

## John Florio: The Anglified Italian Who Invented Shakespeare

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*Shakespeare es - digámoslo así - el menos inglés de los escritores ingleses. Lo típico de Inglaterra es el understatement, es el decir un poco menos de las cosas. En cambio, Shakespeare tendía a la hipóbole en la metáfora, y no nos sorprendería nada que Shakespeare hubiera sido italiano o judío, por ejemplo.*

Shakespeare is—let us put it this way—the least English of English writers. The English typically resort to understatement, saying a little less about things than they might. Shakespeare, in contrast, tended toward hyperbole in the use of metaphor, and it would come to us as no surprise to learn that Shakespeare had been Italian, or Jewish, for instance.

—Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges oral*, 1979

The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery, and I tremble every day lest something should turn up.

—Charles Dickens, 1847

The fears of Charles Dickens have come true: something has finally turned up, something that, had I not left Italy twenty-eight years ago, I would never have succeeded in seeing and recognizing. By that I mean that I would never have been able to read *Shakespeare* in a way that would have led me to John Florio. I was sensitized in the first place to the idea of an “ethnic” Shakespeare through leaving myself: leaving behind the country of my birth, crossing cultural boundaries, speaking other tongues. At the end of the twentieth century, even without persecution, expatriation is always a wrench. Leaving is a good and an ill at the same time, just as Prospero says to Miranda: “Both, both, my girl: By foul play, as thou say’st, were we heave’d thence, but blessedly help hither.”

### **Metamorphosis**

Marvelous metamorphosis: John Florio emerges from the heart of Europe and becomes *Shake-speare* on the banks of the Thames. Everything comes from abroad, certainly everything that counts. As the Gulf current warms the shores of Albion, so a current from the Mediterranean flowed north and touched the culture of the Tudor age at the right time, impregnating and transforming it. In a superb image of John Florio (Shakespeare, that is), the Greeks received “their baptizing water from the conduit-pipes of the Egyptians,” who had received it in turn “from the well-springs of the Hebrews or Chaldees.” Those same waters brought Florio to the English. Had those waters not moved, they would have grown stagnant in a declining language and culture, and that dammed-up current would have given birth to an infinitely lesser Shakespeare. Instead, the waters of the Renais-



sance and the crisis of southern Europe were carried northward by the “conduit-pipes” of the Jewish Diaspora and the minuscule tide of Italian Protestantism: the language, the poetry, and the ideas of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Machiavelli, Aretino, Tasso, Ronsard, Castiglione, Montaigne, and Bruno engendered the Swan of Avon—a strange and scarcely imaginable phenomenon. What astounds us in Shakespeare is the strangeness and the greatness of the art, not the mode of its manifestation, which has nothing exceptional about it. The encounter and clash of cultures, microscopic or epidemic contaminations, more or less intense and rapid hybridizations from which arises the new, the unusual, the extraordinary are the way history—that

is, life—proceeds.

When I began to involve myself with Shakespeare, two sentences, one by Dickens and another from Henry James, struck me forcefully and drove me to confront the question openly. Henry James wrote:

I am *a sort of* haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world. The more I turn him around the more he so affects me. But that is all – I am not pretending to treat the question or to carry it any further. It bristles with difficulties and I can only express my general sense by saying that I find almost as impossible to conceive that Bacon wrote the plays as to conceive that the man from Stratford, did.<sup>1</sup>

I wondered what Dickens was really thinking of, what kind of stunning revelation he was referring to, and why James went so far as to talk of “fraud.” To the advantage—and detriment—of whom? Who was the author, or who might he be, whose authorship of the *oeuvre* was denied with such insistence? Why does the Institution—in the full Orwellian and Foucauldian sense of a system of surveillance and punishment, with policemen and professors reinforcing one another—defend this academic dogma so stubbornly? What problems, I asked myself, would arise if the name of the orthodox English author were replaced with the name of another Englishman, noble or commoner, as long as there existed unassailable proof of his identity?

None, clearly. If the name of any other candidate native to England were to be substituted for the name *Shakespeare*, as the anti-Stratfordians have been demanding for centu-

ries,<sup>2</sup> England's national reputation would suffer no harm. How could it be other than beneficial to correct a misidentification and definitively establish an important identity? We would finally learn something about the author: his life, his works, his travels and loves. Everything would be incontrovertibly true and authentic. The Great Author would acquire a visage, a reliable portrait at last. But no: orthodox scholarship refuses to let go of the man from Stratford.

### A Foreigner

Such obstinacy notwithstanding, today "Shakespeare" is about to assume his true identity, that of a foreigner. This foreigner, John Florio, was however born in London in 1553, and resided in continental Europe with his father between the ages of two and about twenty. Returning to London at the beginning of the 1570s, he began his working life within the entourage of the leading aristocratic families, and later at court; in 1591 he added the appellation "Resolute" to his name. Having decided to endow his new, beloved homeland (then a culturally backward place) with a literary oeuvre of supreme quality, Florio chose to become a playwright under the aggressive pseudonym "Shake-speare," with "spear" standing obviously for "pen." This name turned out to coincide phonetically with that of an English native, "William Shakspeare" (also spelled "Shakspear" or "Shexpir"), the son of a Stratford glove-maker who made a career in London as an actor, and then as a landowner, theatrical impresario, and moneylender, and who profited from the homophony.

Under this dissembled identity, John Florio, and not the man from Stratford, became "the Swift Swan of Avon." That is the hypothesis which really makes the Institution quake, which it rejects with all its strength. Shakespearian criticism may not have been able to construct a credible biography of *Shakespeare* out of thin air; it may not have dared, or even been able, to invent a life, a correspondence, events, significant relations with contemporaries for him, to give him a profile as a man, as a human being; but it has shown great flair in covering up the testimony and the evidence relating to the creative life of the true author of the works of Shakespeare—John Florio, the hidden poet determined to refuse an unwanted and unacceptable identity. The dispute between the two parties, the orthodox Stratfordians and the miscreant anti-Stratfordians, would have lasted into eternity, because the trunk containing the autograph manuscripts or the letter in the author's own hand clearing up the mystery of his identity, would never have been found.

### The Cover-Up

The Florios, father and son, were themselves complicit in this posthumous institutional cover-up, furthering the operation for a complex series of reasons. For one thing, John was a highly visible immigrant, hence envied and hated at a time when mistrust of foreigners was rife—too visible to present himself officially as the author of the works of *Shakespeare* on top of everything else. For another, his father, Michel Angelo, with the Roman Inquisition permanently on his trail, felt insecure even in his new Protestant domicile, and decided to live clandestinely. A third factor is that John, an "aristocrat" in sentiment, avoided acknowledging that he had written for the theater, a profession he cer-

tainly esteemed as an Italian, but a minor one nevertheless that enjoyed no literary prestige in England at that time. Finally, and fundamentally, John Florio had decided to assume the mission of elevating the English language and the culture of England above its rivals, but to do so *incognito*. The author of those plays, the man responsible for that enrichment of vocabulary and style and ideas, could simply not be seen to bear a foreign name. “*Italus ore, Anglus pectore*”<sup>3</sup> they said of him, and John Florio saw himself that way too. This new, extraordinary author had to be an Englishman. And he was! The motives for Florio’s pseudonymous, virtually anonymous offerings were not only grounded in the history of Renaissance letters, they also made sense on their own terms, articulated by W. H. Auden in an excellent introduction to the works of “William Shakespeare”:

[I]t should be borne in mind that most genuine artists would prefer that no biography be written.<sup>4</sup>

Such was indeed Florio’s preference, and he had his way, allowing the authorial identification of Shakspeare of Stratford to go ahead. This identification was decided upon in the *milieu* around Ben Jonson and Francis Bacon, consecrated by the national universities a century later, and guaranteed by the immense power of the British Empire. So from 1592 to 1616, the name “Shakespeare” continued to be ambiguously projected out into the Stratford countryside, among butchers, poachers, and glove-makers.

Let us be clear: it is not a question of snobbery, which is the accusation that certain Stratfordians foolishly (or perhaps astutely, so as to embarrass their adversaries) direct at those who refuse to believe that the Bard could have sprung from a family of illiterates. It is not that the children of artisans and peasants were then incapable of creating poetry. They certainly were, as shown by the case of other Elizabethan authors such as Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, and indeed Ben Jonson himself. But not like that, not like him, without the faintest trace of an academic curriculum, with the empty and routine life that the official biographies relay. If, as Harold Bloom maintains,<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare* is the “inventor” of the modern human condition, then his life is important to us. All the more so in that it was the life of a foreigner, an uprooted individual, a migrant who reappeared in London at age 17 full of energy and boundless talent and mastered a second language, the emerging English tongue, which he invested with fantastic dynamism.

Today, in the words of Daniel Swift, “Shakespeare has escaped the grounds of the academic institutions and is now at large in the community.”<sup>6</sup> And this is why, from the age-old question of authorship, there emanates the nervousness, embarrassment, and sometimes anguished tension of a culture—that of the British Isles—to which the diaspora of the South unexpectedly presented this extraordinary gift. By the 400th anniversary of the death of Shakspeare, Shakespeare had become a foundational element of English, and then British, identity, and now it is about to flee their grasp. And that is why the world has been so “patient,” as Henry James said, with this fraud. It had an interest in going along!

### The Florios

In writing my book on Florio as Shakespeare, I brought to light no new texts, uncovered no manuscripts in overlooked libraries; I have simply exhumed and read the works of the Florios, and a number of books about them dismissed or ignored by official scholarship. While Shakespeare Studies have been able to protect the Stratfordian identity, shrewdly avoiding the “danger points” (the writings of John Florio and his role as linguist, and also, in Shakespeare’s works the theme of exile, his familiarity with the Bible, his passion for proverbs), over the course of time the odd person here and there has chosen to focus on the trickiest, most controversial topics.

And so I have had occasion to read long-forgotten books, compare various articles and theses, and study the works of Shakespeare. From the corpus of plays, it was particularly illuminating to read *The Tempest* closely, and the late “romances”; and likewise the *Sonnets*. My reading of *The Tempest* was guided by the writings of critics like Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, and Jan Kott. But the books that were really precious and crucial were *Giovanni Florio. Un apôtre de la Renaissance en Angleterre à l’époque de Shakespeare* (1921) by Clara Longworth Chambrun, *Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne* (1925) by George Coffin Taylor, and *John Florio. The life of an Italian in Shakespeare’s England* (1934) by Frances Amelia Yates.

The first two have been virtually “disappeared” by Shakespeare criticism. The reading of (and cross-referencing among) these books turned out to be highly revelatory once I came into contact with another important study: *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography* (2001) by Diana Price. Price combs through the orthodox biography, highlighting the chronological gaps, ambiguities, blank spaces, and contradictions of every kind in the life narratives that attempt to make the poverty of the documents match the immense richness of the *oeuvre*: from Shakespeare’s education (or rather the lack of it), to the non-existence of contemporary proof of linkage between the literary activity of the author and the life of the actor from Stratford, and on to the incredible story of his funeral monument.<sup>7</sup> The author is an independent scholar, who, in a vain attempt to get a hearing from the academic community, carried out an utterly serious and extraordinary piece of research. She succeeded in sweeping away all the identifications hitherto put forward, orthodox and heterodox, and leaving a disquieting vacuum in their place.<sup>8</sup>

Naturally the truth was already there, and I have done no more than fit the pieces of the puzzle together. My debt to those three key books from the 1920s and 1930s, and to Diana Price’s book, is enormous, and I will quote from them frequently. It was those now distant monographs, along with a revelation from Santi Paladino, that supplied me with all the *tesserae* of the mosaic that finally revealed the portrait of Florio. Santi Paladino,<sup>9</sup> then a young and unknown Italian journalist who deserves credit for a major revelatory intuition, stated in print in 1929 and again in 1954, that “Shakespeare” was the pseudonym of an Italian writer, Michel Angelo Florio. But perhaps because Paladino had not adequately digested the two then-current biographies of Michel Angelo’s son John, although he was aware of them, or another revealing book published in 1925 by an American of which he must not have known, or perhaps simply because the time was not yet

ripe, his pamphlets had no impact, and his thesis, unsupported by adequate scholarly apparatus, immediately vanished under an avalanche of arrogant irony and indifference.

### Linguists, Translators, Go-Betweens

A passion for language (for both *la langue*, the implicit rules structuring a given language, and *la parole*, the idiosyncratic utterances of individuals using it) is the fundamental trait uniting the Florios and *Shakespeare*. Michel Angelo and John Florio inhabit writing, and in the case of John especially, the English tongue. Language is their sole true territory. Neither England nor Italy is really their *patria*. One thinks of Elias Canetti:

People often talked about languages; seven or eight different tongues were spoken in our city alone, everyone understood something of each language... Each person counted up languages he knew; it was important to master several, knowing them could save one's own life or the lives of other people.<sup>10</sup>

Even apart from his revelation as Shakespeare, John Florio is the major representative, not just of the small Italian Protestant diaspora in England, but also of the large group of translators of works of classical and European literature who made possible the birth and growth of Elizabethan culture. From Thomas Hoby, translator of Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano* in 1561, to Philemon Holland, the translator of Livy (1600) and Suetonius (1606), to the Homer and Ovid in English of George Chapman and Arthur Golding, it was they who enabled the English Renaissance to take flight. F.O. Matthiessen puts it in lapidary fashion: "A study of Elizabethan translators is a study of the means by which the Renaissance came to England."<sup>11</sup>

The first thing that strikes one in contemplating the lives of the Florios is their passion, their genuine mania for *la parole* and their extraordinary creative capacity; these allowed John to coin more than a thousand words and new expressions in English, and to write such poetic prose:

...a good word is a dew from heaven to earth: it is a precious balme, that has sweetnesse in the boxe, whence it comes, sweetnesse and vertue in the bodie, whereto it comes: it is a golden chaine, that linkes the tongs, and eares, and harts of writers and readers, each to other.<sup>12</sup>

Capability like that is found in no other author of the age, except for *Shakespeare*. Speaking of the genius of *Shakespeare*, Price cites George Gordon, who wrote in 1928:

Much more has been written about the verbal audacity and word creativeness of Shakespeare than about another power of his, more remarkable even than his gift of formal invention—I mean his genius in the manipulation and development of meaning... Shakespeare possessed this power in a degree never approached before or since by any Englishman, or perhaps by any individual mind.<sup>13</sup>

In our time Harold Bloom has said that “no other writer has ever had anything like Shakespeare’s resources of language, which are so florabundant in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* that we feel many of the limits of language have been reached, once and for all.”<sup>14</sup> *No other writer*—except John Florio! Then there is that curious “*florabundant*” from the American critic, a slip of the pen that magically evokes the hidden name.

Infinite resources of language, certainly, but also a strangeness of both *langue* and *parole*. Shakespeare’s English, his grammar, his lexicon, are odd and untypical. Criticism is unanimous about this. In *Shakespeare’s Grammar*, Jonathan Hope states:

Younger or more urban sixteenth-century writers than Shakespeare generally show much less variation in their grammar: their English is effectively closer to ours than Shakespeare’s is. Intriguingly, this raises the possibility that Shakespeare’s biography supplied him with a richer linguistic palate than other writers of his day.<sup>15</sup>

Though confined by the horizon of orthodox criticism, Hope clearly expresses the most natural, logical, and intelligent hypothesis that can be formulated about the incredible linguistic capacity, lexical and grammatical, of Shakespeare: that the life he lived and his background help to explain his extraordinary ability. On the other hand it is not only pathetic but also extremely irritating to observe scholars struggling to account for Shakespeare’s exceptionality by adducing the skeletal and contradictory biographical circumstances of the man from Stratford. The culmination—or nadir—is reached when a life such as this, which ought to embarrass biographers struggling to put together narratives scarcely coherent unless colored by imagination, is made to explain aspects and points of particular interpretive difficulty in the oeuvre. In Simon Palfrey’s *Doing Shakespeare*, the table of contents alone, which presents queries like “Why all these metaphors?” or “Why use two words when one might do?” or “Why all these puns?” is indicative of the pertinence of my own perspective, in which the “defects” of Shakespeare and the puzzlement they provoke apply literally to the Florios.<sup>16</sup>

### Languages

Michel Angelo and John Florio spent their whole lives thinking about the languages of Europe and about language in general. They were both polyglots and high-wire acrobats of language: their adored, maternal Italian language, but above all the new, virgin, malleable, proteiform English language. For Frances Yates, John’s Italian-English dictionary possessed incalculable value for all scholars of the sixteenth century. *A Worlde of Wordes*, entered in the Stationers’ Register in 1596 and published in 1598, is the first authentic modern Italian-English dictionary. It represents a fundamental innovation for English lexicography, since for the first time the common speech of one modern European language was translated into another.

Florio informs us that he planned, and had begun to compile, an English-Italian counterpart. Although this was never completed, it would have been invaluable, supplying us with a direct and illuminating record of Shakespeare’s entire treasury of words translated into Italian. The dictionary we do have is extraordinary for the wealth of its content—

over 46,000 Italian words in 1598 and around 74,000 in 1611—and for the lexicographical treatment they are given. Some have spoken of the “asymmetry of the Worlde of Wordes,” given that the English synonyms overwhelm the Italian headwords. The dictionary is, in other words, an immense harvest—around 150,000 words—from the Elizabethan lexicon, and Florio obviously realized as much, writing in the Epistle Dedicatorie: “If in these rankes the English out-number the Italian, congratulate the copie and varietie of our sweete-mother-tongue.” Such an expression of deep and sincere attachment to the English language, “our sweete-mother-tongue,” amounts in itself to a manifestation of the Shakespearian identity of Florio.

Shakespeare has the same passion for words. Stephen Booth writes:

Shakespeare is our most underrated poet. It should not be necessary to say that, but it is. We generally acknowledge Shakespeare’s poetic superiority to other candidates for greatest poet in English, but doing that is comparable to saying that King Kong is bigger than other monkeys. The difference between Shakespeare’s abilities with language and those even of Milton, Chaucer, or Ben Jonson is immense.<sup>17</sup>

Staying for a moment with Booth’s simile, King Kong’s enormous size and incomensurability are the result of his origins: the ape was born far away, he arrived from a different world, and he crossed the ocean. The same is true of Shakespeare, the poet *extraordinaire* who came from elsewhere: his immense linguistic capacity is not the fruit of the same cultural soil that yielded “Milton, Chaucer, or Ben Jonson.”

British writer Vernon Lee has been one of the more explicit voices, along with other women such as Violet Jeffery and Yates, to underline the cultural gap between Italy and England at that time and the fundamental contribution of the Italian Renaissance to the English cultural and artistic development:

...the English mind in the time of Elizabeth, had found itself of a sudden full-grown and blossomed out into superb manhood, with burning activities and indefatigable powers. But it had found itself without materials for work. Of the scholastic philosophy and the chivalric poetry of Middle Ages there remained but little that could be utilized... All the intellectual wealth of England remained to be created; but it could not be created out of nothing. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bacon could not be produced out of the half-effete and scattered fragments of Chaucer, of Scotus, and of Wycliffe. The materials on which English genius was to work must be sought abroad, and abroad they could be found only in Italy. For in the demolished Italy of the sixteenth century lay the whole intellectual wealth of the world...<sup>18</sup>

And Italy came to England with Florio! This is the “Shakespeare theorem,” and it could be proved with simply a pencil and a piece of paper. But it demands corroboration here through historical and textual experiments and evidence in order to overcome the drag of systemic resistance.



### Earthshaking

Even today the fact that Florio was Shakespeare is a revelation of the kind that can cause the earth to shift beneath one's feet. Hence the movement of the discourse in my book must constantly adapt, for in examining the various aspects of an *oeuvre* and a life-history that relate now to one, now to the other, of these two identities—the official one and the concealed one, Florio—it is impossible to avoid an effect of disorienting confusion, of constant ambiguity. One can lose oneself in a game of mirrors, a tangled skein of meanings generated by the simultaneous utilization of two names that projects us 400 years back into the past, when the original switch of identities took place in the well-upholstered setting of Elizabethan society.

Adopting anonymity and concealment as necessities at first, the Florios later had to resign themselves to the misapprehension when the beneficiary, the man from Stratford, appropriated it, and the general opinion confirmed it. This minor misidentification, this little piece of semantic slippage, has had “catastrophic” historical consequences over the course of time. Someone, I no longer remember who, put it this way in describing an event analogous to the prevalence of the Stratfordian myth: “It is a sort of Niagara Falls of history, there is no conspiracy but *everything* conspires in the sense that everything respire in the same direction.”

The world's “patience” of which Henry James speaks is certainly a political datum, just as the reasons for people's “patience” in the face of the suppression of democracy and our universal financial imbroglio are political. Overlaid on these political reasons, however, there is also a strong anthropological, indeed *mental* component, which perhaps only psychoanalysis is in a position to clarify. The end of the myth of Stratford (the Bethlehem of the Anglophone literary world) is an epochal event both positive and illuminating, and I do not think it a matter of pure hazard that it is occurring at a moment of deep crisis, like the one we are in now.

### Love of Shakespeare

My book, *John Florio: The Man Who Was Shakespeare* (Giano Books 2008), was written for persons engaged in study and research, but above all for those who love the works of Shakespeare. I do not seek the approval of the “guardians of Stratford,” rigidified as they so often are in their conservatism, their repetition of the same. I do seek a readiness to listen on the part of every reader of Shakespeare. All who love his plays and sonnets for what they are, for their art, their humanity, their truth, and not for their cultural value and historical significance, cannot fail to be receptive to the extraordinary story of John Florio, containing as it does the history and the authentic personality of *Shakespeare*. For my part, I touch on all the significant aspects of the astonishing overthrow of this mythology, but in every case it is only a beginning, the rest of the work will have to be undertaken by all the forces of research and investigation that will be set free once the collapse of the man from Stratford gains widespread acceptance.

Eighty years ago even those British and American scholars who had begun to explore the relation between John Florio and Shakespeare did not dare to proclaim the truth which they themselves were busy excavating, and in the end they diligently joined ranks

with the bristling phalanx of Stratfordians, of those who, as Diana Price puts it, would sooner “suppose all sorts of things rather than conclude the obvious.” Since then all the specialists have sagely trained their gaze elsewhere, while the person responsible for the works of William Shakespeare has remained right there in plain sight, weapon in hand like the murderer in an Agatha Christie thriller, without arousing the slightest suspicion in the legion of investigators, most of whom were busy shimming and shoring up the wobbly identity of the man from Stratford, while others sought the perpetrator, and vainly seek him still, among a little troop of Elizabethan Sirs and Earls.

But instead the author was a visitor: John Florio, a man who, albeit in plain view and well known to the investigators, remained absolutely “beneath” all suspicion.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Miss Violet Hunt, August 1903, in *Letters*.

<sup>2</sup> In the hoary saga known as the “Authorship question,” those denominated “Stratfordians” are the guardians of the belief that the Bard truly was William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, while the term “anti-Stratfordians” comprises all who defend other authorial identifications, such as Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, Christopher Marlow, Francis Bacon, etc.

<sup>3</sup> “Italian born, English at heart,”

<sup>4</sup> W.H. Auden, *Shakespeare. The Sonnets and narrative Poems*, Introduction, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Invention of the Human*, 1998

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Swift, “Bad Will Hunting,” *The Nation*, 13 March 2006.

<sup>7</sup> In the eyes of many, the monument we see today is the cumulative result of a number of alterations, the most clamorous of which was the eighteenth-century addition of a pen and a sheet of paper so as to impart literary credibility to the air of affluent bourgeoisie that the bust inevitably gives off. See Diana Price, *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography*, 2001, pp.154-161.

<sup>8</sup> Four publications dedicated to John Florio appeared in 2005. The one closest to my own project is a brief essay by Manfred Pfister that appeared in a German collection of comparatist studies entitled *Renaissance Go-betweens*, and I refer to it in a few parts of this book. To the same collection belongs a brief, and to my mind less successful, essay by Catherine Belsey. The third is Jason Lawrence’s book “*Who the devil taught thee so much Italian?*” *Italian language learning and literary imitation in early modern England*, which dissects Shakespeare’s knowledge of the Italian language at length. Lastly there is Michael Wyatt’s book *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England*, the second part of which is entirely dedicated to John Florio. It contains a wealth of careful research and supplies a few pieces of new information, none of them decisive, on Florio’s role as lexicographer and “political” translator, and I shall often have occasion to refer to it in the chapters on the two editions of Florio’s dictionary and his translations. 2005 was the year the silence around John Florio was broken, and the university world seems timidly to have discovered him, to have become aware of his extraordinary activity as a cultural operator, his exceptional gifts as a linguist, grammarian, translator, and therefore as author. But it is still a giant step from that to “feigning hypotheses,” and none of these four scholars took it: John Florio was talented, highly talented; but once again nobody goes so far as to set him beside *Shakespeare*.

<sup>9</sup> Santi Paladino, *Shakespeare sarebbe il pseudonimo di un poeta italiano?* (1929); *Un italiano autore delle opere shakespeariane* (1954). pp.12-13. Writing in 1934, Frances Yates had this to say about the 1929 article: “In an astonishing work which claims that Michael Angelo Florio, whom the author confuses with John Florio, was the author of Shakespeare’s plays [...] it is stated that Michael Angelo had been in Spain, Austria, Athens, at the French court, and in Denmark. No authority is given for these statements *but there may be some truth in some of them*” (Yates, 17, n. 1). Now it must be said that Yates read Paladino carelessly, for he does not in the least confuse the father with the son: Paladino was convinced, on what evidentiary basis it is hard to tell, that the poet was basically the father, and that John was the translator and adaptor of works written earlier, sometimes decades earlier, by Michel Angelo. Readers are invited to ponder the

words from Yates (emphasis added by me), in which she lets it slip that “there may be some truth” in Santi Paladino’s hypothesis.

<sup>10</sup> Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free. Remembrance of a European Childhood*, 1983, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Otto Matthiessen, *Translation: an Elizabethan art*, 1931, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes*, 1598.

<sup>13</sup> George Gordon, pp. 266-67, cited in Diana Price, p. 235.

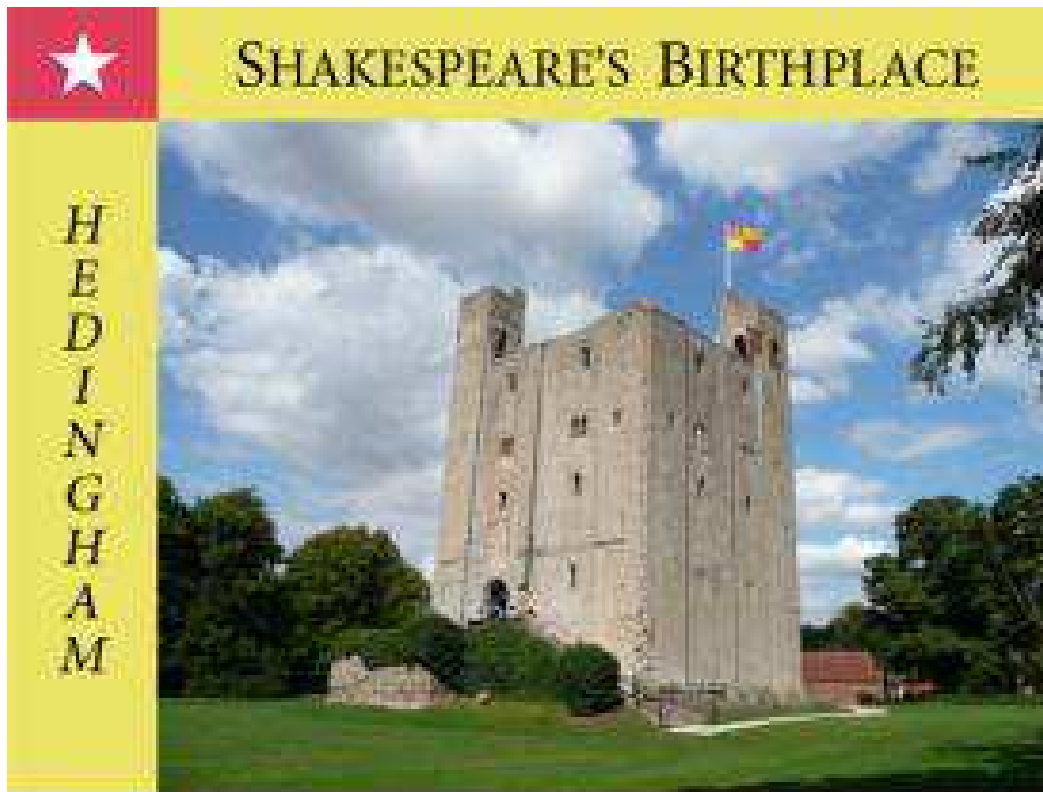
<sup>14</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare’s Grammar*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Booth, in *Shakespeare and Language*, 2004, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Euphorion: *Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in The Renaissance*, 1884, p. 62. Vernon Lee, the pseudonym used by Violet Paget (1856-1935), moved to Italy and resided in Florence from 1889 to her death.



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