

The 500th anniversary of Michelangelo Florio's birth: Aretino, the Florios and *Hamlet*

Abstract

In the present study, Massimo Oro Nobili: 1) celebrates the 500th anniversary of the birth of Michelangelo Florio, of whom the same Author, for the first time (in his study, published in May 2017), correctly identified the year of birth in 1518, on the basis of a correct reading of Michelangelo's *Apologia*; 2) confirms that Michelangelo Florio "Florentine" and Friar Paolo Antonio "Florentine" or "from Figline" are the same person; 3) publishes and comments on a first edition of the "correspondence" between Friar Paolo Antonio (*alias* Michelangelo Florio) and Pietro Aretino; 4) points out the influence of Aretino on the dictionaries of John Florio; 4) points out the influence of Aretino on the works of Shakespeare and, in particular, on *Hamlet*.

Summary

1. This year is the 500th anniversary of the birth of Michelangelo Florio! In the light of Michelangelo Florio's *Apologia* - in which Michelangelo specifies that he, from his baptism, had been "enveloped" for more than 32 years in the Catholic Church (p.34 r), and that "he stripped himself of his friar's habit" (p. 78 r) in 1550 - I was the first to motivately support, as early as in a study published in May 2017, that the date of his birth was to be placed in 1518.

2. Michelangelo Florio Fiorentino and the friar Paolo Antonio Fiorentino (or from Figline) are the same person, as evidenced by documents that certify this identity "per tabulas", as already, however, noted by authoritative scholars.

3. From a linguistic point of view, it is to be noted that also Friar Paolo Antonio *Florentine*, "guardian friar of Santa Croce" had a preference for the word "scorno" (letter to Cosimo de' Medici of 9 April 1548), as also Michelangelo Florio *Florentine* ("scorn", in: *Apologia*, f 18 v f, 32 v; *Historia* of Lady Jane Gray, page 8 and pp. 27-28); a word ("scorns") also used by the Playwright in the famous monologue of Hamlet (Act III, Scene i, 70). Friar Paolo Antonio, as a guardian friar, also supervised (like the previous Guardian friars) the important library of Santa Croce (whose "stadium" had also been attended by Dante Alighieri), *one of the most prestigious centers of European culture of the time*. After the imprisonment of Friar Paolo Antonio (January-February 1548), a new guardian friar of Santa Croce was appointed, whose presence appears with certainty (in the correspondence published by Prof. Carcereri) only from June 1549. For scholars who are passionate about archival research, information on Fra' Paolo Antonio (Michelangelo Florio) could be sought in documents (where still preserved) at Santa Croce in Florence.

4. Was Michelangelo Florio born in Florence or in Figline? Indeed, Figline is very close to Florence! My humble opinion is that he was born in Figline.

5. Short references to the "*Floriana thesis*" by Santi Paladino (corroborated, in his thesis, by the fundamental information - the "*Shakespeare*" entry of the IX edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica - he received from the valiant Prof. Raffaele Sammarco). The important admission of the most authoritative supporter of the Stratfordian thesis, Prof. Jonathan Bate: "*Because Shakespeare knew Florio and his*

works, the belief that Shakespeare's works were actually written by Florio is harder to refute than the case of any [English] aristocrat's authorship".

6. The "non-existent Shakespeare's library" (in the sense that it has never been found). Jonathan Bate's conjectures on this library. The Florios' library.

7. Conclusions. The positive emergence of a group of scholars of Michelangelo and John Florio. A "transversal" group that includes both "Stratfordians" and "Anti-Stratfordians", as well as "agnostics" about the Shakespearean authorship.

APPENDIX APPENDIX I

The correspondence between Paolo Antonio *Florentine* (aka Michelangelo Florio *Florentine*) and Pietro Aretino; notes on the influence of Aretino on the works of Shakespeare and on Hamlet in particular

I.1 The correspondence between Paolo Antonio *Florentine* (aka Michelangelo Florio *Florentine*) and Pietro Aretino

I.1.1 The letter, with no date (approximately dated between May 1545 and January 1546), sent by "Friar Paul'Antonio", "To the very Magnificent my Sir Pietro Aretino, who is always to be respected", accompanying "a small present" (six herrings): the letter closes with the words of the friar, addressed to Aretino: "I recommend myself to you".

I.1.2 Letter by Pietro Aretino to General Costacciaro, October 1545, in which Aretino intercedes in favor of the "venerable Friar Paolo Antonio" ("everyone knowing how much the Florentine priest is really expert on the religious doctrine"), so that, despite the opposition of the Apostolic Legate, Monsignor Della Casa, may the Friar preach the Lent of 1546, in Santi Apostoli in Venice.

I.1.3 Letter of April 1548, by Pietro Aretino, from Venice, "To Friar Pavolo Antonio", imprisoned in "Torre di Nona" (Rome).

I.1.4 The documented activities and preaching of Michelangelo Florio between 1541 and January / February 1548, when he was imprisoned in Torre di Nona.

I.2 Notes on the influence of Aretino on the works of Shakespeare.

I.2.1 J. M. Lothian's study of 1930. Thirty "borrowings" in Shakespeare's works, essentially from the comedies of Aretino. Aretino's comedies are among the books read by John Florio for his dictionaries.

I.2.2 Aretino and *Hamlet*.

I.2.2.1 Aretino possessed all the information on the "Italian story" told in *Hamlet*: the murder of the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria della Rovere, by pouring poison into his ears. It is a "new source" (Prof. Giorgio Melchiori) to represent the modality (*unique in the history of the theater and strongly theatrical*) of the death of King Hamlet. Background. It would be better to more divulge how the poisoning of the Duke (whose Titian's portrait is in the *Uffizi* of Florence) is the *Italian historical source* of *Hamlet*.

1.2.2.2 Aretino perfectly knew the story of the Duke of Urbino Francesco Maria della Rovere, who was presumed to have been murdered by pouring poison into his ears. Aretino accused Luigi Gonzaga of being one of the instigators of this murder. Aretino, through Guidobaldo (son of Francesco Maria and new Duke of Urbino), of whom he declared himself to be a “*spontaneous servant*”, knew *the written document* (a letter from Luigi Gonzaga to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga) describing *the unique modality* by which it was assumed that the Duke of Urbino had been murdered. Aretino (who had dedicated the Book I of his *Lettere* to the Duke) defined the death of Francesco Maria as a “*strange accident*”. Guidobaldo was *very embarrassed in judging and condemning his relative* (from his mother’s side) Luigi Gonzaga, *bound to him by blood tie* (Guidobaldo refused that the trial against Luigi Gonzaga took place in his own Duchy of Urbino); *similar situation of extreme discomfort will also characterize Hamlet* (son of King Hamlet, also poisoned through his ears), *he too struggling with the murder of his father, perpetrated by a relative bound to him by blood tie, even his own uncle*.

1.2.2.3 Aretino also knew, with certainty, *a very specific detail*, which appears in *Hamlet: the circumstance that Eleonora Gonzaga and Francesco Maria della Rovere had been married for 30 years when the duke died*. In fact, Titian had been asked to paint two “*pendant*” portraits of the dukes for their 30th wedding anniversary; and Aretino had also written two sonnets on these portraits!

1.2.2.4 Aretino had celebrated *the widow pain of Eleonora Gonzaga*. Also the Playwright will celebrate the pain of the widowhood, completely inventing a scene that does not exist in the *Aeneid*, recited in *Hamlet* and concerning *the widow pain of Hecuba*; this, *in sharp contrast with the behavior of Gertrude* (who, not even a month after her husband’s murder, marries her husband’s brother and murderer).

1.2.2.5 The celebration, in *Hamlet*, of the historic mortal rivalry between the Duke of Urbino Federico da Montefeltro (the husband of Battista Sforza, whom the Playwright cites in *Hamlet*) and the warlord Carlo Fortebracci, stripped of his lands (like *Fortinbras* in *Hamlet*). A story, concerning an important previous (of two generations) Duke of Urbino, of which Guidobaldo was proud and which even Aretino well knew, an exciting story of the Italian Renaissance.

1.2.2.6 Aretino: the “*mute*” visual arts and the “*words*” that complement the images in the sonnets for Titian’s portraits. Shakespeare: the “*dumb-show*”, “*silent visual art*” in the court play in *Hamlet* and then the intervention of the “*words*” that complete the play, a real “*Shakespearean manifesto of what the theatrical event is*” (Prof. Giorgio Melchiori).

APPENDIX II

The influence of Pietro Aretino on John Florio: the portrait (1524-1525) of Aretino (with the epigram “*in utrumque paratus*”) and the portrait (1611) of John Florio (with the epigram “[...] *uterque opere*”)

II.1 A brief introduction. The traditional studies on John Florio (Mario Praz, Manfred Pfister, Michael Wyatt, Donatella Montini) rightly point out how the works signed by John Florio were all works related to his ability as an expert linguist, to his being an intermediary of language and culture, especially Italian, and his related role as an Italian teacher, lexicographer and translator: (i) his learning manuals, *First Fruits*, *Second Fruits*; (ii) his bilingual Italian-English dictionaries of 1598 and 1611; (iii) also his masterly translation into English of the *Essays* of Montaigne, a masterpiece but still a translation from an “*original*” text. “*None of John Florio’s works was an ‘original’ literary work*”; “*he produced no plays*,

poetry, or narrative prose of his own". This aspect is sometimes considered as a sort of limitation of his excellent activity. A question (explicitly or implicitly) emerges in all these studies: "why such a scholar like John never signed 'original works of English literature'? Having said that, in my turn, I personally ask a question: "Would John Florio have realistically been in a position to write and sign with his name (of clear Italian origins) important 'original' works belonging to English literature, and market them in England (and in his nascent colonial empire)? We are talking about the England of Elizabeth (under whose reign the first dedication appeared with the name of Shakespeare, in 1593), who had made of her being "mere English", "pure English-blood" (as daughter of two parents both Englishmen, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn) the fulcrum of all her politics; this, in clear and clear contrast with the disastrous reign of her half-sister - certainly not, "mere English" - Mary (daughter of Henry VIII and of the Spanish Catherine of Aragon), who had even come to the point of delivering, in 1554, the title of King of England to a Spanish Catholic person (Philip of Hapsburg, King of Spain from 1556); who, in turn, had tried, then, in 1588, to invade England itself, with his *Invincible Armada*. John Florio also states, as early as 1591, "I know they have a knife at command to cut my throate". And "We are not talking about death threats in any metaphorical sense"! "Coming out into the open would have been impossible and dangerous and ...something he never wanted to do" (Prof. Tassinari). John Florio could only sign works related to his role as teacher of the Italian language, as lexicographer, as language expert and translator; it was realistically impossible for him to "enlarge" beyond that role (barely tolerated and object of envies). In any case, it would have been completely impossible to "commercialize" in London and in the English colonies an "original" work of English literature, which did not bear the name of a "mere English", "pure-blood English" author! John Florio could only resign himself to "his clandestine labour as dramatist" (Prof. Tassinari).

II.2 *The important Pietro Aretino's influence on John Florio's dictionaries, as highlighted by Prof. Hermann W. Haller and the Accademia della Crusca.* In the *Epistle Dedicatorie* of his dictionary of 1598, John Florio refers to Aretino with great words of praise: "How then ayme we at Peter Aretino, that is so wittie, hath such varietie, and frames so many new words?" The list of books, read by John Florio for the preparation of his dictionary of 1598, shows that out of 72 bibliographical references contained in this list, 15 include Aretino and his works (more than 1/5); for the dictionary of 1611, the number of volumes of Aretino read and listed by John Florio is still growing. Is it, finally, a mere coincidence that the Italian books read by John Florio for his dictionaries, are those that served to the Dramatist to write his works, including Italian books, still not translated into English, at the time of publication of the works of the same Dramatist?

II.3 Pietro Aretino, in the "Second Fruits" (1591) by John Florio (in the footsteps of Ariosto, who had celebrated him as "the whip of Princes, the divine Pietro Aretino" - Orlando Furioso, XLVI, 15), is defined: "devine for his witt, true speaking for his words and the whip of Princes for his witty true speaking". Moreover, the representation of Aretino as an extraordinary author capable of "writing the truth", with his pen used as a "whip", is not so dissimilar from that of the Dramatist, who is represented by Jonson (dear friend of John Florio), in the *First Folio* of 1623, as an author who used his pen as a "lance brandished in the eyes of ignorance". Aretino → Michelangelo Florio → John Florio → Ben Jonson (*Volpone*, 1606): John, in turn, transferred to Ben Jonson the in-depth knowledge that (thanks also to his father Michelangelo) he had of Aretino and his works (which he had, as he himself certificated, almost entirely read): in fact, *Volpone* by Ben Jonson (1606), one of the most famous works of the time of Shakespeare, had his plot taking place in the Venice of Aretino. As Prof. Mario Praz points out, "It was through Florio's suggestions that Jonson sensed in the Venice of Aretino a new and enormous way to sin".

II.4 The portrait (1525) of Aretino (with the epigram "*in utrumque paratus*") and the portrait (1611) of John Florio (with the epigram "[...] *uterque opere*")

II.4.1 *The portrait of Pietro Aretino*, by Sebastiano del Piombo (1524-1525):

(i) *The two masks* (under the portrait) represent, in a theatrical way, the "*duality*" of the human person, the tragic story of the human person who constantly struggles in choosing between wearing "*the ugly mask of vice*", or "*the beautiful mask of virtue*" (as Vasari defined these two masks);

(ii) The *recomposition of this "duality" in the Latin epigram*, in which Aretino said to be "*in utrumque paratus*" (epigram, which has been the subject of acute and important studies), i.e. "*prepared*" to face life, being aware that every human person, by his nature (wanted by God), is ineluctably destined to wear "*both masks*"; because we are evidently all sinners and no human person is immune from sin and vice, although every person can, at any moment, recognize his own fall, dismissing the "*ugly mask of vice*" and "*re-wearing the beautiful mask of virtue*". The important subsequent letter by Aretino to friar Andrea Ghetti Volterrano of March 1548, about the dramatic "*nature*" (desired by God himself) of the human person, who is always between the choice of "*deserving*" "*the graces of Him*" and "*the faculty of vices*".

II.4.2 *The portrait of John Florio*, work of the engraver John Hole, reproduced in his dictionary of 1611. The analysis of the Latin epigrammatic phrase (constituting a part of the broadest Latin inscription, reproduced therein) "*Italus ore, Anglus pectore, uterque opere*"; which *clearly shows the resentment of the influence of the "duality" of the "masks" and of the "epigram"*, placed in the mentioned portrait of Aretino (1525).

II.4.2 (i) The peculiar "*duality*" of John Florio

II.4.2 (i.1) The first characteristic of his '*duality*' (a characteristic that externally was felt; '*external accidence*' - Prof. Pfister): "*Italus ore*" (i.e. Italian mother tongue and characterized for his "*voice*", with an inflection, in his oral expression, which clearly "*reveals*" his Italian origin).

II.4.2 (i.2) The second characteristic of his "*duality*" (an internal characteristic; '*internal essence*' - Prof. Pfister): "*Anglus pectore*" (that is, "*English in the heart*"; John feels, in his intimate soul, an Englishman).

II.4.2 (ii) The *recomposition* of the "*duality*" (which characterizes the first two parts of the epigram) in the third part of the epigram: "*uterque opere*", that is, "*as for the written work, I am both Italian and English*". Here, John no longer refers to his "*voice*" (as in the first part of the epigram), with the inflection that "*clearly reveals*" his native Italian mother tongue; John refers to his "*work*", that clearly is, his "*written work*", in contrast to his "*voice*" of the first part of the epigram; in *his written work*, in fact, "*his voice is not heard*", with the typical inflection of his Italian mother tongue; in *his written work*, his "*voice*", his inflection of Italian mother tongue, cannot "*reveal*" his Italian origin.

II.4.2 (ii.1) *As for my written work, I am Italian*

John was able to read, with great competence, the classic Italian works of Humanism and the Italian Renaissance and to write in Italian, as demonstrated, among other things, by: a) the two dialogical manuals of 1578 and 1592 - his *Fruits* - containing real scenes with "*theatricality*", reported in writing, both in Italian and in English, to facilitate the learning of the Italian language, of which John was "*Praelector*", "*Reader*"; b) the Italian translation of the *Basilikon Doron*; c) the two Italian-English dictionaries and the list of Italian books read for the preparation of such dictionaries (where you can find

the books that were used for the works of the Dramatist). A double competence in writing, which is a proof that had no equal in any English writer of the time!

II.4.2 (ii.2) *As for my written work, I am also English*

John was also able to read English works and to write works in English; without his signature, no one could doubt that his works were written by a “*mere English*”, a “*pure-blood English*”; in fact, in his written work, *one did not hear John’s “voice”*, his inflection which, in his oral expression, clearly “*revealed*”, on the other hand, John’s Italian origin. It is sufficient to think to his masterly translation of Montaigne’s “*Essais*”: “*The translation was probably one of the most influential books ever published in this country [England]*”(Yates); “*And in 1603, English men and women with small or no French had John Florio to thank, for in that year Montaigne spake English*”(Jonathan Bate).

II.4.2 (iii) This *third part* of the epigram (“*uterque opere*”) has so far been totally ignored by the scholars (unlike the “*in utrumque paratus*” by Aretino): it is, without any doubt, *the most important part* and contains a “*coded message*”, expressed with two simple words of an epigram, but equally clear and challenging, by John Florio, who seems to rhetorically wonder: “*is there someone else, besides me, who has the skills to transfer (into the English literature) the culture of the literary works of the Italian Renaissance (fully “digested” by the careful, competent and scrupulous reading of all the books I have listed for the preparation of my dictionaries, which are the books necessary to write the works of Shakespeare)? And thus, by reworking such Italian works, creating important variations and creatively rewriting them? And thus, in an English so perfect (like no one had ever done before), that no one could ever doubt, in the absence of my signature, that such new works were not written by a “mere English”, that is to say “a pure-blood English”?* John Florio, as a “*go-between*”, a linguistic-cultural “*mediator*” (in such a way, the “*duality*” of the first part of the epigram is recomposed), who transferred, into England and the entire world, Italian culture, languages, places and history, through the English language, which “*was just beginning its ascent as the global language it is today*” (Prof. Hermann Haller), through British colonial expansion. John seems to affirm (with a sort of “*coded message*”) that, as proof of his being the author of the Playwright’s works, a different candidacy should indicate a candidate who has precisely his own characteristics - which he perfectly outlines, with regard to his own competences, and he focuses with the two words (“*uterque opere*”) - without however being John Florio himself: a challenge that currently seems to be practically impossible.

II.5 The analysis of the other “*inscriptions*” in the portrait of John Florio, published in the dictionary of 1611. We make reference to the usual question: *why did John only sign works related to his role as teacher of the Italian language, lexicographer and translator?* John seems to answer to this question with his motto: “*He who contents himself, enjoys*”; the motto of an excellent scholar who ‘*understood that, in order to give a decisive literary contribution to his own country, England, where he was born [...], he, an Italian-Englishman, could not emerge, but he would have had to let emerge a pure-blood Englishman*’ (Prof. Laura Orsi), *at the cost of the sacrifice of his name, renouncing to appear in his literary works: he is the poet who did not need to affirm himself [i.e. to affix his own signature], because those, who content themselves, enjoy* (Prof. Lamberto Tassinari). John Florio declares himself - in the Latin epigram, in the footsteps of the concept expressed in his Italian motto – “*In virtute sua contentus, nobilis arte*”, that means that, despite everything, John was “*Content, satisfied for his own value, noble as to his art*”. John “*wishes with love*” (“*optat amans*”) that he, “*florid in this portrait*” (“*hac species floridus*”), not only “*flourish until now, and will still flourish*” (“*Floret adhuc, et adhuc florebit*”), but he “*may continue to flourish even further*” (“*floreat ultra*”). It is Florio’s passionate final wish: that *his name*

should not be forgotten (aware of the now imminent *First Folio* of 1623, where his theatrical works will be formally attributed to Shakespeare); may his name continue to “flourish” “even further”.

II. 6 The completely unusual “*Florio*” entry in his dictionary of 1611 (acutely pointed out by Vito Costantini, as a “*coded message*”), which should be the subject of specific, careful evaluations and reflections, by scholars: a possible precious documental indication on the relations between John Florio and William of Stratford.

II. 7 Brief notes on the stratagem, already successfully experimented in Venice, to commercialize Lutheran works, attributing them to a truly existing Catholic character, Cardinal Federico Fregoso, recently deceased: the first Venetian “*First Folio*”, “*ante litteram*” of 1545.

Appendix III

“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 IV

“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

“A 500 anni dalla nascita di Michelangelo Florio: Aretino, i Florio, *Amleto*”

in

www.shakespeareandflorio.net