

# **“I knew him in Padua”: London theatre and early modern constructions of erudition\***

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines one aspect of the two-way cultural traffic between London and Padua: how the city of Padua figured in debates about the nature of masculinity in early modern London, especially its theatres. Invariably known primarily for its university—*noted by Coryat and Moryson, a tourist attraction for Chaucer, Sidney, and Milton*—the name “Padua” became synonymous with “erudition.” While learnedness was in theory a positive quality, the place of learnedness in a declining honor culture and its complex role in constituting masculinity remained a contentious subject. English writers by turns envied or scorned the learning acquired in Italy, and invocations of Padua and its link to rapier fencing resulted in a series of contradictory figures in the drama of Shakespeare and Webster: doctors, pedants, enlightened philosophers, lovers, murderers for hire.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; Webster; Jonson; Padua; Italy; university; fencing; masculinity; honor.

### **“Le conocí en Padua”: El teatro de Londres y las construcciones de la erudición en la temprana edad moderna**

RESUMEN: Este artículo examina un aspecto del tráfico cultural de ida y vuelta entre Londres y Padua: cómo la ciudad de Padua aparecía en debates acerca de la naturaleza de la masculinidad en el Londres de la edad moderna, especialmente en sus teatros. Conocida princi-

### **“Conheci-o em Pádua”: O teatro de Londres e as construções da erudição na idade proto-moderna**

RESUMO: Este artigo examina um aspeto do tráfico cultural mútuo entre Londres e Pádua: como Pádua aparecia nos debates sobre a natureza da masculinidade em Londres na idade proto-moderna, especialmente nos seus teatros. Conhecida principalmente pela sua universidade—

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palmente por su universidad—de prestigio para Coryat y Moryson, una atracción turística para Chaucer, Sidney y Milton— el nombre “Padua” se convirtió en sinónimo de erudición. Aunque la erudición era, en teoría, una cualidad positiva, su posición dentro de una cultura del honor en declive y su complejo papel en la constitución de la masculinidad seguían siendo un tema polémico. Los escritores ingleses envidiaban y desdénaban a la vez el aprendizaje adquirido en Italia, y las menciones a Padua y su vínculo con la esgrima con estoque dieron lugar a una serie de figuras contradictorias en el teatro de Shakespeare y Webster: doctores, pedantes, filósofos ilustrados, amantes, asesinos a sueldo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Shakespeare; Webster; Jonson; Padua; Italia; universidad; esgrima; masculinidad; honor.\*\*

reconhecida por Coryat e Moryson, uma atração turística para Chaucer, Sidney e Milton—o nome “Pádua” converteu-se num sinónimo de erudição. Embora a erudição fosse, em teoria, uma qualidade positiva, a sua posição numa cultura de honra em declínio e o seu papel complexo na constituição da masculinidade permaneceram um tema polémico. Os escritores ingleses invejavam ou escarneciam à vez o saber adquirido em Itália, e menções a Pádua e à sua relação com a esgrima com florete resultaram numa série de figuras contraditórias no teatro de Shakespeare e de Webster: doutores, pedantes, filósofos iluminados, amantes e assassinos a soldo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Shakespeare; Webster; Jonson; Pádua; Itália; universidade; esgrima; masculinidade; honra.\*\*\*

For Shakespeare and his generation, the name “Italy” conjured contradictory images of rich cultural origins, cynical political philosophy, heroic action, treachery and deceit, romantic love, and threatening Catholicism, among others.<sup>1</sup> The early modern English tropes of “Italy” proceeded in large part from cultural envy—envy of the deep well of Italian culture and history—but also from envy’s inverse, a sense of cultural inferiority, of somehow losing the national identity of “Englishness”; this cultural anxiety was often projected outwards, turning Italy into a threatening other. Nevertheless, the grand tour of many Englishmen in the early modern period usually included Italy, especially Venice and Rome, as has been well documented (Stoye 1989; Chaney and Wilks 2014). For many writers, the journey also included a stop in Padua,<sup>2</sup> from

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\*\* Translation into Spanish by Tamara Pérez-Fernández.

\*\*\* Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Ramalheite.

<sup>1</sup> The critical and editorial work of Michele Marrapodi in particular has fully addressed these tropes about “Italy.”

<sup>2</sup> See Woolfson 1998, and his follow-up article (2013). This entire issue of *Renaissance Studies* 27.4 has a relevant special topic: “The Italian University in the Renaissance,” edited by David Rundle and Alessandra Petrina.

Chaucer, who *may* have met Petrarch there (Gray 2012),<sup>3</sup> and Sir Philip Sidney, who preferred Padua to Venice,<sup>4</sup> to John Milton, who passed through Padua in 1639, and who had met Padua's most famous scientist, Galileo, on an earlier trip (though the meeting was in Florence).<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hoby studied in Padua to "obtain the Italian tung" with which he would later translate Castiglione's *The Courtier* (Hoby 1902, 8; Bartlett 2006, 125–26). Shakespeare, too, repeatedly travelled to Padua... in his imagination – though some have claimed an actual trip (Roe 2011). Meticulous scholarship, however, has detailed how Shakespeare, like most Englishmen, gained his knowledge of Italy. In the first wave of this scholarship, his direct, actual knowledge of specific texts and authors was explored in depth. Whether through circulating unpublished manuscripts, mediated texts of contemporaries such as William Painter, or through his own perhaps limited capacity to read Italian (or French versions of it), Shakespeare was acquainted with the works of a surprising number of Italian writers.<sup>6</sup> In more recent work, however, a fruitful and wide-ranging intertextual approach has been prominent. Michael J. Redmond (2009, 2) has argued that "Italy was synonymous with intertextuality in early modern English culture," while Keir Elam (2004a) simply titled his review article in a collection of essays, "Italy as intertext." Whatever the source of his information, Shakespeare often had the Veneto in general in mind, with Verona and Venice, as well as Padua, the location of other early plays (most famously, the setting for *The Taming of the Shrew*); indeed, in the Folio text of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed even bids Lance "welcome to Padua," when they seem to be in Milan.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chaucer's Clerk says "I wol you telle a tale which that I | Lerner at Padowe of a worthy clerk [...] Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete, | Highte this clerk" ("Clerk's Prologue," 26–27, 31–32; Chaucer 1957, 101 [see 26n.]).

<sup>4</sup> Sidney's only known extant foreign purchase was "a copy of Guicciardini's history of Italy, bought in Padua on 20 June 1574" (Duncan-Jones 1991, 76).

<sup>5</sup> His visit with Galileo might instead have been in the spring of 1639.

<sup>6</sup> Including Aretino, Ariosto, Bandello, Boccaccio, Castiglione, and Contarini, to name just a few of the ABCs.

<sup>7</sup> On this aspect of the play, see especially Cioni 2004; Marrapodi 1999 and 2014. Given the substantial work already devoted to *Shrew*, I will focus on other plays of the period.

<sup>8</sup> The line is either a joke, an error in the transcription and printing process, or perhaps Shakespeare just daydreaming.

Venice and Rome were by far the most fully described and imagined Italian cities—the first for its interlinked elements of power, commerce, and sex; the latter for its past Roman glories and present Papal authority—and both possessed a political and religious power that Padua never achieved. Nevertheless, the name “Padua” was also a complex signifier of considerable cultural weight, and it was frequently invoked in specific contexts. The city’s link with early modern London was substantial—both material (there were many travelers in both directions, from merchants, religious refugees, diplomats, and language teachers to actors) as well as virtual, or discursive.

For Shakespeare and most of his audience, “Padua” — both a real place and a cultural construct — was, above all, a symbol of erudition. The city’s name usually evoked one or both of two related associations: the famous university, and the city’s fencing schools. Its university was consistently mentioned by English travelers. When he wasn’t chatting up Venetian prostitutes, for example, Thomas Coryat spent three days in Padua in 1608, noting its 1500 university students. He said that “more students of forraine and remote nations doe live in Padua, then in any one University of Christendome” (Coryat 1905, 1.297), while Fynes Moryson described the university as “third for antiquity, but cheefe for dignity,” known especially for its excellence in medicine, mathematics, and music (1967, 430, 433). In his *Second Frutes* of 1591, John Florio identified various Italian cities with a single characteristic: Venice was *ricca* (rich), for example, Genoa *superba* (proud), and Florence *bella* (fair), while “*Padova dotta*” (“Padoa learned”) (1591, 108–109).<sup>9</sup> Samuel Lewkenor, in his review of the universities of Europe in 1600, praised

the world amazing glorie of her [Padua’s] farre renowned Academie, which in fame and dignitie surmounting all other Italian Universities, is as it were an other Athenian Areopage, which hath alwayes carefully nourished, and studiously brought up men excellently learned in the liberall sciences. (Lewkenor 1600, I3v)

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<sup>9</sup> Florio’s knowledge of Italy seems to have been entirely oral and textual, as he was born in England, raised in Switzerland, and apparently never set foot on the peninsula (Wyatt 2005, 166).

The most casual allusions to the city invariably referenced the university, and by extension, learning *per se*.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, “Padua” became the code word for many types of erudition. When Portia disguises herself as Balthazar to preside over Shylock’s trial in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare invokes the specialized erudition of legal knowledge by certifying her (or his) expertise in letters come from Bellario, “a learned doctor” from “Padua” (4.1.105, 109).<sup>11</sup> In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Padua is full of schoolmasters (and those pretending to be such) and students. Lucentio is typical in that he has come to Padua from Florence to “haply institute | A course of learning and ingenious studies” (1.1.8–9), to “suck,” as his servant Tranio continues, “the sweets of sweet philosophy,” but, Tranio hopes, not to follow too rigorously the local “virtue and [...] moral discipline” (1.1.28, 30).

A second, related aspect of Padua’s reputation for knowledge is indicated in Moryson’s further comments on the city: “Padoa affordeth also most skillfull masters and teachers to Fence. So as the desyre to learne these vertues and qualityes, drawes many native and forragne gentlemen to spend some tyme in this university” (434). Montaigne visited the city in 1580–1581, but his travel journal never mentions the university at all; rather, he and his scribe “saw the schools of fencing, dancing, and equitation, at which more than a hundred French gentlemen were at this time seeking instruction” (Montaigne 1903, 2.10). Indeed, there often seemed little distinction between the university itself and the city’s fencing schools. In *Second Frutes*, Florio’s dialogue describes at length the qualities of an Italian gentleman—a “Padoan”—whose fencing skill with rapier and

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<sup>10</sup> As in the first line of Robert Greene’s 1583 romance *Mamillia*: “The Citie of Padua, renowned as wel for the antiquitie of the famous Universitie, as also for the notable ryver now called Po etc.” (A4r). Such examples could be multiplied at length. I have silently modernized u/v throughout.

<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare’s inspiration for Portia’s legal knowledge might have come from Vincentio Saviolo’s book on fencing (see below), which, in a section praising “The nobility of Women,” says that “At Padua where I was borne, in my time was a Gentlewoman of good reckoning, that professed the civile lawe publicquelye, came dayly into the colleges and schooles, and disputed with all the Doctors and schollers of the universitie” (1595, Mm3r). In spite of such comments, however, and despite the university of Padua granting the first doctoral degree in the world to a woman (Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia, 1678, in philosophy [“History”]), virtually all of the figures associated with its learning were male.

dagger (“most gentleman-like weapons”) is the quintessence of his virtues (Florio 1591, 116–19).

The topos of erudition, both of the university and the fencing schools, resulted in a series of contradictory figures associated with Padua, as we will see: enlightened philosophers, humanist scholars, lovers, pedants, murderers for hire. I will proceed here by examining several gentlemen who came from, or were said to have studied and lived, in Padua, and consider their real and symbolic connections to cultural debates in early modern London and their representations on the London stage from the 1590s through 1620—beginning with the gentleman from Padua to whom Florio refers above, “master V. S.” (117), or Vincentio Saviolo, the famous fencing teacher from Padua who lived and practiced in London, and who had also studied fencing in Spain (Aylward 1956, 51). Around 1590, Saviolo had taken over a fencing school established in 1576 in Blackfriars by another Italian, Rocco Benetti, one of whose patrons was Sir Walter Raleigh.<sup>12</sup> Following the 1594 translation into English of Giacomo di Grassi’s *True Art of Defence*, a highly technical how-to manual, Saviolo’s 1595 work, *Vincentio Saviolo his Practice* was the best-known and most important statement of the Italian fencing method and, equally important, its relation to the concept of honor. Saviolo—Florio said that he “looks like Mars himself” (Florio 1591, 117)—offered the possibility that a man “small of stature and weake of strength, may with a little removing of his foot, a sodain turning of his hand, a slight declining of his bodie, subdue and overcome the fierce braving pride of tall and strong bodies” (B1v); indeed “courage and strength [...] are nothing except [a man] have knowledge or arte” (C3v). Ultimately, Saviolo claims, “the more skill a man hath of his weapon the more gentle and curteous should he shewe himselfe, for in truth this is rightly the honour of a brave Gentleman, and so much the more is hee to bee esteemed” (C4v). In passages such as this, Saviolo reflects an ongoing crisis within the early modern honor culture, as Lawrence Stone (1961) and Mervyn James (1986) among others have described. As early as 1583, Sir Thomas Smith had noted that

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<sup>12</sup> The school seems to have been founded in 1563 by William Joyner, one of the earliest Masters of Defence—an ironic origin, given the attacks on Italianate fencing by later Masters of Defence (see below). One of Joyner’s students was Richard Tarlton (Borden 2006, 135).

whosoever studieth the lawes of the realme, who studieth in the universities, who professeth liberall sciences, and to be shorte, who can live idly and without manuall labour, and will beare the port, charge and countenanunce of a gentleman [...] shall be taken for a gentleman. (Smith 1583, 27)

The entire debate is neatly encapsulated in the title of a 1600 reprint of a 1595 work translated from the Italian: *A Discourse Whether a Noble Man by Birth or a Gentleman by desert is greater in Nobilitie*.<sup>13</sup> Sir George Buck, James I's Master of the Revels, complained that the sons of "merchants, tradesmen or artificers" and others of humble birth "can be made gentleman" simply by admission to an "inne of court," whereas, for Buck, "no man can be made gentleman but by his father" (1615, 969).

The old idea of nobility through birth, in a long process of decay, gave way to an emerging concept, which Saviolo exemplifies, in which art rather than nature, and erudition (in part) rather than mere blood, became the hallmarks of masculine worth. Saviolo at one point meditates on this transformation:

What is become of the gentilitie and inbredde courtesie of auncient noble Gentlemen? where is the magnanimitye of the honourable Knightes of fore-going times, whose vertues as they are recorded in histories wherin we read of them, so ought to have beene lefte to their posteritye, that in them we might see the image (now forgotten) of auncient true Nobilitye? But since all things fall to decaye, it is no mervaille though virtue (I speake with all due reverence and favour) bee not found but in few: for surelye there be many in whome nothing remaineth but the bare tytle of nobilitye, in that they be Gentlemen borne: who in their manners wholly degenerate from their auncestors, and make no account either of honour or dishonour, giving themselves to such pleasures, as their unbrideled appetite leadeth them unto. (O4r)

A man's natural inferiority can be overcome by his knowledge, Saviolo demonstrated, and thus at least one aspect of gentility may be *performed* rather than merely inherited. English conduct manuals agreed, as in Richard Brathwait's *The English Gentleman*, which

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<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Battista Nenna's work, first published in Venice in 1542, John Huntington remarks, "achieves a style which constantly voices ideas critical of a nobility of blood and riches but never authorizes them," with "an element of evasion" of the more radical ideas (2001, 69-76).

featured a long section on education, “the Seasoner or instructresse of Youth” (1630, L2r), as one of the key characteristics of gentility. Henry Peacham, too, in his *Compleat Gentleman*, has a long chapter on “the dignitie and necessity of Learning in Princes and Nobilitie,” arguing that “Since Learning [...] is an essentiall part of Nobilitie [...] for whatsoever dependeth on the culture of the mind; it followeth, that who is nobly borne, and a Scholler withall, deserveth double Honour” (Peacham 1622, D3v).

English opposition to Saviolo and his new-fangled non-English methods was most vociferous in George Silver’s *Paradoxes of Defence* of 1599, in which he mocked both the jargon — “o you Italian teachers of Defence, where are your *Stocatas, Imbrocatas, Mandritas, Puntas, & Puynta reversas, Stramisons, Passatas, Carricados, Amazzas, & Incartatas* [?]” (H4r) — and, as Elam has shown in an important essay, lamented the emasculation and effeminizing of the male body produced (or imagined) by English adoptions of Italian fashions of fencing, clothing, and language, leading to what Elam slyly calls “a form of poniard envy” (Elam 2004b, 33). Silver touted instead solid, traditional masculine English virtues, as represented by the broadsword and buckler — weapons that were inevitably class-inflected as “low”<sup>14</sup> — to counteract the fact that “we like degenerate sonnes, have forsaken our forefathers vertues with their weapons, and have lusted like men sicke of a strange ague, after the strange vices and devises of Italian, French and Spanish Fencers” (A4v). Nothing, Silver argued, is more destructive of English manhood than the “Italian teachers of Defence [...] [who propagate] these Italianated, weake, fantasticall, and most divellish and imperfect fights” (B1r). In another passage (also quoted by Elam 2004b), Silver laments that

the Italian teachers of Offence [...] have transformed our boyes into men, and our men into boyes, our strong men into weaknesse, our valiant men doubtfull, and manie worthie men resolving themselves upon their false resolutions, have most wilfully in the field, with their Rapiers ended their lives. (I1r)

The technology of fencing, then, became one of the several contested discursive sites on which English masculinity was constructed.

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., Florio: “What weapon is that buckler? A clownish dastardly weapon, and not for a Gentleman” (1578, E1v).



Italian rapier fencing, as exemplified by the Padovan Saviolo, was simultaneously dangerous and inadequate, endowing the weak with unnatural power (because the rapier was so much more dangerous than a broadsword) but also making them vulnerable to attack, turning boys into men – which one would think a desirable power – but also turning men into boys. The phallic language of swords, rapiers, pikes, and so on reflects the contradictions and anxieties of masculinity at the time. Both Saviolo and Silver, to close off this point, described the location of fencing practice as a “school” or “academy,” and for both writers the expert fencers were termed “masters” and those training were “scholars.” Fencing knowledge therefore *was* erudition. “Padua” as a symbol of learning, good and bad, was thus frequently deployed into much larger debates about the nature of noble identity: in some cases, erudition could supplant rather than merely supplement an essential quality; in brief, erudition could produce a performance, or imitation of nobility.

Like any aspect of conduct or manners, however, the skill or technology could be abused, and no imported skill seemed more controversial or subject to ridicule than rapier fencing and its pretensions to a specialized knowledge. Many early modern plays echo Silver in their mockery of Saviolo’s rich Italianate jargon, such as Armado’s complaints in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* that Cupid “the passado he respects not, the duello he regards not” (1.2.172–73) or Mercutio’s mockery – “the immortal *passado!* The *punto reverso!*” (2.4.25–26) of Tybalt’s affectations in *Romeo and Juliet*;<sup>15</sup> Jonson would incarnate the comic aspects of such knowledge in the character of Bobadilla in *Every Man in His Humour* (see below). One pamphlet typically warned that “although indeede some be excellently learned [in Italy], yet are they all given to counterfeit learning [...]. For from a Tapster upwards, they are all discoursers in certain matters and qualities; as Horsmanship, [and] weapons” (*Profitable* 1633, H1v–H2r). The dangers of rapier fencing, on the other hand, were detailed at length by Silver and others. As Brathwait warned, “For fence-play, I have knowne some puffed up with a presumption of skill, to have

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<sup>15</sup> Mercutio’s description of Tybalt as the “very butcher of a silk button” (2.4.23) probably alludes to Rocco Bonetti, said to be able to “hit anie Englishman with a thrust upon anie button” (Silver 1599, K1r); see Holmer 1994 for the links between Saviolo and *Romeo and Juliet*.

beene too apt in giving offence," overcome by ambition and vainglory, even perishing in their self-over-estimation (1630, Dd3r).

Shakespeare identifies one gentleman, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, as "Signor Benedick of Padua" (1.1.34). But why is Benedick from Padua?<sup>16</sup> The play's action takes place in Messina, and Benedick has somehow made it over 1250 kilometers down the peninsula without any explanation; nor is there even a hint of Benedick as a character in the probable sources of the Claudio-Hero story, such as Bandello's novella of Timbreo and Fenicia, or in Munday's 1585 play, *Fedele and Fortunio . . . a very pleasaunt and fine conceited Comoedie, of two Italian Gentlemen* (Bullough 1956, 2.112-34 and 2.134-39). *Much Ado* is dated around 1598 or early 1599 (McEachern 2006, 125-28), after Saviolo's pamphlet and just before Silver's response, a conjunction that explains why, even before he is identified as from Padua, that Beatrice refers to him with a different name: "I pray you, is Signor Mountanto returned from the wars or no?" (1.1.29-30). While the Arden Two and Three, New Cambridge, and Oxford editions all offer substantial glosses of "mountanto" as a fencing term for an upward thrust, and the latter three as an elaborate, possibly self-betraying sexual joke by Beatrice, who may have been "mounted" by Benedick at one time<sup>17</sup> and in any event mocks his swordsmanship, in all senses, none of these editions makes the obvious connection to affected fencing and Padua. Shakespeare quite deliberately links Benedick to Padua not only for his fencing and wit, then, but also because he will be the only man in the play to learn how to change.

Benedick, Beatrice mocks, once "set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight; and my uncle's fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid and challenged him at the bird-bolt" (1.1.37-40); like the cowardly fencers Silver describes, or the cowardly would-be duelist Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*,

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<sup>16</sup> Humphreys had labelled this fact as one of the play's "inconsistencies left in haste" in the Arden Two edition (1981, 65); Levith suggested the explanation was that Benedick's "wit and learning" reflected the "university city of Padua" (1989, 77), which is closer to the mark.

<sup>17</sup> As suggested by Beatrice's comment to Don Pedro on having lost the "heart" of Benedick: "Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice; therefore Your Grace may well say I have lost it" (2.1.265-68).

Benedick, she implies, may be all talk and no action, his affected challenge received only by a fool, with the result that he is “no less than a stuffed man” (1.1.55–56). “The gentleman,” the messenger in the scene concludes, “is not in your books,” to which Beatrice replies, “An he were, I would burn my study” (1.1.73–75). By the end of the play, however, Benedick will offer a deadly serious challenge to Claudio.

Benedick eventually comes to his senses, tricked by his colleagues into admitting or allowing his love for Beatrice; his transformation is anticipated in Beatrice’s comment, after hearing of Don John’s “melancholy disposition”: “He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick. The one is too like an image and says nothing, and the other too like my lady’s eldest son, evermore tattling” (2.1.5–9). Benedick remains infantilized and effeminized, then, a boy, a “lady’s oldest son,” not a man. Much of *Much Ado’s* plot, however, shows noble gentlemen behaving badly. The noblemen of the play have proven their worth in war but the women of Messina are subordinated to them in the most stereotypical sexist ways—Hero’s worth seems entirely constituted by her chastity, to take but one example, and the lords treat her and her father badly. Here Shakespeare makes another critical transformation in his source material in order to rescue the nobility who disgrace themselves: he turns Bandello’s villain in the source narrative—who was a “young knight of noble family named Sir Gironde Olerio Valenziano, who had proved himself a doughty warrior in the wars and was also one of the most splendid and liberal members of the Court” (Bullough 1956, 2.114)—into Don John, “the Bastard” (1.1.90.2sd), an ironic and appropriate identity in a play so consumed with male anxiety over cuckoldry. Not “noble” in his lineage, then, Don John becomes the play’s scapegoat for masculine aggression and ignoble action. The other noblemen’s masculine identity is thus decontaminated by the play’s end, when Don John is exposed and punished, while Claudio is forgiven.

Finally, when Beatrice asks Benedick to “Kill Claudio,” and he resists, her mockery indicts all the noblemen as effeminized, in terms that might remind us of George Silver’s lament:

O, that I were a man for his sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones,

too. He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie and swears it. (4.1.316–21)<sup>18</sup>

Leonato and his brother, in challenging Claudio, rehearse again the critique that Silver had articulated: "I'll prove it on his body if he dare, | Despite his nice fence and his active practice [...]. I'll whip you from your foining fence, | Nay, as I am a gentleman, I will" (5.1.74–75, 84–85). Leonato's brother describes Claudio and Don Pedro as "Scambling, outfacing, fashionmonging boys" (5.1.95), not men. Benedick had much in common with the other men at the beginning of the play, but by now has learned that "In a false quarrel there is no true valor" (5.1.121), and he has come to challenge both. By the end of the play, Benedick's wit is, as Margaret says, "as blunt as the fencer's foils, which hit but hurt not," to which he says, "I give thee the bucklers" (5.2.13–14, 16–17). Silver's defense of sword and buckler against the fencer's foil turns here into yet another series of erotic jokes turning on the potency of men's "swords" (18) and "pikes" (21). I don't want to overstate the significance of the debate about fencing within the full text of *Much Ado*, a rich and complex play; but Shakespeare repeatedly links the play's interrogation of masculinity and nobility with traces of this discourse, and Benedick's origin in Padua and his association with fencing and learning are essential traits.

At about the same time as *Much Ado*, Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) gave the world Bobadilla, the cowardly braggart who takes a beating rather than defend himself; Jonson originally set the play in Italy—in Florence—in the 1601 Quarto, but revised it to London in the 1616 Folio. In the Quarto, Lorenzo Junior (=Edward Knowell in F) expresses his disgust in terms that Silver would have approved: "'Sblood, an' these be your tricks, your *passados* and your *montantos*, I'll none of them. Oh, God! That this age should bring forth such creatures!" (4.2.118–20Q; 4.6.132–36F). Jonson also compares Bobadilla to "that fencing Burgullian" (3.5.15Q/F), an allusion to a notorious Burgundian fencer, John Barrose, who according to John Stow had "challenged all the Fencers of England"

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<sup>18</sup> The metadramatic aspects of the situation are self-consciously signaled by Beatrice's next line: "I cannot be a man with wishing; therefore, I will die a woman with grieving."

(Stow 1605, 1308);<sup>19</sup> he was hanged outside Ludgate on 10 July 1598 for killing an officer who had arrested him for debt. A few months later, on 22 September 1598, while *Every Man In* was probably still playing at the Curtain Theatre, with Shakespeare listed in Jonson's Folio as one of the actors, Jonson was indicted at Shoreditch on a charge of manslaughter, having killed the actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel. Jonson later told William Drummond that Spencer had challenged him ("appealed to the fields"), and that Spencer's "sword was ten inches longer than his" (one of the dangers of the rapier that Silver would warn about). Spencer had "hurt him [Jonson] in the arm" before being overcome; for this offence Jonson "was imprisoned, and almost at the gallows" (Donaldson 1985, 600, ll. 200-4), and branded on the thumb as a convicted felon.<sup>20</sup> In the Quarto, finally, Doctor Clement is described as "the *gonfaloniere* of the state here, an excellent rare civilian, and a great scholar [...]. I have heard many of his jests in Padua" (3.2.44-51Q); in the 1616 Folio text, "Padua" was revised simply to "the university" (3.2.258F), the two terms by now synonymous. Shakespeare's most famous university student, Hamlet, would two or three years later be suitably cautious before his final duel with Laertes, who had been trained in "rapier" by a "Norman" fencer—the ominously named "Lamord" (4.7.91-99). Offered the rapiers to choose among, Hamlet warily asks, "These foils have all a length?" (5.2.263).<sup>21</sup>

In spite of its European-wide reputation for education and profound knowledge, then, Padua's university and its alter ego, the fencing school, also seemed to some English writers to produce pedantry and folly, and sometimes much worse, as we will see in a moment. George Chapman, for example, regularly invoked the signifying power of the name "Padua" in his comedies as a foolish or curdled pedantry. The scheming, duplicitous Rinaldo in *All Fools*

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<sup>19</sup> References to Barrose also appear in Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1602; Preface, 15), Marston's *Scourge of Villainy* (1598; Satire 11, 60-63), and Guilpin's *Skiatheleia* (1598; D5v).

<sup>20</sup> Jonson also boasted of his military service "in the Low Countries," where he "killed an enemy and taken *opima spolia* from him" (Donaldson 1985, 600), indicating a one-on-one duel.

<sup>21</sup> When Marcello sends a challenge to his brother Flamineo in *The White Devil* (see below), he says "bear him my sword, | And bid him fit the length on't" (5.1.200-1), and Flamineo ("I have brought your weapon back") returns and "runs Marcello through" (5.2.14sd.), an act that implies a rapier.

(printed 1605) is a malcontent “younger son” whom the garrulous fool Gostanzo praises to his father: “You have a younger son at Padua, | I like his learning well,” and foolishly advises him, “Make him your heir, | And let your other [son] walk” (1.1.316–18). In *May Day* (printed 1611), Chapman’s Quintiliano, a notorious swindler, cheats the naïve and foolish Giovanello, “a Freshman come from Padua” to Venice “to see fashions,” snapping up this “excellent morsel” (2.1.536–39, 626). Despite praising him as “a fine Ciceronian” (2.1.682), Quintiliano nevertheless cons him of five pounds with a further insult: “let the scholar report at Padua that Venice has other manner of learning belongs to it. What does his *Continuum et Contiguuum* here? Let ‘em go to the ink-pot and beware of the wine-pot” (4.1.13–17). In *The Gentleman Usher* (printed 1606), the pedant Sarpego (his name probably puns on “serpigo,” a skin disease) reads his awful poem to the unnamed Italian court, to which the Prince remarks “No inkhorn ever did bring forth the like” (1.1.192). Sarpego boasts that “I can both act and teach | To any words. When I in Padua school’d it, | I play’d in one of Plautus’ comedies, | Namely *Curculio*, where his part I acted, | Projecting from the poor sum of four lines | Forty fair actions” (1.1.197–202). *Curculio* is the pedant in Plautus’s play of the same name; the word “*curculio*” means grain-worm, or weevil, hence he is figuratively as well as structurally a parasite. While Chapman had fought in the Netherlands, there is no evidence that he ever traveled to Padua, but he certainly knew of its reputation, both positive and negative (Eccles 1946; Burnett 2006).

In a much darker vein of allusion, the wise shepherd in Brian Melbancke’s 1583 euphuistic novel *Philotimus* says that

I was somtimes a scholler in Padua, where I tooke such pains as became a student, and reaped scarce the gaines of a slothfull trewant. When I had taken some degrees, my courage was enhaunced with a loftie conceite, but when I learned by experience abroad, how course account was made of learning, I was daunted with a selie confusion. Then did I learne that it was easier for a swashbuckler, with his blasphemous othes to come to credit and estimation, then for a poore sielie scholler with all his witte and learning, to reape one peny profit or commoditie. I lived abroad with slender diot, and was mocked abroad as a sottish idiot, I tooke

paines for the weale publicke, but was rewarded slenderly with private wealth. (Colby 1969, 306)<sup>22</sup>

The learning and erudition of “Fair Padua” could therefore signify not only a “loftie conceite” and “nursery of arts” but also the stereotypical plodding pedant or the jabbering of fencer’s language, and even, as we will see, a nursery of alienation and evil. Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* had shown the dangers of knowledge, and Faustus, too, had traveled to “Padua” (8.16). One of the twinned murder plots of Robert Yarington’s 1601 *Two Lamentable Tragedies* takes place “Neere Padua [...]. By a false Uncle, on his brothers sonne, | Left to his carefull education, | By dying Parents [...] Looke for no mirth, unlesse you take delight, | In mangled bodies, and in gaping wounds, | Bloodily made by mercy wanting hands” (A3r).

If the years 1595–1605 reflected considerable English interest in rapier fencing, linked to Padua as a cultural symbol of learning and/or pedantry, the period following to 1618 registers a rapidly deepening concern, including King James’s, over the violence of the rapier duel and the extreme concept of honor that led many members of the nobility into deadly combat.<sup>23</sup> The comic duels seen in *As You Like It*, with Touchstone’s 7 stages of lying, and in *Twelfth Night*,<sup>24</sup> had given way to real bloodshed. After a series of notable deaths in 1613—including challenges by Sir Edward Sackville, Francis Lord Norris, Grey Lord Chandos, Robert Earl of Essex and others (Stone 1965, 242–50)—King James issued a series of

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<sup>22</sup> A few years later, Greene had commented that “I thinke ye schollers of Padua have so long read Platoes workes, that ye tast of Platoes vanities, I mene not of his philosophy but of his follies: for now he beareth no touch in Padua that can not as well brave it with Plato as reason with Plato, that covet as well to imitate Aristotle in the sumptuousnes of his apparell as the subtilnesse of his arguments, that hath not a tailer as well to picture out his lineaments, as a Stationer to furnish out his librarie” (Greene 1591, C2v).

<sup>23</sup> Ironically, as Moryson observed, “the cause why single fights are more rare in England in these times is the dangerous fight at single rapier” (qtd. Aylward 1905, 62): fewer duels perhaps, but more deadly ones.

<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare seems, in Touchstone’s speech, to be parodying (or in some cases virtually quoting) from the second part of Saviolo’s *Practice* (see R4v–T4v on “the nature of Lies”), or possibly both writers are borrowing from William Segar’s *The Booke of Honor and Armor* (1590), while in *Twelfth Night* Toby inflates the skill of “Cesario”—“They say he has been fencer to the Sophy” (3.4.280)—in terms also taken from Saviolo: “The gentleman will, for his honor’s sake, have one bout with you. He cannot by the *duello* avoid it” (3.4.306–8).

proclamations in 1613 (one 119 pages long) seeking to curb deadly rapier duels (and, as a side benefit, de-militarize the aristocracy),<sup>25</sup> and Middleton and Rowley cashed in a few years later with a play – *A Fair Quarrel* – that features a series of honor-challenges, some for trivial causes, culminating in a near-fatal rapier duel between Captain Ager and the Colonel (see Low 2003, 108–18). And in 1618, Middleton published *The Peacemaker*, repeating the arguments James had already made in print and fulsomely praising him; Middleton complains that “the compounding of Quarrels is growne to a Trade [...] there be some Councell learned of *Duells* [...] incite [young men] to the Duell, and make an Art of it [...] so much Noble and Gentle blood shall be spilt upon such Follies” (D1v–D2r). In the same year, the anonymous author of *Swetnam the Woman-Hater* (1618; printed 1620) (Crandall 1969) had his cowardly protagonist hide from his pursuers by changing his name and opening a fencing school where he will teach “the very mysterie of Fencing,” including the “*Puncto*” (1.2.97–98, 74).

Some gentlemen suffered considerably from their experiences in Padua, as we have seen, showing the dark shadow of knowledge that destroys its subjects, of erudition breaking bad, such as a gentleman in John Webster’s 1612 play *The White Devil*. As he works to place his sister Vittoria with Duke Brachiano, Flamineo mocks her witless husband Camillo as

An excellent scholar – one that hath a head filled with calves’ brains without any sage in them – come crouching in the hams to you for a night’s lodging – that hath an itch in’s hams [...] Is he not a courtly gentleman? – When he wears white satin one would take him by his black muzzle to be no other creature than a maggot (1.2.123–29).

It takes one to know one, of course. When their scheme is interrupted and condemned by Cornelia, mother to Flamineo and Vittoria, Flamineo bitterly vents the story of his life, saying to his mother:

I would fain know where lies the mass of wealth  
Which you have hoarded for my maintenance,  
That I may bear my beard out of the level

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<sup>25</sup> *A Proclamation prohibiting the publishing of any reports or writings of Duels* (STC 8490); *A Proclamation against private Challenges and Combats* (STC 8497); and *A Publication of his Maties Edict, and Severe Censure against Private Combats and Combatants* (STC 8498.5).



Of my lord's stirrup.

.....

Pray what means have you  
 To keep me from the galleys, or the gallows?  
 My father proved himself a gentleman,  
 Sold all's land, and like a fortunate fellow  
 Died ere the money was spent. You brought me up,  
 At Padua I confess, where I protest,  
 For want of means (the university judge me)  
 I have been fain to heel my tutor's stockings  
 At least seven years. Conspiring with a beard  
 Made me a graduate, then to this Duke's service;  
 I visited the court, whence I returned –  
 More courteous, more lecherous by far,  
 But not a suit the richer – and shall I,  
 Having a path so open and so free  
 To my preferment, still retain your milk  
 In my pale forehead? No, this face of mine  
 I'll arm and fortify with lusty wine  
 'Gainst shame and blushing. (1.2.293–314)

Flamineo's story is typical in Jacobean drama: a family history of gentility, land-poor and now destitute, the hopes of courtly preferment dashed as he is now merely Brachiano's secretary, and soon his pander. The path to this disappointment led through the university at Padua, where Flamineo, for all his cunning, was already reduced to a parasitical existence doing menial tasks for his tutor, and was either a poor student—receiving his degree after seven years by simply reaching a particular age—or he “conspire[ed]” with some senior insider to get his degree. Either way, Flamineo displays contempt for erudition, at least as it is embodied in the foolish husband Camillo: “Will you be an ass|Despite your Aristotle, or a cuckold [?]” (1.2.64–65). In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Tranio also dismisses the relevance of Aristotle to his master Lucentio's mission:

[...] while we do admire  
 This virtue and this moral discipline,  
 Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray,  
 Or so devote to Aristotle's checks  
 As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured [...]  
 No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en.  
 In brief, sir, study what you most affect. (*Shrew* 1.1.29–33, 39–40)

In comedy, setting Padua's erudition aside in the name of "pleasure" has no serious consequences, as licentious Ovid displaces Aristotle's "checks," or self-restraint. In Webster's tragedy, however, there is nothing to rein in the diseased will, once moral philosophy has been pushed aside. Flamineo learned only the corruptions of status and self-aggrandizement at the university.

The final scenes of *The White Devil*, as in the sources, take place entirely in Padua, enacting the corruption of the court and its subversion of the ideals of nobility at savage length. When his villainy is exposed and he is captured, Flamineo mocks Lodovico's "idle questions": "I am i'th'way to study a long silence. | To prate were idle—I remember nothing. | There's nothing of so infinite vexation | As man's own thoughts" (5.6.198–202), and as he nears the moment of death he denies knowledge and philosophical questions altogether: "I do not look | Who went before, nor who shall follow me; | No, at myself I will begin and end: | 'While we look up to heaven we confound | Knowledge with knowledge'. O, I am in a mist" (5.6.252–56).<sup>26</sup> He dies shortly thereafter. Yet even in his death throes, Flamineo remains a student from the city of fencing schools, as he asks his murderers about their weapons, "O what blade is't? | A Toledo or an English fox?" (5.6.230–31)—that is, a rapier made of the famed Spanish steel, or a cruder English short sword.<sup>27</sup> On the boundary of death, Flamineo's question is quite literally academic.

Webster invented almost everything about Flamineo, whose sole mention in Webster's sources comes in one of the *Fugger News-letters*: at "2 o'clock at night [...] [Vittoria's] palace in Padua was found open. Fifty well-armed men thereupon entered and cruelly shot the

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<sup>26</sup> Hamlet, another melancholy university student, might have responded: "Sure he that made us with such large discourse, | Looking before and after, gave us not | That capability and godlike reason | To fust in us unused" (*Hamlet* 4.4.37–40).

<sup>27</sup> While "Toledo" referred to the particular hardness of the metal, it was more or less synonymous with "rapier": "the Toledo rapier" (Lodge 1596, F2r); "his Toledo Rapyer" (Savile 1596, E4r). Jonson's Bobadilla claims that his "rapier"—"A most perfect Toledo"—rivals the legendary swords of history such as "Excalibur" (*Every Man In* 2.3.124–50Q; 3.1.134–60F). The "English fox" supposedly referred to an image on the hilt (said to be a wolf originally), and was much less refined but at least not foreign: "hold take my sword in your hand, 'tis none of the sprusest, but 'tis a tough fox, will not faile his master" (Ford 1633, K3r); "I had a sword, I the flower of smithfield for a sword a right Fox" (Porter 1599, E3r). In *Henry V*, Pistol threatens the French soldier: "O Signieur Dew, thou diest on point of fox" (4.4.9).

brother of the Signora Accaramboni, a certain Duke Flaminio, as to the lady, they stabbed her where they found her at prayer” (Webster 1995, 1.373–74). “Near on six hundred” enraged citizens of Padua crying out for justice enacted their own revenge on the murderers; two of Vittoria’s servants, who opened the palace to the murderers, “were riven asunder with red-hot tongs, and killed with a hammer and then quartered,” while two of Bracciano’s advisers were “secretly strangled,” three others “torn to pieces by the mob as they were firing upon the house” and twenty others probably hanged (1.375). So much for the reign of justice and law in Padua. Certainly Webster transformed and transplanted some of the savagery of the full story into the rich character of Flamineo, whose education in Padua soured his nature and prompted his alienation.

Yet another gentleman of Padua, and a close literary cousin to Flamineo, is Webster’s Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612–1613). Antonio announces his entrance in the play and describes him as

The only court-gall; yet I observe his railing  
Is not for simple love of piety,  
Indeed he rails at those things which he wants,  
Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,  
Bloody, or envious, as any man,  
If he had means to be so. (1.1.23–28)

When Delio confirms that Bosola had been “seven years in the galleys, | For a notorious murder” suborned by the Cardinal, Antonio concludes

’Tis great pity  
He should be thus neglected, I have heard  
He’s very valiant. This foul melancholy  
Will poison all his goodness. (1.1.68–69, 73–76)

How did Bosola come to this condition of alienation, melancholy, and envy? Delio later relates Bosola’s history, and many in the audience might already have guessed it:

I knew him in Padua, a fantastical scholar, like such who study to know how many knots was in Hercules’ club, of what colour Achilles’ beard was, or whether Hector were not troubled with the tooth-ache. He hath studied himself half blear-eyed to know the true symmetry of Caesar’s nose by a shoeing-horn, and this he did to gain the name of a speculative man. (3.3.40–46)

Such figures reflect Jacobean realities of thwarted intellectuals and ambitious noblemen; as Lord Chancellor Ellesmere put it in 1611, “we have more need of better livings for learned men than of more learned men for these livings, for learning without living doth but breed traitors as common experience too well sheweth” (qtd. Curtis 2015, 193).<sup>28</sup>

In *Bosola*, once again Webster has almost totally invented his villain and his warped university career, who in the sources is simply a name: when one man hired to murder Antonio hesitates, according to William Painter’s translation of Belleforest’s adaptation of Matteo Bandello’s narrative,

it chanced that a *Lombarde* of larger conscience than the other, invegled with Covetousness, and hired for readie money, practised the death of the Duchesse pore husband. This bloody beast was called *Daniel de Bozola* that had charge of a certaine bande of footemen in *Millan*. This newe *Iudas* and assured manqueller [...] secretly conveyed himself in ambush (Webster 1995, 1.704),

and murdered Antonio. In both of his great plays, from the slightest of references in his sources, Webster fabricated his complex villains into disappointed graduates of the university of Padua, its great humanist ideals deformed into a dark, savage alienation and a deconstruction of earlier ideals of nobility and masculinity. Both of Webster’s villains, moreover, are sexually warped, loners who are voyeuristically attached to but alienated from vibrant, powerful women whose sexuality has led to their tragic fates. Webster himself never traveled to Padua (or anywhere in Italy), but he dramatically exploited its contradictory significations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See also the classic work by Hexter 1950. There are also several references to Padua, though less negative, in *The Devil’s Law-Case* (1617–1621?).

<sup>29</sup> Noting the lack of factual knowledge about Webster’s formal education, Forker observes that Webster’s “greatest plays betray a paradoxical respect for and suspicion of book learning such as may well have found parallels in an atmosphere where ‘official’ study was highly specialized, theoretical, and based largely on musty precedents” (1986, 52). In one of his “New Characters” essays of 1615, describing “A Fellow of a House [i.e. a university college],” Webster mocks his pedantry and cowardice: “Hee speakes Swords, Fights, *Ergo’s* [...]. He hath lesse use then possession of Bookes” (Webster 1995, 3.473). Webster also describes “An ordinary Fencer” in terms that would suit Andrew Aguecheek: “surely Nature meant him *Stock-fish*: his and a Dancing-schoole are inseparable adjuncts” (Webster 1995, 3.463–64).

Bosola's erudition, gained at Padua, curdled into triviality and curiosity. His satiric thrusts at the court and courtiers are not "for simple love of piety," for virtue's sake; rather, as Antonio says, "he rails at those things which he wants," just as English writers mocked or condemned in their own representations of Padua what they actually envied and desired. In one of the play's great verbal ironies, Bosola finds his role serving Ferdinand to be that of "a very quaint invisible devil in flesh: |An intelligencer" (1.1.253-54) or spy; the word and its variants ricochet through the play, the word most venomously invoked in Antonio's summary of the Cardinal: "he strews in his way flatterers, panders, intelligencers, atheists, and a thousand such political monsters" (1.1.156-58).<sup>30</sup> Like Flamineo, Bosola's aspirations, also undermined at the university, have declined from intelligence to intelligencer, humanist education transformed into aggression and violence. In *The White Devil*, Francisco says of the Cardinal "It is reported you possess a book |Wherein you have quoted, by intelligence, |The names of all the notorious offenders |Lurking about the city" (4.1.29-32)—now, the book of Padua is not by Erasmus or Aristotle but a black book of betrayal.<sup>31</sup>

Like Flamineo, Bosola also dies "In a mist" (5.5.93). In the final bloodbath, Bosola has wielded a "sword" — of "Justice" (5.5.38-39), in his mind—and mocks the dying Cardinal with an exquisite pun on his sword's "point" or tip: "I do glory |That thou, which stood'st like a huge pyramid |Begun upon a large and ample base, |Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing" (5.5.75-78). "Nothing" is the end to which Bosola also arrives: the Aristotelian ideal of virtuous behavior has fallen away, as Bosola says in his first words: "Miserable age, where only the reward |Of doing well is the doing of it!" (1.1.31-32). Later, as he deceives the Duchess, he ironically reassures her "No question but many an unbeneficed scholar |Shall pray for you, for this deed, and rejoice |That some preferment in the world can yet |Arise from merit" (3.2.279-82)—a moral lesson devoutly to be wished, once taught in Fair Padua, nursery of arts,

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<sup>30</sup> See also 2.3.69; 3.1.58; 3.2.229; 3.2.264; 4.1.131; and 5.2.209. The term is used frequently in *The White Devil* as well: 3.2.229; 4.1.44; 4.3.107; 4.3.138; and 5.1.220.

<sup>31</sup> The list of Englishmen in Padua given in the Appendix to Woolfson's book (1998) includes a large number of intelligencers, on both sides of the period's religious and political conflicts.

but too soon twisted into its opposite, in the corruptions of the Jacobean court projected upon the name of “Padua.” At first a positive signifier of learning in early modern London, the name “Padua” also eventually incarnated some of the corruptions of London. Thus, the home of the great university also became the graveyard of erudition, its scholars and fencers squandering their learning in self-destructive actions.

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