

“The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right”

*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene v, 196-197

## **The Shakespeare case: the influence of Titian and Pietro Aretino (Michelangelo Florio’s friend) on the Shakespearean works *Venus and Adonis* and *Hamlet***

*In the year of the celebrations of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reform (October 31<sup>st</sup> 2017), in the context of which Venice was awarded, with other European cities, the title of “European City of the Reformation”<sup>1</sup>*

*Abstract:* The present study, after a wide Introduction on the “Shakespeare Case” and the “Floriana Thesis” by Santi Paladino, contains some observations on the relationship between the Shakespearean theater and the visual arts; thus, in the light of the canon of “complementarity” between the visual arts (in particular, the Titian’s portraits) and the Aretino’s sonnets, which were prepared to explain, by means of the words, the “invisible conceit” conveyed in these portraits. Subsequently the possible influence of two Titian’s paintings on two Dramatist’s works is emphasized: 1) Titian’s painting, *Venus and Adonis* and the homonymous Dramatist’s poem; 2) Titian’s portrait of the Duke of Urbino - the “Gonzago” in *Hamlet* - and the Shakespearean representation of the ghost of King Hamlet, all armed and frowned. In the premise and in the conclusions, we propose the fundamental role of Michelangelo Florio (Aretino’s friend) and John Florio, in the authorship case, in accordance with the “Floriana Thesis” by Santi Paladino. Particular attention is dedicated to the method, used in Venice to circulate Lutheran works, by attributing their authorship to a Catholic cardinal; a method that could have been replicated also for Shakespeare’s works, under the reign of Elizabeth, the queen “*mere English*”, “*pure-blood English*”.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Further references, on the matter, may be read in the link <http://reformation-cities.org/?lang=en>

“The Shakespeare case: the influence of Titian’s paintings and Pietro Aretino’s writings (Michelangelo Florio’s friend) on the Shakespearean works *Venus and Adonis* and *Hamlet*” by Massimo Oro Nobili, Copyright © December 2017 by Massimo Oro Nobili. All rights Reserved

## SUMMARY

### Introduction

#### The Shakespeare Case

- i. Brief outline on the “Floriana Thesis” by Santi Paladino.
- ii. Michelangelo Florio’s fundamental life experiences and his cultural background. His theological culture. Michelangelo first “doubtful” and then (*Apologia*, f. A5r) “resolute to answer to all the despisers of the truth, in order to teach the Ignorant”, for his salvation - True “manifesto” of all Michelangelo’s work. His imprisonment in Rome and his meditations on existence and afterlife - The Dramatist as the “*Philosopher of Being*” - The torments listed by *Hamlet* in his soliloquy and those listed by Michelangelo Florio in his *Apology* - The act of fornication - His teaching Lady Jane Gray, Queen of England for nine days and then beheaded - The masterpiece of his Latin letter of 23 January 1552: the letter of “forgiveness”, which anticipates the words and contents of the discourse on “mercy” in the *Merchant of Venice* - Shakespeare as the “true playwright of mercy” (Von Balthasar) - Michelangelo Florio’s friendship with Aretino and his entourage (including Titian): Aretino’s pen, used as a “whip”, in the name of “*Veritas*”, is not so dissimilar from the Dramatist’s pen, used as a “lance brandished as at the eyes of Ignorance” – Michelangelo’s knowledge of Italy, its history and its proverbs – His exile – Florios’ library, where you can find the necessary texts for the preparation of Shakespeare’s works.
- iii. The candidacy of the Florios as the only current candidature - The demolition of the candidacies of Sir Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford by James Shapiro, 2011 - William Shakespeare and John Florio: a first linguistic-stylistic comparative analysis by Professor Laura Orsi, 2016 – “*The perfect compatibility of Shakespeare’s linguistic creativity with that of John Florio - their osmosis*” - The ultimate purpose of the strongly interdisciplinary studies on the two Florios: to better know the works of the Dramatist.
- iv. The three indefectible elements of the “Floriana thesis”: 1) The centrality of the Lutheran Reformation; 2) The conception of John Florio, through Michelangelo’s famous “act of fornication”; 3) The “danger which has been avoided”, thanks to the failure of the expedition of Philip II, Champion of Catholicism, aimed at invading Elizabeth's England, the “*mere English*”, “*pure-blood English*” and Anglican queen (the defeat of the *Armada* -1588).
- v. Who was the greatest, Michelangelo (who still had the Latin universal language as his reference) or John Florio (who was an important “contributor” of the nascent English universal language, at the dawn of the English colonial empire)? “Posterity will judge”! In our opinion, it was a “generational relay”, in which both these great humanists deserve to “get on the podium” to receive their deserved recognition.
- vi. A real “turning point” in Paladino's “Floriana thesis”: the recently discovered and documented friendship between Michelangelo Florio and Pietro Aretino; Aretino wrote, in April 1548, an affectionate letter to Fra Paolo Antonio Fiorentino (the name that Michelangelo had as a Franciscan preacher), imprisoned in Rome by the Inquisition in Tor di Nona; in a previous letter dated October 1545, Aretino had already highlighted his friendship and esteem for Fra Paolo Antonio Fiorentino, hoping for his preaching in Venice; the Florios’ library (according to the list of volumes mentioned by John for the preparation of his dictionaries) contained a really large part of Aretino’s works; this documented relationship of esteem and friendship opens (as the present study tries to demonstrate) inscrutable new perspectives of renewed studies and insights on Aretino’s influence on the works of Shakespeare, in addition to the conspicuous “concentration of studies” already existing in this regard. The possible solution of the most delicate profile: that of Shakespeare’s knowledge of Italian. The unlikely legend of John Florio who translates from Italian to Shakespeare. The epistolary between Michelangelo and Cosimo I de’ Medici. Also Julio Romano’s masterpieces in Mantua influenced the Dramatist’s works. Michelangelo Florio’s “*Nicodemite*” period (1541-1550).
- vii. In Venice, Michelangelo Florio, Pietro Aretino, and Tiziano were part of a “Titianesque-Aretinian entourage”, on which Bernardino Ochino’s Venetian preaching in 1539 had so much influence: the Titian’s wide painting “*Ecce Homo*”(1543), where both Ochino and Aretino are portrayed. The testimony of Michelangelo Florio, in the spring of 1541, against Fra Giulio da Milano, in the related Venetian inquisitorial process.
- viii. The reasons of maximum commercial diffusion of the literary works, in order to reach the largest plenty of readers, according to Michelangelo Florio’s thought.

- ix. The works which were signed by John Florio (dialogic manuals, dictionaries, translations), as works all referable to his being an expert in languages. Manfred Pfister's authoritative and careful study. The nonexistence of works, signed by John Florio, which are "original" creations of English literature "in the proper sense" (even though his dialogic manuals with their theatricality were already far more than teaching manuals and his translation like that of Montaigne's *Essais* was more than just a translation). John's debut as an "original" author, in all respects, in the English literature could not have a commercial outlet in England (and in the new world), except that through the mediation of the attribution of the literary works to a "pure-blood" Englishman, "mere English", just according to the motto that characterized Elizabeth's reign.
- x. The techniques of commercialization of Lutheran works in Venice, "a true knot of heterodox propaganda in Italy" and Italian "door" to the Reformation, where "typographers were eager for novelty". The anonymity of the *Benefit of Christ* (the most important book of the Protestant Reformation in Italy). The use of pseudonyms. Both anonymity and pseudonyms, however, raised the level of attention of the Inquisitors. The successful technique of the attribution of the work of Luther to Cardinal Federico Fregoso, a person who really existed and recently deceased (therefore, unable to deny his paternity): a technique particularly studied by Pier Paolo Vergerio and even recommended by him to facilitate the marketing of heretical works in Italy.
- xi. Why may we not hypothesize that Michelangelo Florio had suggested to his son to adopt in England the successful technique, happily experimented in Venice, of the attribution of works (belonging to English literature) to a really existing "English" person, in order to make them tradable in England and in the new world? And, in particular, to attribute them to a "pure-blood" Englishman, "mere English", according to the dictates of Elizabeth's patriotism, who was proud to be a "mere English", unlike his sister Maria, a Tudor queen, Spanish for part of her mother and Catholic as for her faith?
- xii. The Word of God in Michelangelo Florio's works and in the Dramatist's works. Six significant examples: 1) "readiness" (*Hamlet*), that is the invitation of Jesus to be found "ready" to die in a Christian way at any moment of life (Luke 12, 35-40 and Matthew, 24, 44); 2) Jesus' "salvific" accomplishment on the cross: "consummation" (*Hamlet*); the "Consummatum est", "It is finished", "Everything is accomplished", the last words of Jesus who dies on the cross (Gospel of John); the expression was reported by Michelangelo Florio himself in his *Apologia*; the "benefit" of the salvific sacrifice of Christ crucified, as an absolutely central theme within the profound "Christological" religiosity of the Reformed; 3) The "man new made" ("*Measure for Measure*") and the "homo novus" (Saint Paul, Letter to the Ephesians); 4) In the *Tempest*, Prospero reassures that, in the shipwreck caused by him, "There is ... not so much perdition as an hair"; in the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul, who was shipwrecked near Malta, reassured the sailors, telling them that "not a single hair of your head will be lost". 5) *Measure for Measure* and Jesus' admonition: "and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew's Gospel); the parameter, the law must be the same for everyone (Michelangelo, in two of his Latin letters to Cecil, had first asked for a punishment for his parishioners, invoking the rigor of the Old Testament and, a few weeks later, he had implored mercy, for his "act of fornication", on the basis of Jesus' new commandment of love); the telling of a story, in *Measure for Measure*, of an act of fornication and of an "illegitimate conception" (just the same Michelangelo's story!), in violation of the sixth biblical commandment that forbids fornication. 6) Michelangelo's translation of the "Catechismus" (1553); the "catechism" of John Falstaff (*Henry IV, Part I*).
- xiii. The important Vito Costantini's discovery on the relationship between John Florio and William of Stratford, in the "strange" and clearly "unusual" definition of the lemma "Florio" in his dictionary of 1611; a "coded message".

## Chapter I

**Shakespeare's theater, between visual arts and poetry, in the double representation (first “mute” – “dumb-show” and then “spoken”), in the “recital at court” in *Hamlet*, according to Prof. Melchiori's authoritative opinion; Aretino's analogous conception about the complementarity between the visual art of the “silent” Titian's portraits and the poetry of Aretino's sonnets, that were composed for these portraits, to make them “talking”.**

## Chapter II

**The relationship between the Titian's painting *Venus and Adonis* and the homonymous Shakespearean poem.**

II.1 The Titian's painting *Venus and Adonis* for the occasion of the marriage between Philip II of Spain and Maria Tudor, Queen of England. The complex “political” framework of this marriage. “*The interest of Philip and his father to get their hands on England*”. Maria Tudor's interest in restoring the Catholic faith with the help of Philip II. The strong internal tensions, even of the British Parliament, contrary to this marriage: the Rebellion of Thomas Wyatt, who considered the proposed marriage as an affront to the national honor of England. The failure of the Rebellion on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1554 and, five days later, the beheading of the former Queen, Jane Gray, of Protestant faith, on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1554.

II.2 Michelangelo Florio's heartfelt story concerning the bloody events that followed Edward VI's death, and also his considerations with regard to the marriage between Philip II and Mary Tudor, in his *History* on the life and death of his favorite pupil, the queen (for only nine days) Jane Gray, written in 1561/2 and published in 1607. In the same days of the beheading of Lady Jane, in February 1554, a royal edict was also issued that banished from England the foreigners (forced to flee from kingdom within 24 days); among these, Michelangelo and his “little family”, who left London on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1554 and even Bernardino Ochino had left London when Mary Tudor became queen.

II.3 The “*historical*” reason of Titian's choice concerning the subject of the painting *Venus and Adonis*, “*in absolute coherence with the political reasons of that marriage*” between Philip II of Spain and Queen Mary Tudor of England: “*criticism of hunting ... as a warning to avoid the danger of war*” and “*to preserve peace*”. Two Titian's letters, related to the painting, sent by Titian in 1554 to Philip, “*King of England*” and to the bishop of Arras, intermediary of his royal wedding. At the date of publication, in 1593, of the Shakespeare's homonymous poem, Philip had suffered one of the most famous naval defeats of history (1588), at the conclusion of his war initiative aimed at the re-conquest of that England, of which he had been King: a further reason that made the allegorical message of Titian's painting in reference, even more “*updated*”, when the Shakespearean poem was published.

II.4 Brief notes on the authorship of the Shakespearean poem according to the “*Floriana thesis*”. The dedications to the Count of Southampton, by Shakespeare (for *Venus and Adonis* - 1593- and *Lucrece* - 1594) and by John Florio (for his dictionary of 1598). The comparative analysis between Shakespeare's dedication for his poem *Lucrece* (1594) and the subsequent dedication of John Florio for his first dictionary (1598), in the words of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, IX Edition. Analogies with Michelangelo Florio's dedication to Elizabeth of England, on the occasion of his translation from Latin into Italian of *De Re Metallica* by Georg Agricola (1563).

II.5 The “*artistic*” reasons that led Titian to pose nude Venus, “*rear viewed*”, in the painting “*Venus and Adonis*”, as a “*pendant*” of the painting depicting the equally naked “*Danae*”, “*viewed from the front*”, already sent to Philip II, in order to embellish his “*dressing room*”. Titian's obsessive search for “*three-dimensionality*” through painting. A search Titian was particularly fond of and had had its debut in the famous painting “*Woman in the mirror*”, where you could see a woman's “*real*” “*front*” and her reflection (in the mirror): a virtual woman “*from the back*”. The following portrait of Gaston de Foix, by Gian Girolamo Savoldo (1529). It was the famous “*Comparison*” between painting and sculpture, which fascinated the world of art, especially Venetian art, in that period. The mirrors in the paintings art not only “*glass mirrors*”, but also “*water mirrors*”, or “*steel armors*” able to reflect images.

---

“The Shakespeare case: the influence of Titian's paintings and Pietro Aretino's writings (Michelangelo Florio's friend) on the Shakespearean works *Venus and Adonis* and *Hamlet*” by Massimo Oro Nobili, Copyright © December 2017 by Massimo Oro Nobili. All rights Reserved

II.6 Literary previous works, as possible source of inspiration for Titian in the composition of the painting “*Venus and Adonis*”. Lodovico Dolce's works: *Favola d'Adone* (1545), which underlines Venus' presentiment of the imminent accident on Adonis; *Didone* (1547), where the Carthaginian queen tries to retain Aeneas. Still the meaning of warding off the war. In Venice, the myth of Adonis was celebrated at that time: by Giovanni Tarcagnola (1550), by Gabriele Parabosco (1553) and by Diego Urtado de Mendoza (1553). Michelangelo Florio was, as already noted, in the Titianesque-Aretinian entourage, which also included Lodovico Dolce; while John had included, in the list of books read for his dictionary of 1611, also volumes of Tarcagnola and Parabosco.

II.7 Sculptural and pictorial references, which could have influenced the structure of the Titian's painting. The *Ara Grimani*. The so called “*Bed of Policleto*”. Raphael's depiction of Hebe (in the *Wedding of Psyche*) in the Villa Farnesina in Rome. None of these three formal sources, however, represents a woman who tries to hold back her lover.

II.8 The authoritative opinion of the greatest theorist of “*iconology*”, Erwin Panofsky, regarding the influence of Titian's painting *Venus and Adonis* on the homonymous Shakespearean poem. According to Panofsky, Shakespeare's words seem a poetic paraphrase and description of Titian's painting. Just like Aretino's sonnets for Titian's portraits. The “*dumb play*” in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (the description of the silent “*war of looks*”, constituting the central part of the Titian's painting), precedes the “*dumb-show*” in *Hamlet*. Similarities and differences between the “*dumb play*” (silent visual scene, but not characterized by the physical movement of the characters) and the “*dumb-show*” (silent visual representation, but characterized by the physical movement of the characters). The precise description of Venus' position “*in unstable equilibrium*”, in Titian's painting. The “*bonnet*” of Adonis, in the Titian's painting in Palazzo Barberini in Rome, which also appears in Shakespeare's poem. How Michelangelo Florio saw the painting.

II.9 The description of the painting of a horse (which perfectly imitates nature), in Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*, recalls the paintings of the “*Hall of Horses*” in Palazzo Te in Mantua, tracing a piece of *Orazia* by Aretino, who knew well such paintings. The author of these paintings, Julio Romano, will be subsequently praised by the Dramatist in *Winter's Tale*, precisely for his ability to perfectly imitate nature; he also forged wax statues. Shakespeare [*Winter's Tale*] and Aretino [*Il Marescalco*] were the only Renaissance dramatists to mention Julio Romano in a theatrical work.

II.10 First conclusions on the influence of the Titian's painting *Venus and Adonis* (1554) on the homonymous poem by Shakespeare (1593). The marriage between Philip II and Mary Tudor, on the occasion of which, the Titian's painting was composed (as a gift to Philip), was a marriage that was very little based on love, but mainly on the desire of the spouses to restore Catholicism in England, while allowing to Spain to widen the field of its influence also on England. For Michelangelo Florio and his “*little family*” it represented the cause of a second exile. For Michelangelo, Mary Tudor was an “*impious and crudely impudent Queen Jezebel [who] had stolen that Kingdom to Christ and given it to Antichrist*”, just like the biblical Queen Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, who abolished the veneration of the God of Israel, replacing it with false idols. It is confirmed that the defeat of the *Armada* (1588) and the failure of Philip II to invade England were essential events for the take-off of the Shakespearean theater; would Spain have succeeded in dominating England and restoring Catholicism, John Florio would have suffered a further exile, the rise of the English empire could not have been realized and the “*Shakespearean enterprise*”, according to the “*Floriana thesis*”, could not have accomplished. It is a fact that the Shakespearean theater appears after this historic victory of Elizabeth, a “*mere English queen*”, “*pure English queen*”; epithet of which she was proud (and which clearly distinguished her from her half-sister Mary, a Tudor queen, but Spanish on the mother's part and Catholic as for her faith).

### Chapter III

**III.1 The Titian's portrait of the Duke of Urbino Francesco Maria I della Rovere - The “Gonzago”, murdered during the Recital at Court in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - and the suggestive representation of the ghost of King Hamlet, all armed and frowned. Titian's portrait should become famous all over the world also as a representation of King Hamlet's Ghost.**

---

“The Shakespeare case: the influence of Titian's paintings and Pietro Aretino's writings (Michelangelo Florio's friend) on the Shakespearean works *Venus and Adonis* and *Hamlet*” by Massimo Oro Nobili, Copyright © December 2017 by Massimo Oro Nobili. All rights Reserved

III.2 First brief conclusions about the Titian portrait of the Duke of Urbino Francesco Maria I della Rovere and the suggestive Shakespearean representation of King Hamlet's Ghost.

### Further considerations

- i. Brief notes on the important study by Richard Paul Roe, the new "*Schliemann*" of the "*Shakespearean case*" - His book *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy - Retracing the Bard's Unknown Travels*, 2011 - A fundamental milestone, which has forever changed our vision on how to read the Bard - The model for a search in Italy of the "real" places, described by the Dramatist - The need to search in Italy, in its cities, its history, its archives, libraries and art galleries traces of works of Shakespeare - Two mere examples in *All is well that ends well*: 1) the "*Tuscan wars*": the surrender of Siena to Cosimo I de' Medici (1555); 2) "*the emblem of Saint Francis*" in the appurtenances of the Franciscan Church of All Saints (*Ognissanti*) in Florence.
- ii. Laura Orsi confirms the paternity of the translation (1620) of the *Decameron*, by John Florio, and underlines a new, further source of *Romeo and Juliet*, a comic novel, a private story, of the *Decameron*, that of Catherine and Ricciardo, the fourth of the fifth day (which the Dramatist read in Italian): "*the novel of the nightingale*". Understanding Shakespeare better will help us to better understand his world. In our opinion, a further possible source of *Romeo and Juliet* is the tragic *Historia* (by Michelangelo Florio) on Jane Gray and Guildford Dudley: two young spouses, like Juliet and Romeo, who died, sacrificial victims of a "*public context*" of adverse adults; their sacrifice, however, generates "*reconciliation*", as in the drama of Shakespeare, the "*true dramatist of forgiveness*" and of reconciliation (Von Balthasar). The great importance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, of the connection between the private affair and the public context, characterized by opposing factions; if Jane Gray's faction had triumphed, Michelangelo Florio's career would have been assured; instead, the faction of Mary Tudor triumphed and Michelangelo was forced to leave England with his "*little family*". The attempt by Jane Gray's faction had aimed at avoiding the bloody Catholic restoration; and the English people ended up in some way to understand the importance of that attempt, aimed at internal pacification, which will finally take place under Elizabeth's reign.
- iii. The importance of continuing the studies on the Florios. The Istituto Studi Floriani, founded by Corrado Panzieri and Saul Gerevini. The hope that the study of the lives of these two humanists will enter into the Italian schools, not only in Universities. A special thanks to Stefano Reali, who, for the first time, represented in theatre Michelangelo and John Florio. The Aretinian "*binomial*" between silent visual arts and words, in the Shakespearean theater.

### Appendices

#### -Appendix I

***"The names of the Books and Authors, that have been read of purpose for the accomplishing" of the Dictionary A Worlde of Wordes of 1598.***

#### -Appendix II

***"The names of the Authors and Books that have been read of purpose for the collecting" of the Dictionary Queen Anna's New World of Wordes of 1611.***

#### **THE ENTIRE TEXT IS AVAILABLE IN ITALIAN**

*Il caso Shakespeare: l'influenza dei dipinti di Tiziano e degli scritti di Pietro Aretino (amico di Michelangelo Florio) sulle opere shakespeariane Venere e Adone e Amleto*