

Shakespeare and the Courtesan

(Stage Play)

by Paul Streit

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1. GLASGOW UNIVERSITY
(GRILLO #1)

Enter Grillo. Speaks with Italian accent.

GRILLO #1

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world
Draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

Students. Welcome to Glasgow University. I am Professor Ernesto Grillo. Welcome to this class on William Shakespeare. This class will tell the story of William Shakespeare, his life and his works.

To begin with William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon visited Italy. As a person born in Italy I can assure you that the evidence is incontestable. Let me cite examples to you.

The frequent use he made of Italian poems and novella points to only one conclusion, that he was fluent in both reading and speaking Italian. Not as well as Latin or Greek, but fluent.

Pause.

Often he understands the differences in dialect between the various cities of Italy. There were no translations of many of the Italian works he used in England at the time of his writing these glorious works.

Pauses. Looks to see a student raise his hand and ask a question. He listens to the question.

GRILLO #1 (CONT'D)

In the tales by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, there is the whole plot of The Merchant of Venice.

In Cinthio's Hecatombiti, there is the whole plot of Othello.

In the adventures of Isabella, there is the whole plot of Measure for Measure.

But the man from Stratford does more than borrow plots from the Italian poets, novelists and playwrights.

(MORE)

GRILLO #1 (CONT'D)

He breathes the life of the Italian cities, the colors of the sky and the blue of the Mediterranean.

Shakespeare's knowledge of Italy is so staggering that we can only conclude that he visited Venice. Yes, two plays staged in Venice.

And in the cities of Milan, Mantua, Padua and Verona. We must also conclude that he did not visit Rome, the site of the Pope, because nowhere are there any descriptions of the Holy City. We can therefore conclude, because we know the life of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, that Shakespeare visited Italy in the summer of 1594 through the next year, the summer of 1595.

2. ENGLAND--COURT
(ELIZABETH, OXFORD)

Enter Queen Elizabeth who sits on her throne. Enter Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. He goes before the Queen, bows and waits for her to speak.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, you have applied for leave to travel to the Continent.

OXFORD

Yes, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Where do you plan to go?

OXFORD

First to Paris, then briefly to Germany, then to Italy.

ELIZABETH

Do you plan to stay long in Paris?

OXFORD

Not long your majesty. Only long enough to prepare for the longer trip to Germany. I have no interest in the French.

ELIZABETH

For what purpose will you travel to Germany?

OXFORD

To visit Strausbourg, where resides Johann Sturmius.
(MORE)

OXFORD (CONT'D)

Then we will proceed south as the spring thaws make the Alps passable. Once through the Alps we will ride to Venice.

From there. After a stay in Venice, travel down the eastern coast of Italy. Visit Dubrovnik. Perhaps touch upon Greece. Then around the boot to Palermo. Then up the coast to Naples. Finally arriving in Florence. The rest of the year I shall visit the cities in Northern Italy.

ELIZABETH

Who will accompany you?

OXFORD

We will be a party of seven. My most trusted retainers and several servants. Pack horses will carry out belongings and provisions.

ELIZABETH

This sounds like a rather arduous and somewhat dangerous journey.

OXFORD

We will be prepared to defend ourselves. But I have made out my will to leave my estates to the proper people as is prudent for any man on such a journey.

Elizabeth pauses.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, Henri of Navarre is to be crowned at the Rheims Cathedral, ninety miles west of Paris. We will have our ambassador to France attend. But it would, in addition, be fitting for a noble of England to attend.

OXFORD

As you wish, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

It can only help England diplomatically. Henri does not have blood on his hands as his mother still does and late brother had from the slaughter of innocent Protestants on St. Bartholomew's day. Whatever religious persecutions the English have engaged in, nothing compares to this barbaric act against the Protestants. We must forever be on our guard against the savagery of the Catholics, either French or Spanish.

OXFORD

To be sure your majesty.

Changing the subject.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, what will you do in Venice?

OXFORD

I will see many plays, commedia dell'arte.

ELIZABETH

What is commedia dell'arte?

OXFORD

There are travelling troupes of actors, who perform the roles of known characters of Italian life. Foolish old men, cowardly military officers, devious servants, lustful females, miserly merchants and such. There may be script or they improvise.

ELIZABETH

Improvise? Make it up as they go along? Such is not traditional theater as we have it here at court.

OXFORD

No your majesty. But the actors are often very funny and amusing. That is why it is so popular.

I also plan on visiting the studio of Titian, the greatest of Italian portrait painters.

I have an introduction to Domeninico Venier. He has a literary academy, or salon, held in his private residence. The artists, writers meet there. He has been responsible for the publication of many artists, and supported many with his patronage.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, if our ambassadors are to be believed, there are twenty prostitutes for every priest in Venice. They publicly display their wares in lewd dress aping the nobility.

OXFORD

Yes your majesty. I have heard of such.

ELIZABETH

They have the "honest courtesans." Whores who mix with the highest ranks of citizens and nobility. They apparently can play a musical instrument or are able to write a line of poetry or such.

OXFORD

Yes, your majesty. I will beware of such women, should I encounter any.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, you are a man. You have a man's desires. You have not lived with your wife for two years. Apparently, you have wedded her but not bedded her. You are ripe fruit to be plucked off the tree by such slatterns.

OXFORD

Yes, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Further, you risk your life in consorting with them. The Italian disease is the Italian disease.

OXFORD

Yes, your majesty.

Elizabeth pauses.

ELIZABETH

Venice produces the finest clothing for women. The finest in the world. Does it not?

OXFORD

It is known for the latest in fashion. Especially Milan.

ELIZABETH

Lord Oxford, do you plan on bringing back something of high fashion for your Queen.

OXFORD

Your majesty, that was always one of my concerns.

ELIZABETH

Excellent. Lord Oxford, you have our permission to travel to the Continent. Return with a gift fit for a Queen. I am a Queen and such a gift should be fitting for me.

OXFORD

Certainly, your majesty. Your wish, as always, is my command.

3. VENICE--VERONICA'S APARTMENT
(VERONICA, MONK #2)

Enter Veronica Franco. She sits down at a desk and writes. She is wearing a satin robe.

VERONICA

Finito. Finally finished.

She stands. Paces about and begins to read.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

At first, you thanked me, seemed to listen to me, and to be receptive to my loving advice. We decided between us how we should go about having her accepted in the House; everything was going according to plan when moved by I do not know what spirit, while you before made her go around dressed simply and like a chaste young lady with veils covering her breasts, and with other modest accouterments, suddenly, you started encouraging her vanity by bleaching her hair and making her up, making her appear in public with her hair curled on her forehead and neck, and breasts uncovered and bursting out of her bodice, walking boldly with an unveiled forehead: briefly, with all the appearance and embellishments used to show off one's merchandise for profit. And I swear on my honor that, when you first brought her to me so disguised, I hardly recognized her, and I told you what was demanded by friendship and charity.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Then I must add that even if Fortune were only benign and favorable to you in this endeavor, this life is such that in any case it would always be wretched' It is such an unhappy thing, and so contrary to human nature to subject one's body and activity to such slavery that one is frightened just by the thought of it to let oneself be prey to running the risk of being stripped, robbed, killed, so that one day can take away from you what you have earned with many men in a long time, with so many other dangers of injury and horrible contagious diseases.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Maybe it will not be long before your own daughter having realized the great injury that you have done her will flee from you, her mother, who should have helped her, have ruined her.

(MORE)

VERONICA (CONT'D)

And this could be the beginning of your punishment, and may the Lord keep you from persisting in the evil intention you show of spoiling and corrupting the product of your own flesh and blood.

May God have mercy on us,
Veronica Franco

She paces about. There is a knock on the door. A signal. Two raps, then three quick ones. Veronica goes to the door. Let's in the Monk (Man #2). His face is obscured.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

No one saw you?

MONK #2

No one. It is raining. Not hard but raining.

VERONICA

You cannot be seen coming here. And I cannot be seen with you in public. It would be a disgrace to the Church. You would be ruined.

MONK #2

No one needs to know about this.

VERONICA

The abandoned maidens?

MONK #2

We have taken in three this month. They are grateful to be at the Hospice. They were orphaned recently. They had nowhere to go but to the streets.

VERONICA

Can they read and write?

MONK #2

One can read some. The other two nothing at all.

VERONICA

It is important to teach them. If they are to escape the hell they are headed for, reading and writing is a must.

MONK #2

Understood.

VERONICA

Others?

MONK #2

One aging courtesan. She was once a ravishing beauty, but the life destroyed her beauty and now her lungs.

VERONICA

Bless her soul?

MONK #2

We do not believe she has long to live. We can only comfort her. Doctors say it is her end. We can pray for her and let her die in peace and in the grace of God so that she may enter the Eternal Kingdom and dwell in righteousness.

Veronica blesses herself with the sign of the cross.

VERONICA

In Nomine Patris, et Fili, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen

Veronica goes over to the table and picks up a small cloth bag. She goes to the Monk and gives it to him.

MONK #2

This is much heavier than usual.

VERONICA

Yes.

MONK #2

We will say a prayer at mass in the morning for you.

VERONICA

Thank you.

MONK #2

Signorina Franco, the priests and nuns of our Hospice of Santa Maria de Soccorso thank you for your help in founding the hospice and your continued support.

VERONICA

It is I that am grateful to you to support such a mission in Christ.

You must go. And not be seen.

She escorts him to the door. He opens the door. Turns and makes the sign of the cross blessing her. Exit Monk. Veronica goes to the table, sits down and puts her hands underneath her chin, contemplating.

There is another knock at the door. Rather bold. Veronica goes to the door.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Who is here at this hour?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

It is Galliano Terzi. Clerk of the City Council.

Veronica opens door. Enter a Venetian Official #1, wearing a hat.

VERONICA

Good evening. What would bring you out on such a night. Not for my business, I assume.

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Signorina Veronica. I am a good Catholic. I do not traffic in such business. But others do.

VERONICA

So, what brings you here?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

King Henry III will visit Venice in two weeks time. He will spend several days and nights in Venice.

VERONICA

Everyone, knows that. You come tonight to tell me that? What is this about?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

The council wishes you to entertain the king at your residence. You will be paid your standard fee and whatever expenses you might incur for food and drink appropriate for a king.

VERONICA

The Republic of Venice is to pay for this?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Yes. The Republic wishes to have the best possible relations with France and the King of France.

VERONICA

And so you wish for me to have relations with him?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Precisely. He has expressed some interest in the courtesans of Venice and you are reputed as the most desirable. He has heard of you through his ambassador.

VERONICA

The amount again.

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Your fee as listed in the book of Honored Courtesans, plus expenses for food and wine.

VERONICA

This is King Henry III. Correct?

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Of course.

VERONICA

Well, for King Henry III, the amount is triple. It is only fitting that a king should pay more.

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

The council will never agree.

VERONICA

The Republic of Venice will tell the King of France that it cannot afford a courtesan meant for a king. That will make the Republic the laughing stock of the known world and anger the King no end.

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

Signorina you make a good point. I am sure when the council hears your argument, they cannot help but agree.

VERONICA

Yes, and one third of the money is to be paid thirty days prior to the king's arrival date.

VENETIAN OFFICIAL #1

That is an unusual request. Why do you need the money in advance. What do you need.

VERONICA

A dress fit for a king.

4. VENICE--VENIER'S HOUSE
(OXFORD, VERONICA)

VENIER #2

Signorinas, signors, welcome this evening to my. I am Domenica Venier and this is my home, where we meet to discuss art, literature and politics. We try to encourage all artists by providing a forum where ideas may be freely discussed and art allowed flourish.

(MORE)

VENIER #2 (CONT'D)

Tonight, we have the honor of welcoming a guest from far away angleterre, across the Alps, through France, and across the English Channel, he has travelled to visit our fair city of Venetia. And he will tour much of Italy to absorb the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of Italy. Let us welcome, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

Oxford walks over and bows before Venier #2.

OXFORD

It is a pleasure to see Venetia. A miracle arising out of the sea. It has inspired writers from the world over. Inspired me to travel a great distance merely to walk in the footsteps of such artists. And of course, I will visit the greatest painter of our time, Signor Tiziano Vecelli---Titian.

VENIER #2

Our circle. This literary group meets here frequently. We exchange letters. Read poetry. I am one of the patrons. And a patron of many of the literary people of Venice.

OXFORD

A toast to Venice. A toast to poetry.

VENIER #2

Salute. We often talk of the nature and properties of a language. Sometimes the most profound questions are discussed. The nature of art. The meaning of beauty.

OXFORD

You have them all resolved, I presume..

VENIER #2

(Laughing)

We have none of them resolved. Otherwise, there would be no reason to meet and no reason to drink wine with friends of the literati.

Oxford bows, shakes Venier's hand and takes a seat.

Enter Veronica Franco, carrying a book.

VENIER #2 (CONT'D)

Tonight we are here to honor the distinguished poet, Veronica Franco, celebrating the occasion of the publication of her Terza Rima.

Veronica Franco goes over to Venier who shakes her hand and kisses her on the cheek.

VERONICA

Thank you my gracious lord Venier #2.

VENIER #2

Will you honor us with a reading from Terza Rima.

VERONICA

Most certainly.
Terze Rima 24

Poor female sex, you are forever troubled,
With evil fortune, held in base subjection,
And forced to live deprived of liberty!

This does not come from any fault of ours,
Because, though we fall short of men's robustness,
We are the same in mind and intellect.

For virtue does not lie in strength of body,
But in soul vigor and the force of genius,
By which anything known can be possessed.

And I am certain that in such endeavors,
Women are not in any way less worthy,
But often show a greater aptitude.

But if we think ourselves inferior,
Perhaps from modesty and greater knowledge,
We are superior in every way...
And therefore we, better than you in wisdom,
To avoid conflict, bear you on our shoulders,
As those with stronger feet bear those who fall.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

But the majority in this thinks wrongly,
And woman, since she will not practice evil,
Lets herself be reduced to vassalage.
Because, if she but wished to prove her value,
In power of mind, she could by far excel. The men,
not merely prove herself their equal.

They are delighted with their empty power,
For the most part, not knowing what they do.

But since the human race could not continue,
If women, obstinate in this great duel,
Should treat men coldly and with bitterness,

So, not to spoil the world, which is so lovely,
(MORE)

VERONICA (CONT'D)

For all of us, we women must be silent;
 Though men be evil tyrants, we submit.
 They are delighted with their empty power,
 For the most part, not knowing what they do. (For
 mortal weight is felt most by the wise),

And therefore men should show the greatest honor,
 To women, since they freely have surrendered,
 All earthly rule, leaving it up to men.
 (For mortal weight is felt most by the wise),

And therefore men should show the greatest honor,
 To women, since they freely have surrendered,
 All earthly rule, leaving it up to men.

Applause from Venier and Oxford.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Perhaps, the noble Earl of Oxford might enchant our
 ears with a bit of his poetry. Esteemed as he is in
 his country as a poet and playwright.

*Venier #2 applauds approval. Oxford rises and takes a piece
 of paper from his jacket. Franco steps aside.*

OXFORD

Perhaps, Signorina Franco has discovered she knows
 all about men. This is far more likely than I know
 anything about women.

To explain an English word in the poem, a haggard is
 an adult hawk caught for training.

"Woman's Changeableness"

If women could be fair and yet not foolish,
 Or that their love were firm not fickle, still,
 I would not marvel that they make men bond,
 By service long to purchase their good will;
 But when I see how frail those creatures are,
 I muse that men forget themselves so far.

To mark the choice they make, and how they change,
 How oft from Phoebus do they flee to Pan,
 Unsettled still like haggards wild they range,
 These gentle birds that fly from man to man;
 Who would not scorn and shake them from the first
 And let them fly fair fools which way they list.

Yet for disport we fawn and flatter both,
 To pass the time when nothing else can please,
 And train them to our lure with subtle oath,

(MORE)

OXFORD (CONT'D)

Till, weary of their wiles, ourselves we ease;
And then we say when we their fancy try,
To play with fools, OXFORD what a fool was I.
Edward de Veer, Earle of Oxenforde

Applause from Venier and Franco. Franco walks over to Oxford.

OXFORD (CONT'D)

Congratulations. Have you published anything before this.

VERONICA

No. This is the first that has been published.

OXFORD

Congratulations again.

VERONICA

The fate of being anonymous, not to be published, is worse for a writer than poverty or death. Anonymity is worse than death. It is killing your works, denying them life, existence

Are you published in England?

OXFORD

Yes. Not under my name. My guardian, William Cecil, did not think it seemly that a noble should engage in publishing and spill his name all over for all to gawk at. I wrote *Romeus and Juliet* as a poem, not a novel and also *Ovid's Metamorphoses* as a poem.

VERONICA

Have you been published? Are your plays produced for the people? In the theaters?

OXFORD

No. Performed at court for the pleasure of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

VERONICA

It is too bad the people of London cannot see them.

OXFORD

But they do. There are theaters. Theaters in taverns and inns. The Bull, the Red Lion, the Bell Inn.

VERONICA

You have no proper theater?

OXFORD

There is none in London.

VERONICA

Ah, dalla campagna. The country side.

OXFORD

From the countryside. From the countryside indeed.
Yes, you are right. I am from the county side.

As well as an artist, a writer...you are also a...a...

VERONICA

A courtesan. Yes, of course. The works are published by the generosity of Signor Venier and others. It is a cruel world my dear Oxford. A woman without a husband must make a living. But I do have a husband, a doctor, but he does not support me and the children.

OXFORD

Is he not jealous, envious, enraged by you being a courtesan?

VERONICA

He believes that jealousy is a sign of wanting control. Not a sign of love.

OXFORD

Do you believe that?

VERONICA

I am not sure.

OXFORD

Would you, would you...

VERONICA

Of course. Are you interested my dearest Oxford, I hope you are. In my apartment, we often gather, men, women, we eat, drink, play the flute and mandolin and at the end of the evening all end up in bed. We are physicians of the libido and the soul. We can spend the night there.

OXFORD

And the rates?

VERONICA

As published in the book of courtesans. But it is double for aristocrats with titles. Men who have their living from men who work. And triple for men who live off the aristocrats. Kings.

OXFORD

That will be fine.

VERONICA

We whores are to keep the social peace. The women of Venetia live shuttered in their houses. And wear clothes that are not fetching. Their men long for companionship.

We are like doctors, lawyers, pharmacists. We treat the diseases of the senses.

We are heavily taxed. We work on our backs to pay for the grand Venetian fleet. Enough.

Will that be simply to eat, drink and talk, or would you want, *negotiation entiere*,...the whole deal...or just to talk, eat and drink?

OXFORD

One would be foolish not to want the whole deal with the most fabulous, honest Courtesan, Signorina Franco. The whole deal.

VERONICA

When the festivities are over, we will go to my apartment.

OXFORD

At your pleasure.

Exit Oxford and Veronica.

5. VENICE VERONICA'S APARTMENT -- NEXT MORNING
(VERONICA, OXFORD)

VERONICA

Conte di Oxford. Buongiorno. Buongiorno. È ora di svegliarsi. La giornata sta iniziando

OXFORD

I drank too much.

VERONICA

It is the morning.

OXFORD

Yes, I know it is morning. After the evening comes the morning. After the wine comes the headache. After the dance.

VERONICA

Comes the bedroom.

OXFORD

Yes, comes the bedroom

VERONICA

You everything too much. You are a young man. Not an old one. Get up. Get up.

OXFORD

Why?

VERONICA

I have arranged for us to visit Titian. He is expecting us this morning.

OXFORD

All right. I will get ready. (Walking around stretching. Looks at a portrait on the wall.) This is Henry III, of France.

VERONICA

Of course. How do you know who he is?

OXFORD

I met him at his coronation in Rheims. I was the ambassador from her majesty's government.

VERONICA

I see.

OXFORD

And you...you...

VERONICA

Of course. I am the Queen of the Courtesans of Venice. The one fit for a king. You are lucky I did not charge you royal rates. You are not a king.

OXFORD

Not yet.

VERONICA

Signor Titian is renowned through the world. All famous people coming to Venice see him. Kings, dukes, earls.

OXFORD

You have been there.

VERONICA

Several times. The paintings are magnifici. They are sent all over the world.

OXFORD

A very fortunate artist.

VERONICA

He is a very healthy man. He was as fortunate as any other artisan. He has received nothing from the heavens but favor and felicity.

OXFORD

There are other painters in Venice.

VERONICA

He easily surpassed them. The excellence of his art. His ability to deal with and to make himself pleasing to the nobility.

OXFORD

How old is he? He must be a very old man.

VERONICA

Very old. No one knows. He seems to become three years older every year. He adds to his age to increase his stature.

Let us go. Let us go.

Exit Franco and Oxford

6. VENICE--TITIAN'S STUDIO
(OXFORD, VERONICA, TITIAN #1)

Titian #1 enters. He is an old man walking with difficulty. Pacing the floor. Wearing an artists smock, covered with paint. Artists brushes in his pockets. He looks as if he is expecting someone to arrive.

Enter Oxford and Veronica.

TITIAN #1

Buongiorno, signor Oxford.

OXFORD

Buongiorno, signor Vercelli.

TITIAN #1

Buongiorno, signorina Franco.

VERONICA
Buongiorno, signor Vercelli.

TITIAN #1
You have had a good stay in Venice?

OXFORD
Meraviglioso, signor Tiziano.

Titian #1 bows. They walk inside.

TITIAN #1
My noble prince, from childhood, I, Titian of Cadore, have endeavored to learn the craft of painting. Not out of avarice, but in order to earn a modicum of fame and for my family. I have been most urgently requested in the past and in the present by His Holiness the Pope and other gentlemen to enter into their service.

VERONICA
To leave a monument to his famous city.

TITIAN #1
I do not believe that I shall ever achieve the tenderness or skill of a Michelangelo or the man from Urbino, nor Correggio.

Will you stay many months in Venice?

OXFORD
I will stay a month. Then go by ship down the eastern coast of Italy. Perhaps visit Greece, then Palermo, Naples and then travel by land to see the northern cities.

They continue to walk and look at the paintings.

TITIAN #1
When the grand designs I have in my mind and in my heart truly correspond with what my hands and brushes have created, then I have satisfied my wish to serve my patrons.

Would you like to see something I am working on?

OXFORD
Certainly.

They continue to walk until they reach a wall where there are several paintings hanging with the portrait side is facing the wall. Only one painting has the face showing.

TITIAN #1

This is a portrait of the diplomat Baidassare Castiglione.

OXFORD

Il libro del cortegiano. *The Book of the Courtier.*

TITIAN #1

You know of it.

OXFORD

Yes, it is read by every king and duke in Christendom. He has drawn for us the figure and model of a courtier. A work to which nothing can be added. There is no redundant word. A portrait of the courtier which we shall recognize as that of the highest and most perfect type of man.

I have read it in Italian. It has not been translated into Latin as yet.

TITIAN #1

You are that man? The courtier?

OXFORD

I serve my queen with what skills I have.

Titian #1 turns to the portrait.

TITIAN #1

I have laid down a bed of color. The portrait has been here a few months. I wait until I am disposed to bring the brush to the portrait again.

Titian motions and an assistant comes over with a palette and brushes. Titian #1 makes very slight strokes on the face and beard with the brushes. He moves closer and hands the palette to his assistant.

TITIAN #1 (CONT'D)

I now must breathe life into the face.

He then uses the tips of his fingers to blend one color into another. He takes a dab of paint off the pallet held by his assistant. He puts it on the painting and takes a step back.

TITIAN #1 (CONT'D)

Finito. As God may will it. It is as perfect as I can paint.

Titian #1 turns to Oxford.

TITIAN #1 (CONT'D)

Signor Oxford, you must excuse me. I am but an old man and require rest. Please go about my studio and observe.

Titian #1 bows. As does Oxford. Titian #1 Exits.

OXFORD

Buongiorno, Signor Vecello.

Oxford goes closer to the painting and continues to stare. Lost in thought. Veronica approaches and puts her arm in his and gently moves him away.

They walk away to look at other paintings.

VERONICA

There is much to see.

Veronica and Oxford walk among the paintings. She explains each painting to him.

They come to a painting.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

This is...

OXFORD

The Death of Actaeon.
(He moves closer.)

In Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*, Actaeon surprises Diana bathing naked in a stream. She transforms him into a stag.

VERONICA

Then he is torn to pieces by his own hounds.

OXFORD

Yes.

VERONICA

The moral of the story is "do not look upon a naked goddess -- without her permission."

Oxford and Veronica continue to walk and admire the paintings.

They approach the painting Venus and Adonis with a hat.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Signor Oxford. This is.

OXFORD

Venus and Adonis.

VERONICA

Yes, Venus and Adonis. Titian has painted many the same. They are in courts throughout Europe.

OXFORD

I have heard of many described. But none was described with Adonis wearing a cap, a hat.

Venus and Adonis, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Adonis is the incestuous son of Myrrha's love for her father King Cinyras. She seduced him to have a child by him.

When the young boy grows up the older, goddess Venus is so struck by the youthful Adonis, she tries to seduce him. This is the painting. The half naked Venus, her breasts exposed, hanging on to the young Adonis who is trying to pull away. He will have none of her.

VERONICA

What happens to Adonis?

OXFORD

He is killed by a wild boar, who rips his stomach open with his curved tusk.

VERONICA

An unhappy ending to a story of incestuous love and wild passion.

7. ENGLAND VENUS AND ADONIS
(VENUS, PROF. HIGGENBOTTOM #2)

Oxford walks up to the painting. He stares at the painting. Then Oxford slowly merges into the painting and then out the other side into the setting of the painting.

Enter Venus

VENUS

Vouchsafe, thou wonder, to alight thy steed,
And rein his proud head to the saddle-bow;
If thou wilt deign this favour, for thy need
A thousand honey secrets shalt thou know:
Here come and sit, where never serpent hisses,
And being set, I'll smother thee with kisses;

(MORE)

VENUS (CONT'D)

Art thou ashamed to kiss? Then wink again,
 And I will wink; so shall the day seem night;
 Love keeps his revels where they are but twain;
 Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight:
 These blue-vein'd violets whereon we lean
 Never can blab, nor know not what we mean.

Enter Prof. Higgenbottom #2

PROF. HIGGENBOTTOM #2

I am Professor Higgenbottom, Ph.D., MBA, MA and BA, the distinguished professor of Classic Literature at the University of Oxbridge. *Venus and Adonis* by William Shakespeare is a semi-pornographic poem that was a run-away best seller by Shakespeare in the fifteen hundreds.

VENUS

Witness this primrose bank whereon I lie;
 These forceless flowers like sturdy trees support me;
 Two strengthless doves will draw me through the sky,
 From morn till night, even where I list to sport me:
 Is love so light, sweet boy, and may it be
 That thou shouldst think it heavy unto thee?

PROF. HIGGENBOTTOM #2

Shakespeare's poem is based on the *Venus and Adonis* of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It would be clear to all Elizabethan reader's that the *Venus* of Shakespeare's poem is Queen Elizabeth, And curiously, *Adonis* is finally killed by a boar, the English heraldry symbol found on the cost of arms of the earls of Oxford.

VENUS

Ay me, young, and so unkind?
 What bare excuses makest thou to be gone!
 I'll sigh celestial breath, whose gentle wind
 Shall cool the heat of his descending sun:
 I'll make a shadow for the of my hairs;
 If they burn too, I'll quench them with my tears.

PROF. HIGGENBOTTOM #2

Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is a substantial departure from Ovid's *Venus and Adonis*. In it the imagery indicates the flower is her sexual partner as well as her child. It is almost like having slept with her father, she is now sleeping with her son.

VENUS

Within this limit is relief enough,
 Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain,
 Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,
 To shelter thee from tempest and from rain
 Then be a deer since I am such a park
 No dog shall rouse thee, though a thousand bark.

Fondling, since I have hemm'd thee here,
 Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
 I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer:
 Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:
 Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,
 Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.

8. VENICE--VERONICA'S BEDROOM
 (OXFORD, VERONICA)

Oxford and Veronica are lying in bed. Candles are on each side of the table.

OXFORD

(Softly)

Read to me.

She takes out a book of poetry and reads.

VERONICA

I would die with you, felled by the same blow,
 Oh, empty hopes, over which cruel fate forces me to
 weep forever,
 But hold firm, my strong, undaunted heart,
 And with that felon's final destruction,
 Avenge your thousand deaths with this one,
 Then end your agony with the same blade.

She looks over and Oxford is asleep.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Who is this sleeping man? Who is this man from
 Angleterre? He comes from a small island in a dark
 cold ocean. They have no culture no history. The
 Romans conquered them. Italians. What is London? A
 village on a river? No theaters. No theaters!
 Unbelievable!

He is a poet, a playwright? Do we believe that? It
 is the English who translate our Italian. Do the
 Italians translate from English into Italian? Never.
 Nothing worth the effort. And never will be.

(MORE)

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Does this "poet" or "playwright" ever think his work will be translated into the great Italian language? Is he fooling himself? I think so.

A courtier poet. A handsome courtier poet, who uses his flattering poetry to gain the hearts and bodies of the ladies of the court. All fantasies. Talk of love. But no feeling of love.

He lies beside me. Content. Exhausted. Spent. He will see Italy. Its wonders. Its artists. Its painters. Its sculpture. Its paintings. Its architecture.

He has much to learn. I have much to teach.

She kisses him gently. She blows out the candle.

Veronica puts a blanket over herself and goes to sleep.

Lights up. A knock on the door. Veronica rises and opens the door. A messenger hands her a message.)

MESSENGER TWO #1

Signorina, a message for Conte Oxford.

VERONICA

Thank you.

Messenger departs. She reads it. Oxford wakes up.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

(Reading)

It is a message to dine at noon at the Villa Count Foscari in two days time. It is from Count and Countess Foscari.

OXFORD

Where is the Villa Count Foscari? It is obviously on terra firma.

VERONICA

It is a magnificent villa, on the Brenta Canal. The Count Foscari are one of the oldest families in Venice. It is magnificent. It has wonderful gardens on the side of the house.

OXFORD

How far is it?

VERONICA

Ten miles. Five miles on the ferry to the Tranect.
Five miles to the Villa Count Foscari, on the canal.

OXFORD

I see. What is the Tranect?

VERONICA

It is at Lizza Fusina where the ferry arrives. The Tranect is where the boats are pulled across from the lagoon across dry land into the canal. And the reverse. There is machinery there. Horses operate it.

OXFORD

We will send a message to Count Foscari's Venice residence. We will be delighted. We will be at the traghetto. In the early morning.

VERONICA

I cannot go.

OXFORD

Why not?

VERONICA

I am a courtesan. A respectable lady would never invite me into her home. It would be a scandal.

OXFORD

We are being welcomed in
(sings)

Oh, Venetia,
My heart belongs to Venetia
There is no other
But the pale blue of your waters,
The magnificence of your shores,
The excellence of your art. Oh, Venetia
My heart belongs to Venetia.

VERONICA

You will have a delightful time. It is a beautiful villa.

Exit Oxford and Veronica

9. VENICE--MONTE BELLO
(COUNTESS FOSCARI, OXFORD)

Enter Countess Foscari.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Count Oxford is late. I wonder what has happened.

Enter Oxford. Bows to the Countess.

OXFORD

Countess, let me introduce myself. I am Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Count Oxford, I am happy to meet with someone from the far north. My pleasure, your lord. My husband was called to meet with the Doge in Venetia. He gives you his regrets. Shall we dine.

(Bows)

They move toward a large dining table and take their seats.

COUNTESS FOSCARI (CONT'D)

This is the estate of Monte Bello. The building is known as La Villa Malcontenta, the Villa of Malcontent women.

OXFORD

Why is that?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

One of the wives of a Count Foscari was less than enthusiastic about doing her conjugal duties. So her husband locked her up in the house.

We are about two miles from a monastery in case you need some religious solitude. And in the other direction there is Ca' delle Monache, a nun's house.

OXFORD

I see. Are there still malcontented women here?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Not so malcontented that they need to be locked up.

Food and wine are served.

COUNTESS FOSCARI (CONT'D)

Last summer, Henry III of France was sitting at this table. This was the house of his official reception by the Veneto And Venetia. Then King Henry went to the Doge's official residence in Venetia.

OXFORD

Am I sitting in King Henry's seat?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

No. He was a king. He sat where my husband is sits at the head of the table. A man may be a king in his household, but a king of a country is king of all households. Therefore, King Henry sits at the head of the table in any household.

OXFORD

I concur.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

You are an Earl in England. We do not have earls on the continent.

OXFORD

It is an English title. An old English title before William.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

I see. In Italian and other languages, the wife of a Count, the feminine, Count-ess. Is then your wife an Earl-ess? Or an Ear-less

OXFORD

(Laughing)

No, your count-ess, the wife of an earl, is called a count-ess. I assure you my wife has all her ears, two of them at last count.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Your wife, I understand, is the daughter of Sir William Cecil, advisor to Queen Elizabeth.

OXFORD

Lord William Cecil. He was made Baron Burghley by the Queen before I married his daughter. The Queen attended the ceremony.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

How nice of her to do so. He had to be made a lord. Otherwise you would have married a commoner.

OXFORD

My wife is a fine Christian woman.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Yes, that may be. However, our ambassador reports that you have not lived with your wife since you married her, for two years. How do you expect to have any children at that rate? Or perhaps, you plan to remain without an heir, or you might say, "Heir-less".

OXFORD

Quite the contrary, Countess. We are expecting a child. It should be delivered while I am, unfortunately, abroad.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

An immaculate conception, no doubt. Since you were not living with your wife.

OXFORD

A bed trick, Countess. A bed trick.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

A miraculous form of conception. No doubt. Tell me of your Queen. I am told she has hair like a carrot.

OXFORD

How true, countess. Her majesty is a ravishing ginger-haired woman. The same color hair as her father, Henry VIII.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Yes. Your majesty, Elizabeth is the daughter of which wife? Third or fourth?

OXFORD

Second, countess. Queen Anne Boleyn.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Yes, a queen for a very short time.

OXFORD

Unfortunately so. But, she was a fine queen, who produced a noble daughter.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Our ambassador reports that your queen has had several children by Lord Robert Dudley.

OXFORD

Slandorous lies, countess. Lies told by unhappy Catholics and others who wish to defame her.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

How are the Catholics treated in England?

OXFORD

The Church of England is the official religion. Many Catholics practice privately. Other Catholic factions wish Mary Queen of Scots to take the throne of England. That is treason.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

To be sure.

OXFORD

Never has the Queen burned Catholics at the stake, or slaughtered thousands, as King Henry of France did to the Huguenots.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Lord Oxford, have you ever heard of Lady Jane Dormer, the Duchess of Feria.

OXFORD

She is English? Spanish?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

The Duchess is English. She married a Spanish duke during Queen Mary's reign. She was a lady-in-waiting to your Queen Mary. Upon the ascension of King Edward, she fled to Spain with her husband.

OXFORD

Why do you ask?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

The Duchess has put forth that there was bruit during the reign of Queen Mary, that Princess Elizabeth delivered a child by Sir Thomas Seymour.

OXFORD

That is outrageous slander. More slanderous rumors started by enemies of her majesty.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Lady Dormer said the rumor was abroad in the countryside. Started by a midwife who had delivered a child.

OXFORD

Countess, I cannot keep track of every slanderous rumor, simply slanderous, that is made about Queen Elizabeth. In my opinion, and to my best knowledge, she remains the Virgin Queen.

10. ENGLAND--CHESHUNT
(MIDWIFE)

MIDWIFE

In King Edward's time, I was brought from my house blindfold. And so I was returned. I saw nothing in the house while I was there, but candlelight.

(MORE)

MIDWIFE (CONT'D)

It was a very fair young lady. There was a bruit of a child born and miserably destroyed, but could not be discovered whose it was. There was muttering of the Admiral, Lord Thomas Seymour, and this lady, who was then between fifteen and sixteen years of age. If it were so, it was the judgment of God upon the Admiral; and upon her, to make her ever after incapable of children

Enter William Cecil #1

WILLIAM CECIL #1

A prince is born, a prince, a prince,
 But a changling babe, thou must become,
 If thou art to survive a safe haven must appear,
 To shelter thee until calm waters welcome thee.
 The Earl of Oxford will provide such a haven,
 And you my young Lord will be raised as his son.
 The Earl does not now possess a wife,
 But one maiden will fly to him on the morrow,
 To be his lawful wife and you her lawful child,
 [Though in fact, you are the bastard son of a
 princess.]
 Such a secret must be kept, or the death of many,
 When times are right, and dame fortune smiles,
 You will to the world be a prince, and perhaps a king.

11. VENICE--MONTE BELLO
 (COUNTESS FOSCARI, OXFORD)

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Perhaps so. Enough of politics. What cities will you visit in Italy?

OXFORD

I will visit Verona, Mantua, Florence, Padua, the site of legal learning in Italy.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Are you a lawyer?

OXFORD

I attended Gray's Inn in London.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

What is Gray's Inn? An inn, a tavern, where one can drink and lounge about legal London. Pick up enough to go before a high court.

OXFORD

No, in fact. One attends lectures, on property law, heraldry, and so forth.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Do you have a city that has such a scholarly endeavor as Padua and its school of law?

OXFORD

No. But my former tutor, Sir Thomas Smith, attended the Padua Law School. Sir Francis Walsingham also attended the law school. I am anxious to visit Padua. Discuss legal ideas with the learned scholars there.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

Yes, right and just according to the customs of the community. Always, the hardest point of law. Law is meant to regulate. To stop transgressions. While the customs of the community might be to forgive the individual.

OXFORD

Are you in fact a lawyer?

COUNTESS FOSCARI

No. But simple-minded women are not to be legal scholars. But, my Lord Oxford, do not think that women know nothing of the law because they walk with mincing steps, not a manly stride. We know the meaning of the law by what is written, and the intent of the law by how it is enforced.

OXFORD

Agreed, countess.

COUNTESS FOSCARI

What should be done with husbands who are less than enthusiastic about their conjugal duties? Should we women lock them up in their households?

Oxford takes a sip of wine. Eats a slice of venison.

OXFORD

Excellent venison.

12. VENICE--GHETTO
(GUARD #2, OXFORD)

Enter Guard 32 who takes a sentry position. He is followed by Oxford.

GUARD #2

Halt. Who goes there?

OXFORD

Buongiorno, signor guarde. The ghetto is where?

GUARD #2

Across the bridge. Go through the gates.

OXFORD

How will I recognize the house of the money lender #1?

GUARD #2

It is the only penthouse. A house built on pillars. It is easy to find. Straightaway, then to the left.

Enter Oxford into the house.

MONEY LENDER #1

You are here for a loan. A loan you want, is it? What else would you be here for? Except a loan? You cannot buy grain or clothes here, so what is it, a loan? A loan, a loan is it?

OXFORD

Buongiorno, signor. Yes, a loan. I am here for a loan.

MONEY LENDER #1

A loan. I thought so. A loan. How much of a loan do you want?

OXFORD

Three thousand ducats.

MONEY LENDER #1

What is the loan for? Three thousand ducats? A loan for three thousand ducats?

OXFORD

To travel. I am traveling to Palermo. The ship with the letter of credit has not arrived in Venice. It is two weeks late. It will be here.

MONEY LENDER #1

I see. Two weeks late. A ship with a letter of credit. Who backs this letter of credit?

OXFORD

William Cecil backs it. He is my father-in-law.

(MORE)

OXFORD (CONT'D)

He is the treasurer of England. The treasury of England backs it.

MONEY LENDER #1

A loan to travel. Money to travel. The treasurer of England, aye. Your father-in-law, aye. William Cecil, your father in law, aye. Treasurer of England, aye.

Aye, you shall have the loan.

13. VENICE--INQUISITION COURT
(*INQUISITOR #2*)

Inquisitor enters.

INQUISITOR #2

The Lord Procurator, Paulo Scravino, in attendance and before the Very Reverend Father, Master Alberto Vincenti Ruggiero, Inquisitor, the Reverend Lords Roberto Vincente, auditor of the Lord Papal Nuncio and Father Alphonse Marchase, Vicar to the Patriarch of Venice.

The court will come to order.

Enter Ribeiro #1.

INQUISITOR #2 (CONT'D)

The man named below was brought from his home: the Moranno, Gaspar Ribeiro #1 for examination by this court.

Please state your name, your surname, your country of birth, your age, your time in Venice, your occupation, and your religion.

RIBEIRO #1

I am Gaspar Ribeiro #1. I was born in Portugal. I have lived thirty years in Venetia. I am eighty-seven. I am a Moranno; a Jew that Converted to Christianity. What else did you ask me?

INQUISITOR #2

Your occupation and your religion?

RIBEIRO #1

I am a merchant. I trade with the Levant. I am a Catholic.

INQUISITOR #2

When did you become a Catholic? When did you become a Christian?

RIBEIRO #1

I became a Christian in Portugal.

INQUISITOR #2

When was that?

RIBEIRO #1

I don't remember. When I was younger. Not a few years ago. Many decades ago.

INQUISITOR #2

You were baptized a Christian?

RIBEIRO #1

I was. I was baptized a Christian in Portugal.

INQUISITOR #2

What is your parish, in Venice?

RIBEIRO #1

Saint Maria Formosa.

INQUISITOR #2

Is your wife a Christian? Born and baptized a Christian?

RIBEIRO #1

My second wife died last year. She was born and baptized a Christian. My first wife was a Marrano. She converted to Christianity with me.

I am a good Christian.

I carry a candle behind the Host on Good Friday.

I am a good Christian.

I take communion at St. Maria Formosa.

I am a good Christian.

I lend hangings to the Church for special Holy Days.

I am a good Christian.

I had a tabernacle for the Host redecorated in the Chapel.

I am a good Christian.

INQUISITOR #2

But are you a good Christian in Portugal and Venice, but a Jew in the Levant?

RIBEIRO #1

No. No. I am a good Christian everywhere.

INQUISITOR #2

Do you make the sign of the cross?

RIBEIRO #1

Of course, I make the sign of the cross. I am a good Christian.

INQUISITOR #2

Do you observe no meat or poultry during Lent?

RIBEIRO #1

I did. I did.

I am a good Christian. But not now. I have a dispensation from a doctor. I am much older and I have a complaint with my liver. I did, though. I did once.

INQUISITOR #2

Did you buy Alumbra a gold bracelets?

RIBEIRO #1

Yes. Yes. I gave her gold bracelets.

INQUISITOR #2

Were these gold bracelets with precious stones? Embedded with diamonds?

RIBEIRO #1

Yes. Yes. Precious stones. Diamonds.

INQUISITOR #2

Did you give her earrings?

RIBEIRO #1

Yes. Yes. I gave her earrings?

INQUISITOR #2

Why did you give her, this Jewish maiden, these presents?

RIBEIRO #1

My son. My son, wanted to marry her.

INQUISITOR #2

Did you encourage your son to marry this Jewish maiden?

RIBEIRO #1

No. Never. Never did I encourage him. He wanted to marry her.

INQUISITOR #2

You told him not to?

RIBEIRO #1

I told him it was not a good idea. That she would not become a Christian.

INQUISITOR #2

Why not?

RIBEIRO #1

She only wanted the money.

INQUISITOR #2

Were you not bribing her to become a Christian?

RIBEIRO #1

I was showing her that my family could take care of her. Any children that she had with my son.

INQUISITOR #2

Your son was a Christian.

RIBEIRO #1

Yes. Yes. My son was a Christian.

INQUISITOR #2

How could your son, a Christian, marry this Jewish maiden?

RIBEIRO #1

He wanted her to convert. He wanted her to convert to Christianity.

INQUISITOR #2

Did she say she would do this?

RIBEIRO #1

She did not say "yes." She did not say "no." So my son continued to court her. To marry a Jew.

INQUISITOR #2

The inquisition into the case of Gaspar Ribeiro will be adjourned. The court will be adjourned until Thursday, two weeks from today.

The court is adjourned.

All exit. Time delay Inquisitor #2 returns.

INQUISITOR #2 (CONT'D)

The court will come to order.

News has been received that Gaspar Ribeiro #1 has died. He has been buried in the cemetery of the St. Maria of Formosa. We seek that the case be adjourned until further notice.

The court is adjourned.

Exit Inquisitor #2. Time delay Enter the Inquisitor #2.

INQUISITOR #2 (CONT'D)

The court will come to order.

The holy tribunal has seen and heard the aforesaid evidence for and against the aforesaid defendant Gaspar Ribeiro.

The tribunal has heard his testimony. The testimony of his daughter. The testimony of the parish father of St. Maria Formosa. The testimony of those that knew Gaspar Ribeiro. The testimony of parishioners of St. Maria Formosa.

The holy tribunal condemns Gaspar Ribeiro #1 as an apostate who did live surreptitiously as a Christian.

The holy tribunal orders that his body be removed from the Christian cemetery in accordance with the laws pertaining to such procedures.

That his body be removed at night and buried in the Jewish grave yard without light or cross.

The holy tribunal is adjourned.

14. VENICE--JEWISH CEMETERY
(GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2)

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

Out on a night like this. Bahh. Digging graves in the dark. It is not right.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

It's part of the job.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

Well what do you think about it?

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

I don't know.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

I mean, was he or was he not?

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

Was he not what? What was he not?

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

Was he not an apostate?

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

Well, he could have been not. Then again, he could have been-been.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

Well, was he or was he not. What do you think?

They charged him with usury against a Jew. Against a Jew!

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

So they did.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

His son married a Jew and then died.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

Yes, he did both. Married then died. Not uncommon. Often comes close together.

Some say that one is the cause of the other.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

His daughter would have no part of marrying a Jew. Her brother beat her. Tried to force her.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

That she did. Neighbors complained. She screamed so.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

So, what do you think?

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

I think we should hurry and bury him before the sun rises. That might bring a spell down on us.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

It could. An awful spell.

They put the coffin in the ground. Grave Digger #2 takes something from beneath his cloak, and opens the casket.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1 (CONT'D)

Yo, what are you doing?

Grave Digger #2 raises a silver cross above his and makes the sign of the cross with it.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1 (CONT'D)

That's a cross.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

Yes. It is a cross. Very good that you noticed.

He kisses cross and puts it the coffin.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2 (CONT'D)

You never know. He might need it. Wherever he is going. Maybe not. You never know. Maybe he will need it if he is a Christian. If he is a Jew, probably not. Never know.

GRAVE DIGGER ONE #1

You think so.

GRAVE DIGGER TWO #2

Only God knows what is in the heart of a man.

They close the coffin and fill in the grave. Exit.

15. VENICE--GRAND CANAL
(OXFORD, VERONICA)

A warm summer evening. Oxford and Veronica are on a gondola. She is playing a small guitar and singing. They have a bottle of wine and are drinking.

OXFORD

A beautiful evening.

VERONICA

Yes it is.

He leans over and kisses her on the cheek.

OXFORD

Another wonderful day. Another wonderful evening in fair Venice.

VERONICA

You are leaving soon?

OXFORD

In two days.

VERONICA

How will you travel back to England? Through Milan?

OXFORD

I am not going back to England yet.

VERONICA

Where, then?

OXFORD

To Palermo. Sicily.

VERONICA

Why there?

OXFORD

To see the sights. See fair Sicily.

VERONICA

Will you come back to Venice?

OXFORD

No. Back to Verona. Then over the Alps from there.

VERONICA

I will be so sad. I will miss you. I will only see you for two more days. Then we must say good-bye. Two more days.

Oxford kisses her on the cheek.

OXFORD

I don't think so. My sweetheart. I do not think so.

He raises his glass.

OXFORD (CONT'D)

To Sicily. To Palermo.

Perhaps you would like to accompany me on the voyage to Palermo.

VERONICA

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.
(Throws her arms around him and kisses him.)

OXFORD

We will travel Capoodistra, to Pola, Sequna on the Eastern Coast of Mare Adriatico. Perhaps stop in Greece.

16. VOLCANO

(ARIEL, OXFORD, VERONICA)

ARIEL

All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail!
I come to answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly, to swim, to dive into the fire,
To ride on the curl'd clouds.

PROSPERO #1

Hast thou, spirit, perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?

ARIEL

To every article.

I boarded King Henry's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement: sometime I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors.
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake.

PROSPERO #1

My brave spirit!
Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil would not infect his reason?

ARIEL

Not a soul but felt a fever of the mad and play'd some tricks of desperation.
All but mariners plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,
Then all afire with me: King Henry's son Ferdinand, with hair up-staring,--then like reeds, not hair,--
Was the first man that leap'd; cried 'Hell is empty
And all the devils are here.

PROSPERO #1

Why that's my spirit!
But was this not nigh shore?

ARIEL

Close by, my master.

PROSPERO #1

But are they, Ariel, safe?

ARIEL

Not a hair perish'd;
On their sustaining garments not a blemish,
But fresher than before: and, as thou badest me,
In troops I have dispersed them 'bout the isle.

PROSPERO #1

Veronica King Henry's ship
The mariners, say how thou hast disposed
And all the rest ford' the fleet.

ARIEL

Safely in harbour
Is King Henry's ship; in the deep nook, where once
Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew
From the still-vex'd Bermoothes.
King Henry's ship wreck'd
And his great person perish.

PROSPERO #1

Where are they now?

ARIEL

They lie asleep in a cave below.

PROSPERO #1

Fetch them here when they awake,
They will greet us with joy and thankfulness.

ARIEL

I will make it so, great master.

Ariel exits and returns with Oxford and Veronica. Prospero sees them. Veronica and Oxford look very disoriented.

PROSPERO #1

What have you brought me? This is not Antonio or
Ferdinand. Who is the wench?

ARIEL

They are the shipwrecked. Who made landfall.

PROSPERO #1

You have brought the heavens down on the wrong ship.
This is not the Duke of Milan, nor his party.
They are still at sea.

ARIEL

I must conjure up the seas and the storms again.
I must bring the proper Ferdinand to you.

PROSPERO #1

Not so soon. The ship of these travelers still lies
in the deep nook.

(To Oxford.)

You sir, who might you be?

OXFORD

I am Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. I came to
Venice, and to Italy, from England. We were bound
for Genoa.

PROSPERO #1

Who is this lady?

OXFORD

Veronica Franco, a poet from Venice.

PROSPERO #1

A poet. I did not know poets were as lovely.
(Bows to her.)

OXFORD

Sir, please tell us where we are and what you have
done.

PROSPERO #1

I am the Duke of Milan.
I was exiled to this isle.
This is the isle of Volcano.

OXFORD

How did you come to be exiled upon this isle?

PROSPERO #1

My brother call'd Antonio--
I pray thee, mark me--that a brother should
Be so perfidious!-- He whom next thyself
Of all the world I loved and to him put
The manage of my state; as at that time
Through all the signories it was the first of my mind

VERONICA

Oh, the heavens!

PROSPERO #1

Mark his condition and the event;
Then tell me If this might be a brother.

VERONICA

I should sin to think but nobly of my grandmother:
Good wombs have borne bad son.

PROSPERO #1

In few, they hurried us aboard a bark,
Bore us some leagues to sea; where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
Instinctively had quit it: there they hoist us,
To cry to the sea that roar'd to us, to sigh
To the winds whose pity, sighing back again,
Did us but loving wrong

OXFORD

How came you ashore?

PROSPERO #1

By Providence divine.
Some food we had and some fresh water that a noble
Neapolitan, Gonzalo,
Out of his charity, being then appointed
Master of this design, did give us, with
Rich garments, linens, stuffs and necessaries,
Which since have steaded much; so, of his gentleness,
Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me from mine
own library with volumes that
I prize above my dukedom.

OXFORD

And what now, gentle Duke?

Prospero #1 puts on his cape.

PROSPERO #1

Now my noble sir and lady. You must return to your
ship, sail on to Genoa.

Prospero waves his arm and all disappears..

Exit all.

17. MEDITERRANEAN BOAT
(OXFORD, VERONICA)

*A boat is sailing out of the grotto which is large enough
for a ship with a tall mast. Veronica and Oxford awake.
Groggy, disoriented.*

OXFORD

I feel I was awake, yet asleep. I feel I was in a
dream. I awoke.

VERONICA

Perhaps it was a dream.

OXFORD

Too real to be a dream. Too much a dream to be real.

Oxford and Veronica are on deck looking back at Vulcano as they sail away. He puts his arm around her. They kiss and she snuggles up closer against his shoulder.

OXFORD (CONT'D)

Perhaps we should have something to eat.

VERONICA

Affamata. Meraviglioso. I'm very hungry marvelous!

They pull out a lunch basket, bottle and glasses. They sit in the sunlight, drinking wine and eating cheese and bread.

OXFORD

I read your poetry. Terza Rima.

VERONICA

Your opinion?

OXFORD

Excellent.

VERONICA

You have nothing more to say? No suggestions?

OXFORD

They were in poetic form. But more as letters. Long letters to express your feelings, your thoughts of anger or love to men in your life.

VERONICA

You disapprove?

OXFORD

There is to neither approve or disapprove. You felt it best to send a message this way.

VERONICA

The poetic form?

OXFORD

Well accomplished. You will write further, no doubt?

VERONICA

I will write further.

OXFORD

Was your book well received.

VERONICA

Many of the men in Venier's circle admire me as a poet. Others despise me. Perhaps they are jealous. Yet, maybe it is not so bad. They would despise anyone who was more successful than they are.

You have published your poems.

OXFORD

A few under the name Earl of Oxford. I have published others under various names.

VERONICA

When was this?

OXFORD

After the 16th Earl of Oxford died.

VERONICA

Your father?

OXFORD

Perhaps, but that is a story for another day. William Cecil, the Queen's counselor, became my guardian. He did not approve a noble writing for the common view.

VERONICA

And so.

OXFORD

I published under various names. The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet I wrote as a long narrative poem. Of course, it is based on the novella by Matteo Bandello. It was published under the name of Arthur Brooke.

VERONICA

Who was he?

OXFORD

Simply a name. I name I created.

VERONICA

I see.

OXFORD

Love hath inflaméd twain by sudden sight,
And both do grant the thing that both desire
(MORE)

OXFORD (CONT'D)

They wed in shrift by counsel of a friar.
 Young Romeus climbs fair Juliet's bower by night.
 Three months he doth enjoy his chief delight. By
 Tybalt's rage provokéd unto ire,
 He payeth death to Tybalt for his hire.
 A banished man he 'scapes by secret flight.

New marriage is offered to his wife.
 She drinks a drink that seems to reave her breath:
 They bury her that sleeping yet hath life.

Her husband hears the tidings of her death.
 He drinks his bane. And she with Romeus' knife,
 When she awakes, herself, alas! She slay'th

VERONICA

Bravo. Bravo. Bravissio!

OXFORD

A gem for her majesty.

VERONICA

Your Queen.

OXFORD

My Queen, aboard ship.

VERONICA

Words of flattery will smooth your journey, whatever
 the destination.

OXFORD

My destination is your destination, mia bella donna!

VERONICA

You have written plays?

OXFORD

Oh, yes. Before the Queen. Palaemon and Areite, was
 performed before the Queen at Oxford. She attended
 the ceremony there and the one at Cambridge as well.

VERONICA

(Raising her glass)

To the future, great playwright.

OXFORD

Yes. To write plays as the Italians do. Perform
 them before her majesty.

VERONICA

And the world will know your name.

OXFORD

Perhaps. Perhaps. One can only hope.

18. ENGLAND--BLUE BOAR INN
(MISTRESS SMALLTREE)

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

Har, har. T'is "Mr. Shake-speare." What be ye doing
in London. Here to see the new motions on the stage.
Perhaps buy a bit of tobacco. Eye, "Mr. Shake-speare."

SHAXSPERE #1

You're an ignorant lot. T'is Shakspere, t'is it.
You are one that don't know a shak from a shake,
Nor a bat from a bate, nor a rat from rate,
Nor a fat from a fate. My father was a shak,
My father's father a shak.
I was born a shak.
A Shakspere is written on me Christening.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

Shak or Shake. T'is no difference.

SHAXSPERE #1

T'is a great difference. When I be a gentleman.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

Pray tell, how might ye get this coat of arms.

SHAXSPERE #1

I shall not speak a word.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

That ye be seen with a most notable personage. That
it was in Red Bull. Ay it was.

That ye be agreeing to things that cannot be told.
Lest ye loose yer hand to the chopping block.

SHAXSPERE #1

I say neither "nay," nor "yea" to that.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

T'is easy indeed to confuse a spear and a spoon.
Shak and a shake.

Some ye would not know a moon from a spoon. Nor a
spoon from a June. T'is easy to confuse.

SHAXSPERE #1

I say neither "nay," nor "yea" to that.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

That ye be agreeing to say you write things. You being a man who signth his name with a mark.

SHAXSPERE #1

I say neither "nay," nor "yea" to that. Draw 'round me.

They come closer.

SHAXSPERE #1 (CONT'D)

If one day, I should buy me a fine house, in me hometown of Stratford. Let's just say, that there I was, the wrong man, with the right name. Aye, the wrong man, with the right name. I be telling you something. It was a week ago yesterday, a certain noble gentleman, whilst I be recovering from a bit too much of ale on the previous occasion of the previous night, had his gentleman come upon me to fetch me to a certain Red Bull.

In a room above the tavern, there be this gentlemen a dressed in the finest finery, be sitting across from him, but two men with pens a scribbling a'scribbles as fast as they could scribble. I come in and disturb this man who is a saying a many things while a pacing back and forth. He is going on about something that the Danes are coming, a ghost of a father. Like this

HORATIO: What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark did sometimes march?
By heaven I charge thee, speak!

MARCELLUS: It is offended.

BERNARDO See, it stalks away!"

What he be saying I haven't a clue from St. Bartholomew, but at any rate, he stops in mid sentence, if it be a sentence, it more be like a sort of sing-song type of speech that you be hearing in the the-aters, if you catch my meaning. There he stops in mid sentence and looks at me a sort of taking it all in like he had never seen the likes of me before.

(MORE)

SHAXSPERE #1 (CONT'D)

He waves his hand. A secretary comes over to me, hands me a some papers, he calls a man-u-script. Gives me a gold coin, a gold coin, and tells me where to bring this man-u-script.

I cannot tell more.

MISTRESS SMALLTREE

What does he say to you? Out with it, damn you.

SHAXSPERE #1

Nay, I cannot tell more.

19. MEDITERRANEAN BOAT
(*VERONICA, OXFORD*)

VERONICA

You are married?

OXFORD

Yes. To the daughter of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Anne, Anne Cecil.

VERONICA

You do not sound happy about it?

OXFORD

It was a marriage of politics. A marriage for mutual advantage.

VERONICA

Aren't all marriages such?

OXFORD

Some more than others. I have known her since we were children. I lived in William Cecil's house with her. She is like, no, as a sister. She is sweet, but not a wife for me.

VERONICA

There are other ladies of the court.

OXFORD

A marriage of politics. The Queen wanted it. She raised William Cecil to the peerage to have his daughter of equal rank. Are you married?

VERONICA

I am married. Married to a doctor.

OXFORD
Do you have any children?

VERONICA
I have had three children. One did not live through infancy. I support two of them now. No matter about your wife. There are women of the court who will tend to your needs.

OXFORD
Ah yes, the women of the court.

VERONICA
Some must have been very fetching.

OXFORD
Yes, far too fetching.

20. ENGLAND--COURT
(OXFORD, VAVASOR)

Enter Oxford, Vavasor. They walk along as lovers. They Kiss.

OXFORD
Come hither, shepherd swain!

VAVASOR
Sir, what do you require?

OXFORD
I pray thee show to me thy name;

VAVASOR
My name is Fond Desire.

OXFORD
When wert thou born, Desire?

VAVASOR
In pride and pomp of May.

OXFORD
By whom, sweet boy, wert thou begot?

VAVASOR
By fond conceit men say.

OXFORD
Tell me who was thy nurse?

VAVASOR
Fresh youth, in sugar'd joy.

OXFORD
What was thy meat and daily food?

VAVASOR
Sad sighs and great annoy.

OXFORD
What had'st thou then to drink?

VAVASOR
Unfeign'd lover's tears.

OXFORD
What cradle wert thou rocked in?

VAVASOR
In hope devoid of fears.

OXFORD
What lulled thee to thy sleep?

VAVASOR
Sweet thoughts that liked one best.

OXFORD
And where is now thy dwelling place?

VAVASOR
In gentle hearts I rest.

OXFORD
Doth company displease?

VAVASOR
It doth in many one.

OXFORD
Where would Desire then choose to be?

VAVASOR
He loves to muse alone.

OXFORD
What feedeth most thy sight?

VAVASOR
To gaze on beauty still.

OXFORD

Whom find'st thou most thy foe?

VAVASOR

Disdain of my good will.

OXFORD

Will ever age or death
Bring thee unto decay?
No, no, Desire, farewell;
A thousand times a day.

The, Fond Desire, farewell;
Thou art no mate for me;
I should be loathe, methinks, to dwell
With such a one as thee.

Pause.

VAVASOR

Yes, my Lord. Methinks, my Lord does think too much.

OXFORD

Your opinion.

VAVASOR

Methinks, that thinking without action, is a man
without a woman, a flower without a bee.

OXFORD

The idle drone, labours not at all and sucks up the
sweet honey from the bee.
Those that worketh they do receive the least share.
Due deserts with reward will never be.

VAVASOR

The noble Romans would never have talked as such.
For them, action was the thing. To stand by and idly
contemplate would be unthinkable.

OXFORD

Consequences can be ruinous.

VAVASOR

Idleness begets nothing.

OXFORD

I have no army. I have no arms. What action do you
propose?

VAVASOR

Thou hast a very sharp pen.

OXFORD

Oh, hoh! What shall I skewer with my pen?
Shall I rip the boar to save Adonis?

VAVASOR

Thou shalt rip thine enemies. There be other ways to
catch the conscience of a King. Thou hath the
printers.

OXFORD

A good thought.

VAVASOR

Thy cannot put thy name on such, even though the world
will know who hath written them. Nor, must they be
but plays. The Italians wrote their novellas, songs,
political pamphlets. My lord can write other than
plays.

OXFORD

I shall sharpen my pen.

VAVASOR

T'is time for a little more action. I shall smother
thee in kisses.

21. ENGLAND--STUDIO
(SMITH #2, VAVASOR, OXFORD)

SMITH #2

Lord Oxford, he is the most brilliant. They write
about him, "his countenance shake-a-speares."
Beautiful, wonderful. The English Virgil. He makes
the plays and the Queen loves them. The new Horace.

LYLY #1

Wonderful. Beautiful. What do you think this is?
Art? Art? Horace. A classic. Look at this.

SMITH #2

Titus Andronicus. A beautiful title. A classic Roman.
An artistic masterpiece.

LYLY #1

A bloody mess, that's what. In case you weren't
keeping count. One human sacrifice, nine murders,
four executions, two rapes, four amputations, one act
of treason, and one bastard child. Art? Art!

SMITH #2

Expression of the soul.

LYLY #1

Expression of the soul. The bloodiest stage direction in all history.

SMITH #2

What?

LYLY #1

(Reads)

"Latavia stands there, her hands cut off, her tongue cut out, she can neither point to her rapist, or call out his name."

SMITH #2

An expression of the human spirit.

LYLY #1

"She takes a stick in her mouth and writes out her rapist's name in the sand."

SMITH #2

Lord Oxford always has a happy ending.

Ann Vavasor enters.

VAVASOR

Lord Oxford! Where is Lord Oxford?

LYLY #1

Lady Vavasor, I believe he had an appointment with Lord Burghley.

VAVASOR

I have been to Lord Burghley's. The servants tell me that neither Lord Burghley nor Lord Oxford is there. They could be lying.

LYLY #1

Is there something that concerns you?

VAVASOR

Is there something that concerns me?

(Rubs belly)

I should say there is something that concerns me, and concerns Lord Oxford as well. Where do you think he has gone?

Oxford enters the room.

OXFORD

Be gone!

Exit Smith and Lyly.

OXFORD (CONT'D)

My lady.

VAVASOR

Enough of your words, words, words.
 Words of passion spoken in haste in dark corridors.
 Words of trust spoken in moonlit gardens.
 Words of understanding.
 Words of desire.
 Words spoken on soft meadow grass.
 Words spoken on soft pillows in the moonlight.
 Words spoken between perfumed sheets.
 Shall we have clever words of jest?
 Shall we write words of poetry?
 May I favour this match with love, if he my love?
 May I requite this birth with faith?
 Then faithful will I die? Ay.
 Words, ever more, words.
 What words shall we have now?
 Words of contrition?
 Words of sorrow?
 Words of pity?
 Words of remorse?
 More words.

What words shall we have for your wife?
 What words for this unborn child?

What words for the scorn of her father?

What words shall we have for the wrath of the Queen?

What words shall we have for that entanglement that
 surpasses understanding?
 The queen shall not be pleased, when she hears the
 words that will be told her.
 The Tower for you.
 Will she give me such grand accommodations?
 Or shall I be thrown in the Fleet Prison and be treated
 as common rubbish?
 What words do I say to my jailor?
 To fall from the Queen's grace is to fall as far as
 Lucifer fell from heaven to hell.
 What words shall we have for the newborn?
 What words shall we have for this creature?
 What words shall be its name?
 Shall the word be the truth?
 Shall the word be de Vere?
 Or shall we have another word?

(MORE)

VAVASOR (CONT'D)

Shall the creature become a changeling?
 Shall the creature be placed in another nest?
 To be raised as stranger to us both?
 What words shall we use, my Lord?

Oxford attempts to speak.

VAVASOR (CONT'D)

No more words, my Lord.
 We have had our words.
 We have had our time in the sun.
 We have had our day at court.
 We have had our day in the radiance of Her glory.
 We will have our time in ruin, disgrace and torment.

Oxford attempts to speak.

VAVASOR (CONT'D)

No my Lord.
 No more words.
 Words cannot build a castle,
 Wherein love can dwell.

My Lord.

She curtsies and exits.

22. ENGLAND--COURT
 (ELIZABETH)

ELIZABETH

Good morning, Lord Burghley. You are pale and wane.
 What, pray tell, is the matter?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

Good morning, your majesty. I am to report unpleasant news.

ELIZABETH

From your face, it must be unpleasant indeed. Hath Spain invaded France?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

No, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Hath France invaded Spain?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

No, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Hath either arrived on the shores of England?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

No, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Then pray tell, what is it? Out with it.

WILLIAM CECIL #1

A lady of your court is with child.

ELIZABETH

Which one?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

Lady Vavasor.

ELIZABETH

She is but a low born drab. It was a mistake to bring her to court. She was given entre to her betters. She must be removed from court immediately. Send her back to her uncle, let him bear the shame and cost of this. The ladies of the court are not to be common courtesans, who give their favors to any who comes calling.

WILLIAM CECIL #1

Yes, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Who, may I ask is the father of this drab's child?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

He is a member of the court.

ELIZABETH

Of course, he is a member of the court. Would we think that he is an apparition? Would we think he is a member of the French court? Would we think he was a Prince from Denmark? Would we think he is a tradesmen peddling vegetables?

WILLIAM CECIL #1

Never, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

Out with it, Lord Burghley.

WILLIAM CECIL #1

It is... Lord Oxford.

Silence.

WILLIAM CECIL #1 (CONT'D)
My son-in-law. Husband of my daughter.

Silence.

WILLIAM CECIL #1 (CONT'D)
Your majesty?

Silence.

ELIZABETH
Remove Lady Vavasor to the Fleet Prison. There she
shall birth her bastard child. Remove Lord Oxford to
the Tower.

23. ENGLAND--TOWER
(OXFORD)

OXFORD
Were I a King, I could command content.
Were I obscure,
Hidden should be my cares,
Or, were I dead,
No cares should me torment.
Nor hopes, nor hates, nor loves, nor griefs, nor fears;
A doubtful choice--of these three which to crave,
Kingdom, or a cottage, or a grave.

Were thou a King yet not command content,
Since empire none thy mind could yet suffice,
Are thou obscure still cares would thee torment;
But were thou dead, all care and sorrow dies;
An easy choice of these things, which to crave,
No kingdom, nor a cottage, but a grave.

24. ENGLAND--LONDON STREET
(THOMAS KNYVET #2, OXFORD)

THOMAS KNYVET #2
Lord Oxford, halt.

OXFORD
Who orders Lord Oxford to halt? What rank of man be
you?

THOMAS KNYVET #2
It is not my rank you should know, but my relations.
I am the uncle of Anne Vavasor. I demand satisfaction
for this foul deed.

Knyvet draws his sword.

OXFORD

Satisfaction will be on the end of my sword.

Oxford. Draws his sword. They fight.

Oxford is slashed in the leg.

THOMAS KNYVET #2

Anne Vavasor hath satisfaction.

Thomas Knyvet and his men exit. Oxford is bandaged. It is a serious wound. His men carry Oxford away.

25. VERONA--BALCONY
(JULIET-VERONICA, ROMEO-OXFORD)

DIRECTOR #1

Action!

The actors stumble over lines, get lines wrong trip, forget lines, mispronounce words. Bad Shakespeare played for comedy.

JULIET-VERONICA

Romeo, Romeo!
Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO-OXFORD

[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

Director #1 stomps in.

DIRECTOR #1

Cut. Cut. We've must work on this. Juliet, let's talk. Talk to your Director.

Romeo staggers on with his lines.

ROMEO-OXFORD

As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.....

DIRECTOR #1

Cut. Cut. Romeo, cut. Romeo, talk to the Director. Here, both of you

Listen kids. This is a professional movie. This is a classic scene. Un cri du cœur.

ROMEO-OXFORD

A what?

DIRECTOR #1

A cry from the heart.

JULIET-VERONICA

Ok, a cry from the heart.

DIRECTOR #1

A deep yearning. A desire to be together. Not just a few lines written by the Bard, hundreds of years ago.

ROMEO-OXFORD

We've got it. A cry from the heart.

DIRECTOR #1

It doesn't seem like you two even like each other. Think about your acting classes. Stanus Stanislavinsky. Method acting.

Juliet has a complete blank look on her face.

DIRECTOR #1 (CONT'D)

You have heard of Stanislavinsky. The Method.

JULIET-VERONICA

I'm fourteen.

DIRECTOR #1

You have been to acting school?

Juliet looks at him blankly.

DIRECTOR #1 (CONT'D)

Haven't you?

JULIET-VERONICA

Well, no.

DIRECTOR #1

Really. What method do you use to "act Shakespearean?"

JULIET-VERONICA

I just do what they tell me.

ROMEO-OXFORD

Listen, in Shakespeare, the play, I mean there is no balcony. I read the play. There's no balcony. It's a window. How come we don't have a balcony?

DIRECTOR #1

Tradition. Every play, every movie, every poster has Juliet on the balcony. If we didn't have a balcony, Juliet on the balcony, people would want their money back. No balcony, no tradition. Like popcorn at the movies. No popcorn. Not a real movie. Not a balcony. Not a real "Romeo and Juliet."

26. ARKANSAS HIGH SCHOOL
(HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER #2, MARCIA)

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER #2

Class, we have just watched the final scene of the movie Romeo and Juliet.

We are now going to have some character analysis of the major characters. When we see Romeo, we see a character full of passion. He is in love with love. Marcia, what do you think of Romeo?

Marcia is staring at some handsome dude.

MARCIA

Huh?

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER #2

What do you think of Romeo?

MARCIA

He's dreamy.

Teacher reacts. Rolls his eyes.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

Does he have a Facebook page?

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER #2

Justin, what do you think of Romeo?

JUSTIN #1

I agree. I mean look. The guy's crazy about her. Climbs a wall, up a tree and everything. He's really into her. Of course, the parents don't like it. But they're parents, so you can get that. Romeo is way cool. Can't live without Juliet. OD's on the poison. She's really into him. Stabs herself to death cause he's dead. She can't live without him. Really. Way cool.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER #2

Well Justin #1, You have the plot down. What are your thoughts on the character of Juliet?

JUSTIN #1

A hottie. Definitely hot. Excellent.

The teacher shrugs his shoulders.

27. VERONA-SYCAMORE GROVE OUTSIDE CITY WALLS
(VERONICA, OXFORD)

VERONICA

What are these trees? Very different.

OXFORD

They are sycamore trees. With their white bark. They surround the city's walls.

VERONICA

Yes. This is where lonely lovers walk. Verona is famous for doomed lovers.

OXFORD

(Recites)

There is beyond the Alps, a town of ancient fame,
Whose bright renown yet shineth clear: Verona men it
name;

Built in a happy time, built on a fertile soil
Maintained by the heavenly fates, and by the townish
toil

The fruitful hills above, the pleasant vales below,
The silver stream with channel deep, that thro' the
town doth flow,

Oxford stops, puts his arms around Veronica and kisses her.

VERONICA

You kiss by the book. As if it is something you read about. That you should feel certain things but you do not.

OXFORD

I would hardly lie to you.

VERONICA

Your lips cannot lie.

OXFORD

I think that is false.

VERONICA

You are a courtier. Educated in the ways of love. By the book. To put it down in sonnets of fourteen lines. Each precisely measured. You are trained to write from what you have learned. Not by your experience.

OXFORD

That is false. I kiss you because, because...

VERONICA

Because you love me? Hardly, many men make love to me. Few love me.

OXFORD

I, I.

VERONICA

You are the romantic young English courtier. On your tour of Italy--it is only appropriate that you have a beautiful woman on your arm, to be seen with you, to sleep with you. If it were not me, it would be another.

OXFORD

There is none such as you in all of Italy.

VERONICA

True.

OXFORD

Well, I ...

VERONICA

You will go back and tell your companions that you slept with the famous Venetian courtesan. It will be a feather in your cap.

OXFORD

I will do no such thing.

VERONICA

I think you will. All men who return from Venice talk of their exploits.

OXFORD

Let's change the subject. Do you think it would make a good play?

VERONICA

What make a good play?

OXFORD

Romeus and Juliet.

VERONICA

Doomed lovers?

OXFORD

Yes.

VERONICA

It would make a very good play. One suggestion though.

OXFORD

I am glad you like the idea. I think so too.

VERONICA

Rome-e-o. Not Rome-e-us as the novel. Because you are my Rome-e-o.

(Snuggling up)

You are my Rome-E-O. Earl of Oxford. Rome-e-o.

She kisses him. They continue to walk. He then grabs her, pulls her toward him and passionately kisses her.

OXFORD

My darling. My darling. .

VERONICA

(into his ear)

That's better. Much better.

They continue to walk.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

In time we grow old.

Memories dim.

Flames become glowing embers.

Embers to coals.

Coals to ashes.

Ashes scattered on the wind.

OXFORD

Don't, don't talk like that.

VERONICA

(She kisses him on the cheek)

Something to remember me by. La historia d'Italia by Francesco Guicciardini.

She gives him a small book Oxford. He takes it.

OXFORD

Thank you, thank you so much, my, my Juliet

They exit. Arm about her waist.

28. VERONA--STREET
(VERONICA, OXFORD)

Enter Veronica and the maid, Maria, taking a bundle in a white cloth. The cloth has blood stains.

VERONICA

(To maid)

Maria, Take mia bambino to the church. Take tuo bambino to the church. Eduardo. Ma Eduardo

Enter Oxford and sees Maria leaving with bundle. He looks at it and sees what it is..

To Oxford

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Il mio bambino è morto. Il mio bambino è morto.

OXFORD

You were with child?

VERONICA

Tuo bambino to the church. Eduardo. Ma Eduardo. Ma bambino Eduardo.

OXFORD

You did not tell me.

VERONICA

I wanted your child. I wanted tuo bambino.

OXFORD

I will be gone.

VERONICA

I don't care. I don't care. You would know someday. Someday you would know you had a fine bambino. Our child. Our child. You would see him. You would see him someday. A fine young man. Tuo bambino. Tuo bambino.

OXFORD

I will stay in Italy to be with you.

VERONICA

No. Your life. Your country. Your art is in Angleterre.

OXFORD

I, I, I, no, never.

Oxford puts his arm around.

OXFORD (CONT'D)

Let us go to the Church. We will bury our bambino, Eduardo.

Exit Veronica and Oxford.

29. ENGLAND--COURT
(ELIZABETH, OXFORD)

Enter Elizabeth, sits on her throne. Oxford strides through the courtiers and ladies. He has something wrapped in his hand. He approaches Queen Elizabeth and bows.

ELIZABETH

Our cousin, the Earl of Oxford, returns from Italy. Bearing gifts, I see.

OXFORD

Yes, your majesty.
(Hands the Queen a small packet)

ELIZABETH

Such wonderful gloves. Embroidered. Diamonds.

OXFORD

Fit for a Queen, your majesty.

ELIZABETH

I am a Queen, so they must fit me.

How are you, my lord? After your adventures in Italia.

OXFORD

Older, your majesty. Older.

THE END