr., ‘Sequentiality and Manipulation of Response in Ford’s *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble*’, in ‘Concord in Discord’: *The Plays of John Ford*, ed. Donald K. Anderson, Jr. (New York, 1986), p. 242. The suggestion of trickery first arises in Juliet Sutton, ‘Platonic Love in Ford’s *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble*’, *Studies in English Literature*, 7, 2 (1967): 299-309.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.3.137.

the subject of prolonged malicious gossip.¹¹⁴ Here, the anti-court drama of the past becomes a moral lesson in the errors of presumption. The Caroline audience gets conservative comedy, rather than radical tragedy.

Ford's self-reflexive approach to the revenge play makes manifest the extent to which every early modern representation of Italian culture involves a negotiation with previous writing. What emerges from placing the canonical texts we usually study within a longer sequence of intertextual transactions, consistent with Douglas Bruster's perceptive suggestion that source criticism needs to be attentive to how authors 'replied to precursors and their texts', is a more reliable model of historical process.¹¹⁵ As a consequence, in dealing with specific political themes or theatrical genres associated with Italianate drama on the early modern English stage, this book will pay particular attention to the historical evolution of discourses from the Elizabethan period onwards. The abandonment of the source study tradition, liberating critics from the obligation to demonstrate direct connections between a work and its latent influences or analogues, has distracted from the importance of chronology. Current intertextual methodology permits us to make wide-ranging assumptions about cultural formations, applying textual and historical examples subsequent to the publication of the canonical work under examination. My reading of *Volpone* in Chapter 2 highlights the potential pitfalls of overusing such an approach. Many studies have interpreted Jonson's portrayal of English tourists in Venice in light of the later travel narrative in *Coryats Crudities*, notorious for offering domestic readers an overenthusiastic enumeration of the artistic and sexual attractions of the canal city. However, I show that the understandable emphasis on explicating the famous play has implied a direction of influence that is the exact opposite of how the notoriety of Ben Jonson's comic subplot conditioned the reception of Coryate's book and later representations of Italian travel.¹¹⁶ Instead, *Volpone* follows the precedent set by *The Unfortunate Traveller*, where Thomas Nashe satirizes the confusion between foreign travel and domestic reading in texts like *The Schoolmaster*. By focusing on the portrayal of English tourists in Italy in plays and prose including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Patient Grissil*, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, *The Ball*, and *The Novella*, the chapter traces how their rhetorical strategies foreground the rehearsal of earlier plays and books about Italy. Even though the failings of Sir Politic Would-be and his fellow theatrical travellers may exemplify longstanding fears about the loss of domestic identity, their real stimulus has been the books they perused at home. The on-stage intertextual references presume that, like the foolish characters themselves, the London audience perceives Italy in terms of domestic reading.

¹¹⁴ For the aspersions towards the couple, see Jane H. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: The Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 29-49.

¹¹⁵ Bruster, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ For the influence of *Volpone* on the travel book, see pp. 59-60.

What makes engaging the spectator so vital in Italianate court drama, as Chapter 3 suggests, is that the debate surrounding the reception of Cinquecento political theory in early modern England centred on the problem of interpretation. In the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, focusing on the clandestine readership of Niccolò Machiavelli's books, Marlowe offers the author of *Il Principe* as a guide to understanding the ensuing play. The presence of Francesco Guicciardini as on-stage chorus in *The Devil's Charter* ostensibly serves to transmit an impression of historical verisimilitude, consistent with the extensive use of detailed marginal notes citing early modern Italian political and historical writing in Barnes' own political treatise *Four Books of Offices*. The explicit portrayal of such famous Italian political theorists by the two dramatists becomes a movement towards complexity, obscuring potentially subversive political content, rather than an aid to understanding. Alongside the overt source attribution associated with the role of Guicciardini, Barnes silently interpolates verbal echoes from Machiavelli and James I into the speeches of the villainous Pope Alexander the sixth. The repeated errors of Barabas in the course of Marlowe's play, set in contrast to the consistent results obtained by the cynical Maltese leadership, call into question the stage Machiavel's initial endorsement of the character. The inherent potential for misreading in each play evokes period debates about the opacity of Machiavelli's own agenda in the *Principe*. In the second part of the chapter, I look at the references to Italian courtesy books in Marston's *Antonio* plays and Webster's *White Devil*. By approaching Italianate court drama within the context of the domestic circulation of Italian political theory, mediated by dubious translators and paranoid readers, I suggest the intertextual dynamics at stake in these plays are not just specific verbal echoes but the cultural debate about the reception of Machiavelli and his contemporaries in early modern England.

Chapter 4 reconsiders the place of the disguised ruler play in Shakespeare's own drama within the context of its evolution in the Jacobean theatrical repertory. The standard narrative line of early examples like *The Malcontent* is rooted in Cinquecento Italian political theory, where the humiliation of the loss of independence to foreign invaders demands a new vision of statecraft. The learning process the dukes undergo in these plays, via the use of disguise, transforms them into competent participants in the covert power politics of the Italian Renaissance. Here, I concentrate on a reading of the generic intertextuality of *The Tempest*, a play where what is at stake in the main plot is control of an Italian city state. It is telling that the play's staging of the ship of state metaphor in the opening scene has much in common with Machiavelli's description of the historical 'tempesta' which swept the rulers of Naples and Milan from power during the Wars of Italy.¹¹⁷ For although recent criticism has concentrated on the allusions to nascent colonialism in the subplot, eliding the overall focus on Prospero's surreptitious 'project' to regain his dukedom in Milan, the play's fixation upon how power is acquired and maintained has much more to do with the subject matter and plot

¹¹⁷ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 43r. See pp. 121-3.

structure of *Measure for Measure*. By the time Shakespeare returned to the form in 1611, however, the typical situations and ideological stance of the disguised ruler play had become the object of a series of theatrical parodies. By looking at ironic revivals of the form, in light of the growing disillusionment with James's reign, I suggest that the genre became a target for caricature because of its initial association with hopes for reform at the end of the Elizabethan period.

Chapter 5 argues traditional criticism has failed to take account of the complex and contradictory intertextual background of *Cymbeline*, another play from the final period of Shakespeare's career. The anachronistic references to early modern Italy in the subplot, where the character of Jachimo functions as a familiar example of an 'Italian fiend', seem out of place alongside the main plot's negotiation of the relationship between British patriotism and Roman civilization. There is no question that the careful ideological distinction between the glories of ancient Rome and the degradation of modern Italy, as the chapter will show, was a typical gesture of patriotic classical scholars in the period. The goal of such a distinction was to represent England (or Britain) as the legitimate heir of the cultural legacy of Rome. Yet Shakespeare confuses the two periods when the archetypical sixteenth-century Italian politician Jachimo intervenes in the main plot of the play, taking his place in Caesar's legions in the attack upon Britain. Indeed, the confusion surrounding Jachimo's role in *Cymbeline* has obscured a more serious anachronism in the play: the terminology of Britishness. For English nationalists, opposed to James I's plans to unify his reigns in England and Scotland, the 'new' title of Britain introduced by the new ruler was a conscious suppression of centuries of autonomous local history and culture. In rehearsing the rhetorical strategies of the Anglo-Scottish union debate, as the chapter will show through an extensive account of Stuart propaganda texts, the main plot is unable to resolve the tensions between its inspirational story of British resistance to foreign domination and *Cymbeline*'s ultimate submission to Rome. The inconsistencies in Shakespeare's ambivalent portrayal of Italy, simultaneously cast as a threatening intruder, a defeated foe, and a model of cultural legitimacy, have much to do with English unease about obedience to a foreign king.

The importance of Italy in domestic cultural and political debates ensured the peninsula would remain a constant presence on the London stage right up until the start of the English Civil War. A particular advantage of a chronological approach to intertextuality is the possibility to use successive plays as examples of period responses to the preceding repertory. Through their challenges to established genres and conventions, we are able to use the critical insight of the professional dramatists of the time to measure changing audience tastes and the reception of individual plays.