



# THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

Vol. 54, No. 2

Published by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship

Spring 2018

## In the Footsteps of Vere and Roe (Part One)

by Robert Prechter

“There’s one place left we need to see: Italy,” I said to my wife, Robin. I added that my plan was for us to go after I retired, to which she responded, “So, never?”

Three months later I got a request to speak in Milan on October 13, 2017, at an international financial conference. I had pretty much sworn off speaking, but this opportunity was too good to pass up. My biggest concern was that the trip would have to take place in the first half of October, which has a history of being a volatile time for stock prices, and since financial analysis is my business, I could not afford to miss anything important. But with iPad and hotspot, I figured I’d be OK.

I asked our travel agent if there were any non-stop flights from Atlanta to anywhere in northern Italy. He said, “They all cease when the summer is over. The last flight would be to Venice on Friday, September 29.” I told him to put us on it.

We mapped out a journey to six cities over fifteen days that would allow us to visit the key spots in northern Italy about which Richard Paul Roe wrote in *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*. We also tagged the various tourist meccas along the way. This article is about the Shakespeare spots, but one can hardly doubt that Shakespeare would have visited the prominent castles, basilicas, cathedrals, towers and bridges of each city that tourists still seek out today.

Roe’s book does not always specify street names and exact locations, and he lacks photos of certain sites. This article aims to remedy that situation for anyone wishing to venture along the same route.

### Venice

The first thing we did Saturday morning in Venice was to wend our way to the old Jewish ghetto area and locate Shylock’s penthouse from *The Merchant of Venice*. The portico is exceptionally well preserved, and behind the second arch from the left, at #2912 Cannaregio, is the entrance to an old moneylending facility, a pawn shop named the Banco Rosso, now a small museum. The wide square affords terrific photographs. The apartments are privately owned with modern interiors, so we saw little reason to try to visit them. On the outside, your imagination can quickly transport you back four and a half centuries. Roe has an excellent color picture of Shylock’s apartment and the arches to its left.

On Sunday we toured the buildings on the Piazza San Marco, including the Palazzo Ducale, or Duke’s Palace, also called the Doge’s Palace, where Shakespeare would have visited, if not stayed. Right in front of it, a bit toward the left when facing the water, is where Portia landed after setting off from the Tranect. The old port is not there anymore, but rows of tourist gondolas along the Riva degli Schiavoni offer some feel for the bustle of the place back in the day. Because we were traveling by train, we were unable to visit Villa Foscari, Portia’s Belmont home, on the

Brenta Canal. Someone should provide clear directions to it, as Roe does not.

On Monday we shifted plays to *Othello* and retraced



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*Vere and Roe (continued from page 1)*

Othello and Desdemona's steps. Using Roe's unannotated map, we eventually located the spot where Desdemona's gondola landed. People are still embarking from gondolas there all day long. Then we followed the hasty couple's path through the alleyway to Calle Frezzeria, where Othello escorted Desdemona to a house. The streets and buildings are just as they were then, except for some storefronts at street level. The feeling of being back in time is palpable. Roe's book provides no photograph of the alley leading from Desdemona's landing place to Calle Frezzeria or of the landing place itself, so I have included one of each (**photos 1 and 2**).

**To get there:** It is fun to walk in Venice, since cars are disallowed in most areas. But navigating by map is a miserable experience due to the winding streets, the changing names and the occasionally missing street signs. If you want to get around mostly error-free, use a maps app. Get a map of Venezia on which the districts are clearly delineated. To get to Shylock's place, locate the district called Cannaregio. Your destination is the Campo Ghetto Nuovo, a lovely square with only two street entrances, one being Calle Ghetto Vecchio, the other called Calle Farnese on the tourist map and Calesele street on Google Maps. Follow your map app to get there and back.

Roe doesn't provide specific directions to Desdemona's landing place. It took some poking around to locate it. The best way to get there is to follow signs, which are all around Venice, to Piazza St. Marco, which you are going to want to visit anyway. Standing in the Piazza with your back to the water, walk left along the street called Piazza St. Marco until you meet Calle Frezzeria, a street four blocks long. Turn right and walk three blocks. One of these houses is where Othello spirited Desdemona. Turn right when you see an

exceptionally narrow alleyway. It's called Calle S. Zorzi (presumably named after a member of the family of the 50<sup>th</sup> Doge of Venice, Marino Zorzi, who ruled in 1311-1312), but there is no street sign. This alley leads you to Fondamenta Orseolo, the walkway beside the Rio Orseolo canal. To your right is the Basino Orseolo, a wide part of the water where gondolas turn around, which was of normal width in the 1500s. Across the canal is the Hotel Cavaletto. Directly in front of you is a green sign reading, "Servizio Gondole Racino Orseolo." To your left is the landing where Desdemona disembarked. Alternatively, if you decide to walk the full four blocks up Calle Frezzeria, the last right turn takes you toward a pedestrian bridge over the canal, just before which you can turn right and walk along Fondamenta Orseolo to arrive at the same spot.

**Padua**

On Tuesday we took a train to Padua, where *The Taming of the Shrew* takes place. Our first goal was to find three places: Lucentio, Tranio and Biondello's landing place on the canal that today is called the Navigio Interno; the nearby hostel that may have been Lucentio's "lodging"; and Saint Luke's Church, in which Kate and Bianca's respective marriages take place. Once again, Roe gives enough information to find these places, but not specific directions.

The visit was well worth it. By contrasting the maps from the 1200s and 1718 reproduced in Roe's book with modern-day details of the site, it becomes easy to identify the travelers' arrival spot. We walked westward down the south side of the canal and imagined the old setting. Roe provides color photos of the hostel and the church but only a black-and-white of the landing place, so I have included a color close-up (**photo 3**) and one from further



1. Approach to Desdemona's Landing Place, Venice



2. Desdemona's Landing Place, Venice



3. Site of Lucentio's Landing Place, Padua



4: Bridge Adjacent to the Porta Site, Padua

west that includes the adjacent bridge called Ponte San Gregorio Barbarigo (**photo 4**). Lucentio and his companions arrived from the east, drifted under the bridge and pulled over at the Porto, or landing place, on the north bank, which is the side adjacent to the old city center, a few yards west of the bridge. Today, the rear of homes on Via 20 Settembre stand just a few feet beyond the embankment. A sign on a wall indicates that the bridge was built of wood in 1210 and reconstructed of stone in 1489, in the form it was when Shakespeare visited. The version standing today dates from 1717. The “lodging” to which Lucentio referred is presumably the building on the other side of the canal that in the 1500s was a hostel. It is a yellowish-beige, four-story building, on the bottom of which are three archways. Later in the play, Bianca’s and Kate’s marriages take place at a church called Saint Luke’s. That church is noted “St. Luca” on old maps, and a renovated version stands on the very same site. The building currently stands behind locked gates, so we couldn’t go in. A plaque on the building is dated 1655, and another is dated 1815.

According to the old maps in Roe’s book, the bridge’s longstanding original name was Ponte di Santa Maria d’Avanzo. The bridge led to a gated entrance to the city, a Porta, of the same name, which by 1717 was gone. These structures were named after a building located about a hundred yards south of the bridge that began as a medieval monastery and was reconstructed in 1436 and expanded in 1535 to become the Chiesa di Santa Maria in Vanzo, which is still standing today. (You can find a photo of it online.)

As an aside, a few steps down Riviera Tiso Camposanpiero is an excellent white-tablecloth dinner restaurant called Ai Navigli. If you go, be sure to take in the scene of the bridge at night. If you visit Padua, do not leave without viewing the Giatto frescoes at the Scrovegni Chapel and touring the Basilica di Sant’Antonio, one of the finest cathedrals anywhere and our personal favorite.

**To get there:** The old center of Padua is surrounded

on three sides by waterways and on the east side by an avenue named Riviera Tito Livio. At the south end of this area is a road called Via 20 Settembre (the street sign denotes it Venti Settembre), which parallels a canal called the Navigio Interno, the southernmost city waterway. The only crossing, which is at the center of the canal to the south, is the Ponte San Gregorio Barbarigo. That’s where you want to go. Stand on the bridge facing west and look down and to your right. That’s the spot the travelers landed. Then look directly to your left, and you will see, across the street on the right-hand corner of Via del Seminario and Riviera Tiso Camposanpiero, the old hostel. The adjacent buildings to its right—both about the same color—have only two archways and aren’t as tall. Don’t be fooled by signs reading “Ostello Citta’ di Padova,” as they point toward a modern-day youth hostel a few blocks away.

Next, walk past the north end of the bridge and turn right onto Via 20 Settembre. Go about two and a half blocks until you see on the left a coral-colored building, smaller than the other buildings and set back from the road. That’s the reconstructed Saint Luke’s church.

### Verona

On Wednesday, we hopped a train to Verona. We toured Juliet’s purported house, visited the site of Romeo’s purported house, and toured Juliet’s purported tomb at the former San Francesco al Corso, the Saint Francis Monastery, home of Friar Laurence. Although many skeptics say these sites do not pertain to an actual Romeo and Juliet, Roe gives reasons why there is a good chance these sites and artifacts are representative of actual sites and events, if not genuine. The only aspect of Juliet’s house that is out of place is the balcony. Although it is a genuine medieval balcony, it is reported that in 1936 the government removed it from another building and installed it here to increase tourism. This physical inaccuracy stems from a conceptual inaccuracy, the myth that a balcony is integral to the play. Shakespeare mentions no balcony, only a window, fitting the original look of the building.

I omit photos of these places, as they are widely available online. Search on “Juliet’s house, interior” to see how finely a wealthy city family was living in 1302. You won’t miss anything by skipping Romeo’s house, as all you will see is a sign on a wall. Juliet’s tomb is well worth a visit, because adjacent to it is a fine and quite substantial frescoes museum, the Museo degli Affreschi.

Whether or not these tourist sites are genuine, we can certainly take as genuine Shakespeare’s firsthand knowledge of the place. As Roe recounted, the Bard mentions two key sites: Saint Peter’s Church, where Juliet was to marry County Paris, and a grove of sycamores just west of the city where, as Benvolio reports in Act I, the lovesick Romeo had been wandering in the dark earlier that morning and on many previous mornings. (Might Shakespeare have chosen that species of tree—pronounced sick-amore—for the sake of a pun?)

On Thursday, we found Saint Peter's Church, San Pietro Incarnario. Roe's book provides black-and-white photos of the church, whose renovations have changed its appearance. He mentions its original medieval bell tower but does not show it, so I include **photo 5**, which does.

Late that afternoon, we made our way past the Porta Palio, one of the gates to the city, and found the sycamores that Roe located with much excitement. It was early fall, and these very tall trees, quite handily, were shedding leaves. We went online to check the shape of a sycamore leaf, and indeed the shape in the image was identical to that of the leaf we held in our hands (**photo 6**). A turn to the right affords a fine tour of trees, grass and ancient walls, where Romeo, and therefore Shakespeare, probably strolled (**photo 7**).

**To get there:** Anyone can point you to Juliet's house, Romeo's house and Juliet's tomb, and the maps all show them. The tomb is a long way from the houses. What you need to know about Verona is how to arrange your sightseeing. A good plan is to segment your touring. In one segment, visit the Piazza Erbe, Juliet's house and Romeo's house and then cross the Ponte Nuovo to spend two hours walking and climbing around the Giardino Giusti, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century estate's sanctuary, which many tourists miss but which Shakespeare would no doubt have visited. On another walk, visit Juliet's tomb, its adjacent museum, and Saint Peter's Church, San Pietro Incarnario, which is located at #2 Piazzetta San Pietro

Incarnario, just off Stradone Maffei, two blocks east of the Roman Arena, a popular tourist site that you may also want to visit. If you walk partway down Stradone San Fermo, you can catch a glimpse, from behind, of the church's medieval bell tower. At another time, spend a good two hours touring the unforgettable Castelvecchio, then stroll southwest down Stradone Porta Palio to the Porta Palio. The sycamores are right behind it. Be sure to wander toward the right where you will find grassy knolls and ancient yet well-preserved walls.

### Florence

On Friday, we took a high-speed train to Florence. It was time to mind-meld with *All's Well That Ends Well*. Our main goal was to locate the spot where Helena and the Widow watched Bertram and his fellow soldiers march across a bridge over the Arno river into the city. Roe's book identifies the Piazza Carlo Goldoni, a few yards upriver from the Ponte alla Carraia, as the place where the characters were standing. They express worry that the troops might cross at the next bridge toward the east, Ponte S. Trinita. Roe explains that tired troops were unlikely to cross the river on routes that would take them to the city center but rather at Ponte alla Carraia, which would lead them to the Fortezzo do Basso, the massive military facility to the northwest of the city. The Franciscan palmer's lodge—the Saint Francis—to which the Widow directs Helena, stands west of the Piazza



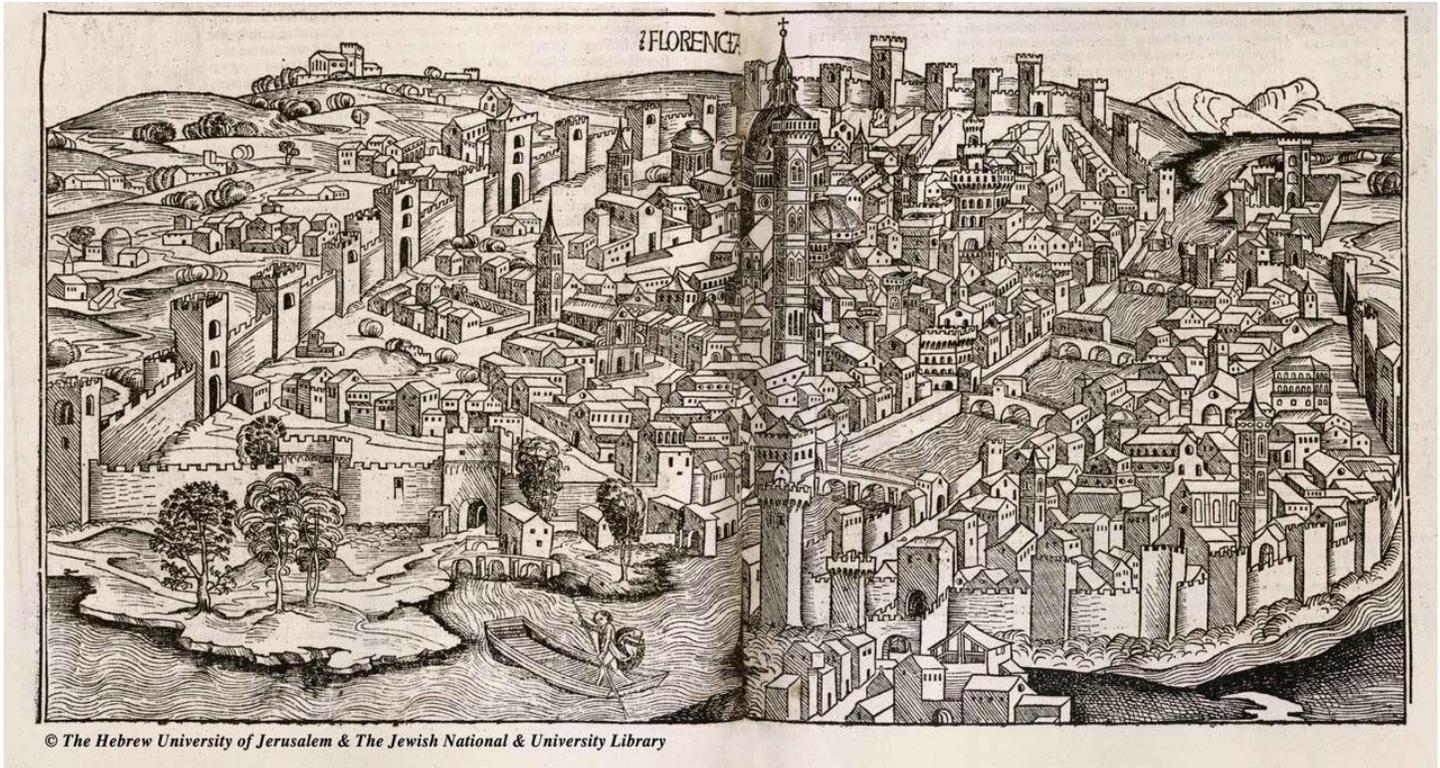
5: Saint Peter's Church Bell Tower, Verona



6: Sycamore Leaves, Verona



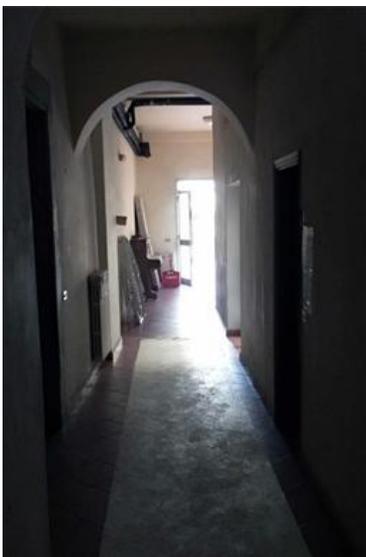
7: Ruins Near the Sycamores at Porta Palio, Verona



8: 1489 Map of Florence, Showing the Port (Bottom, Left of Center)

Goldoni, on Via Borgo Ognissanti, just past the Piazza Ognissanti, which four centuries ago was en route to the Port, or vessels' landing place, to which the Widow refers in the play and which is clearly depicted as lying just outside the city wall on maps of Florence dating from the late 1400s (**photo 8**). As with hotels near airports and train stations, it was a natural spot for travelers' lodging. Roe's book provides a color photo of the entrance of the building and a close-up of the crossed-arms symbol of the Franciscans above the door in relief. When we arrived

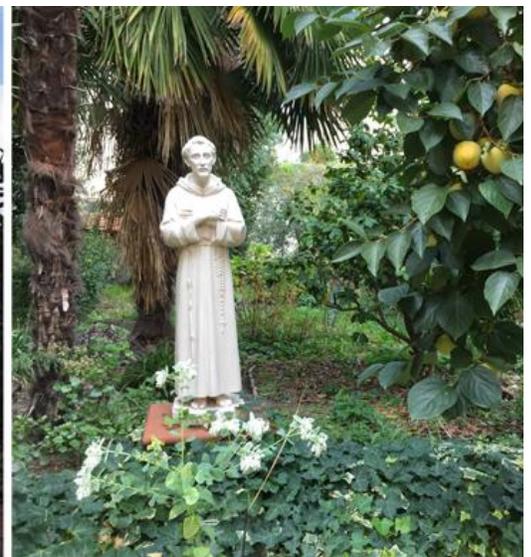
there, I was at first disappointed that construction scaffolding covered the front of the building, since it would not allow a pristine photo. But the activity at the site turned out to provide a terrific opportunity, as the front door stood open to allow workers in and out. I slipped through it and down the corridor (**photo 9**) to a rear courtyard (**photo 10**), where I took several photos, including one of the resident statue of Saint Francis (**photo 11**). A priest's habit hanging on a coat hanger beneath an archway indicated that the facility is still active.



9: Corridor of St. Francis, Florence



10: Courtyard of St. Francis, Florence



11: Garden with Statue of St. Francis, Florence

One evening I came across an identical crossed-arms symbol in relief, indicating a Franciscan facility, on a wall about a block east of Ponte Vecchio. To qualify as an alternate spot where the characters could have been standing, that area would have to have been near a Port in 1570s. The lack of detail on available old maps obscures the answer to that question, but they depict nothing like the obvious Port shown at the spot Roe identified.

**To get there:** Your destination is the Piazza Goldoni, which is marked on all city maps. It is adjacent to the Ponte alla Carraia, the westernmost of four bridges that link to the city center. Six streets meet there. Find the one marked Borgo Ognissanti, which is toward the west a block off the river. Roe figured out that the crowd of expectant onlookers in the play are standing beside the route linking the Ponte alla Carraia to Via de Fossi, the presumed course of the returning soldiers. As Roe observed, the most likely corners—given the Widow’s statement that the pilgrims’ lodge is “here” by the Port rather than “over there” by the Port—are where Borgo

Ognissanti meets the Piazza, the spot on the route closest to the lodge.

Next, walk west on Borgo Ognissanti for one and a half blocks until you see on the right a standard yellow-colored building but with an arched entrance made of grey stone and the Franciscan crossed-arms symbol above the door. That’s the lodge about which Helena inquired.

[Part Two of this article will appear in the next issue.]



## From *The Love Boat* to Lodz: My Chance Encounter with Ted Lange

by Patricia Carrelli

I recently attended a Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable in Beverly Hills led by Carole Sue Lipman. The topic was “Jewels in the Time of Shakespeare,” presented by Sally Mosher, which was quite interesting. Just before the program started, the gentleman who sat next to me happened to mention that he was going to Lodz, Poland, in a few weeks. He was planning to attend a unique ceremony there to honor a Shakespearean actor on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. After hearing about the trip when he returned, my new friend and I thought your readers might enjoy some historical background for his visit.

The actor to be celebrated was Ira Aldridge (1807-1867). Though many people may have never heard of him, his story is compelling. He was born a free black man in New York City in 1807. His father was a preacher who encouraged his son at an early age to appreciate education and the theater. After a brief classical education at the African Free School in New York (founded by Alexander Hamilton and John Jay), Aldridge participated in the African Grove Theater. He was able to secure a job as valet to the English actor Henry Wallack. He traveled with Wallack to London in 1824 and soon was able to get small parts on stage. At first, Aldridge’s acting reviews were not very good. However, he persisted, improved, and eventually became well known in the London theater. He accomplished the seemingly impossible feat of becoming the first black actor to perform on a Covent

Garden stage as the title character in *Othello*. He was even occasionally referred to as “The Black Kean,” after the noted English actor Edmund Kean. Aldridge became the manager of a theater in Coventry, England, helping to revive the struggling company. Later in his career, in a strange reversal, he wore wigs and white greasepaint to play roles like Richard III and Shylock. He toured Prussia and Russia playing the title role in *King Lear*. Tragically, but perhaps fittingly for an actor, Ira Aldridge died in Lodz while on tour at the age of 60.

My new friend, the man who told me about Ira Aldridge, is actor-writer-director Ted Lange, perhaps best known to American audiences for his role as bartender Isaac Washington in the hit TV series *The Love Boat*. Lange told me that as a young black man himself, his high school drama teacher first introduced him to the universality of Shakespeare’s characters by creatively using the music of Miles Davis to accompany some of the poetry in *Macbeth*. Later in his career, Lange read the book *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* and used it to write and direct a play about Aldridge’s life called *Born a Unicorn*. Two songwriters joined his team, and in 1981 they opened their production in Los Angeles with a seven-piece band and a fine company of dancers and singers.

Following a recent revival of Lange’s play, a Shakespearean scholar and head of the British Commonwealth Studies Department at the University of