

# Voyages de Shakespeare en France et en Italie

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*An overlooked masterpiece: A consideration of Lambin*

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HOWEVER FRUSTRATING, the research of links between literature and historical events is fascinating. This is what *Voyages de Shakespeare en France et en Italie*, by Georges Lambin, does, published in Geneva in 1962.

A lengthy introduction by Professors Franck L. Schoell, Georges Connes, and Louis Cazamian [20] refers to others who had investigated Shakespeare's knowledge of France and Italy, namely J.O. Halliwell, Dr Cecil Roth (Review of English Studies, April 1933), Ernesto Grillo, and Abel Lefranc [10-1].

The preface writers quote Grillo: 'We have no hesitation in affirming that on at least one occasion Shakespeare must have visited Italy' [10]. Or to quote, for example John Dover Wilson, that *Love's Labours Lost* 'bristles throughout with topical allusion' [12]. They praise the book themselves; 'It is with regard to actual French historical events that Georges Lambin's explorations are most fruitful' [13].

There is also a wariness. By page 14 the writers are saying, 'we [must now] face an almost insurmountable problem; who was the traveller [in France and Italy]? William Shakespeare, the actor born in Stratford, an actor of little talent, eclipsed by a Burbage, Allen, and others? William Shakespeare the money-lender who signed with an unpolished, boorish signature ('grossiere') Shakspeare or Shaksper, and who according to standard biographers didn't cross the Channel?'

This is the sticking point for the preface writers, because Georges Lambin follows Abel Lefranc in proposing William Stanley, the sixth Earl of Derby, as the author [20]. As a result, at the end of

the preface, Schoell and Connes finish together, but Cazamian adds that he is the one who is most convinced by Georges Lambin's argument regarding the authorship, even if Cazamian is not certain that William Stanley was the sole author of the works.

It is particularly interesting to root the greater understanding of the plays that this Society promotes in actual, documented facts, wherever possible. That is Lambin's main subject.

So why was one of the original print run still available forty years on? With unsplit pages? Is it because the book deals with two subjects, namely the geography, personages, and events in France and Italy as reflected in the plays, AND an argument for the authorship? What a pity if the authorship argument has been the component that has led to the neglect of this book, because it is fascinating.

Lambin contributes solid cross-references and a few sketches to show that either Shakespeare created plays with remarkable, coincidental links to current affairs, OR his knowledge of French and Italian history was amazingly detailed. Shakespeare often wrote, it seems, with first hand knowledge. It is of course not surprising that a French scholar sees aspects of French history that an English professor of literature does not.

Lambin explores four plays. These are: *All's Well that Ends Well*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*. He explores these in five major chapters: Shakespeare in Florence (*All's Well*); Shakespeare and the League ('*La Ligue*') (*All's Well*); Shakespeare in Milan (TGV); Prospero (*Tempest*); Shakespeare in Paris (*Measure for Measure*).

## Lambin's table of character correspondences in *Measure for Measure*

Barnadine	Bernadino de Mendoza, Spanish ambassador
Angelo	Jerome Angenoust, Councillor in the Parisian Parliament, and one of the judges in the Tonart affair
Claudio	Claude Tonart, who'd seduced the daughter of the president of the Parisian Parliament
Isabella	(Ste.) Isabelle of France, the founder of Longchamp, an important place of pilgrimage in Paris
Ragozine	Ragasoni, a legate of the Pope
Varrius	Guillaume du Vair, Councillor in the Parisian Parliament

**Table of verbal correspondances in Hambin**

Latin	French	English
voveo	voeux	when you have vowed
novitia	novicio	a novice in this place
clausarum intrare	cloitre	the cloisters enter (note word order)
de divino officio, tam	prieres des avant	these prayers...
die quam nocte	le jour	ere sunrise

Many of the characters in the plays he presents as having real life equivalents, as some will have read in Philip's Johnson's work on Measure for Measure. Hence Lambin [133] gives facts about affairs mainly in France in the 1580s, and sees a number of correspondances between historical figures and characters within the play.

Naturally one would expect editors of the plays to consider aspects like this in their introductions. Bawcutt, editing Measure for Measure under the general editorship of Stanley Wells, does note that Shakespeare's story is the 'only version in which [Isabella] is a postulant to a religious order' [Measure for Measure, Clarendon, 56]. Briefly, he mentions the Dissolution of the Monasteries [105] – but that's about it.

Bullough deals with literary sources only. Lever does discuss a possible event – a peace treaty signed between the Holy Roman Empire and the Turks [Arden xxxi]. He considers how far the Duke is modelled on James I (references to his Basilicon Doron, and James' 'secret' visit to the Exchange in 1606, and his attitude to mercy for some prisoners at least [Arden xlvi and xlix]). There is little mention of non-literary sources.

Investigating historical parallels in Shakespeare is not the emphasis in literary studies today. Lambin, on the other hand, doesn't deal with literary sources. Consider one example of the detail and precision of Lambin's exploration [96]. In the last scene of Act 1 in Measure for Measure Isabella appears to be about to take her vows. Lambin quotes extensively from La regle de l'Ordre de Sainte-Claire avec les statuts de la reforme de Sainte- Colette. This was originally a Latin text, which he translated into French, and matched with quotations from Measure for Measure:

There are longer parallels, for example with regard to communication with the outside world.

When you have vowed, you must not speak  
with me

But in the presence of the prioeresse;  
Then if you speak, you must not show your  
face

Or if you show your face, you must not speak.'  
1 iv 10-14.

Lambin gives Latin extracts from the rules of Ste. Colette: 'sorores licentiate non audeant loqui, nisi praesentibus et audientibus duabus discretis sororibus, per Abbatissam (IX, 17)... dum loquitur non videatur in facie ab aliquo, et in fine locutuionis suae, iterum pannum illum aliquantulum removeat, et pannum statim vale facto reponat' IX, 47; [selected extracts, 97])

Lambin concludes: 'In his presentation of the postulant Isabella, of the mother Franciscan, and of the role of the Provincial, the dramatist has followed scrupulously the rules governing the nuns of St Claire. When one recalls that the four little monasteries to St Claire in England were dissolved in 1539, over 50 years before the production of this play, and that the exact text of the rules were hard to access, as they are today, one can only be astonished by the minutiae Shakespeare knew.' [98]

This book's neglect may be due to its second theme, the authorship, or to the lack of concern with Shakespeare's plays. Edward Holmes in his book Discovering Shakespeare recognised the usefulness of Lambin who does exactly what this Society promotes; he adds to our understanding of the plays.

Brief though this investigation is, it serves to show how much more we have to understand about the plays and their author.

**Bibliography**

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