

“... a gentleman of worshipful account, well travelled, well conceited and well experienced in the Italian, hath in this very kind taken great pains, and made as great proofes of his inestimable worth. Glad would I be to see that work abroad: some sight whereof, gave me twenty years since the first light to this. But since he [the gentleman] suppresseth his [work], for private respects, or further perfection, nor he nor others will (I hope) prize this the lesse”[excerpt from John Florio’s address “To the Reader” for his first dictionary (1598)].

The genesis of John Florio’s first dictionary (1598): ideas for a research

Abstract: Massimo Oro Nobili, on the basis of the studies by Frances Yates (1934) and by Prof. Lamberto Tassinari (2008), points out that: on the one hand, (i) in the address “To the Reader” of his first dictionary (1598), John Florio *emphasizes the fundamental importance of his father Michelangelo’s monolingual manuscript Italian dictionary, on the genesis of his own bilingual Italian-English dictionary*; on the other hand, (ii) in the “Epistle Dedicatorie” of the same bilingual dictionary, *John clearly and openly claims his own exclusive merits in the translation of Italian words into English*. It was practically impossible for John to create his first grandiose bilingual vocabulary by himself, without the basis of an extended Italian monolingual dictionary! It is a *very important, documented “modus operandi”*: *the paternal “materials” are reworked and translated into English by John!* It is a “modus operandi” that, in accordance with “the Floriana thesis” by Santi Paladino, will be replicated also in *Second Fruits* and still *in the plays that will be attributed to William of Stratford*.

Summary:

1. John Florio himself reveals, in the address “To the Reader” of his first dictionary (1598), when he had “*the first light*” to embark on his superhuman enterprise.
2. The first study of the aforementioned passage (from John Florio’s epistle “To the Reader”), by Frances A. Yates (1934). Yates herself had stated that: “*Michael Angelo had begun in that [his] generation the work which his son was to continue in the next*”.
3. Who is this “gentleman”, who does not seem to want to appear for “*private respects*”? It is Michelangelo Florio, as Prof. Lamberto Tassinari (2008) clearly and expressly recognizes!
4. What was this “work” that John saw? John reveals that the “gentleman” (Michelangelo Florio, as already noted!) “*suppresseth his [work], for private respects, or further perfection*”. It was therefore a dictionary (considering that that “work” gave John the “*first light*” for his *bilingual dictionary*), and, in particular, a *monolingual Italian dictionary*, already fully prepared (from that “gentleman” “*well experienced in the Italian*”) and *perfect* (not “*unfinished*”, as Yates states!); indeed, John specifies that the failure to publish this work could be alternatively debited: 1) to “*private respects*” of his father; or 2) to possible “*further perfection*” of a work that, obviously, was already completed and “*perfect*”, and possibly susceptible, only of “*further perfection*”. The concept of “*further perfection*” contains, already in itself, that the “work” was already “*perfect*”! John himself states,

however, that any dictionary, though “*perfect*”, is *always likely to be further “perfected”*, and expanded with additional words, “*since daily ... new wordes are invented*”! Our personal impression is that *Michelangelo had left this precious material to John, so that John would use it, rework it and publish it.*

5. John, with reference to the “*work suppresseth*” *does not complain at all that it was a small dictionary* (as he had done, for the tiny dictionaries by Francesco Alunno and Filippo Venuti)! It is therefore likely that *this manuscript dictionary gathered a considerable quantity of words!*

6. John claims to have seen this work “*abroad*”, twenty years earlier than his dictionary of 1598 (which had been licensed to Edward Blount in March 1596), and, therefore, between 1576-1578; John probably saw this work in Soglio, where, evidently, he had gone to recover some materials prepared by Michelangelo (certainly active, as a notary, until 1566) and, perhaps, even books from his father’s library.

7. How could John use this monolingual Italian dictionary, being he now in London? It was at that moment that he had “*the first light*” to embark on his superhuman enterprise! A monolingual Italian vocabulary would have served no purpose in London, but *it would have been an unprecedented work if John had translated into English that extended monolingual Italian dictionary, turning it into an extended bilingual dictionary!* Certainly, for John, that “*work*” was not only “*the first light*” for his bilingual dictionary. Certainly, in fact, *John did not throw that precious Italian monolingual dictionary into the wastepaper basket!* On the other hand, some scholars of this dictionary *have not, in our opinion, sufficiently assessed how it was practically impossible, for John, to create that first grandiose bilingual vocabulary, without the support of a congruous Italian monolingual dictionary!*

8. Further proof of the fact that John made use of the monolingual Italian dictionary, written by his father (of course, perfecting and re-elaborating it), is given by John’s own statements in the “*Epistle Dedicatorie*” of his dictionary of 1598. In fact: on the one hand, (i) in the address “*To the Reader*”, there is the proper John’s recognition of the importance that the Italian dictionary manuscript of his father had for his Italian-English dictionary; on the other hand (ii) in the “*Epistle Dedicatorie*” there is the clear and open claim of *John’s exclusive merits in the phase of the translation of Italian words into English.*

9. Conclusions. In the dictionary of 1598, John Florio (*regarding the Italian words*) used, reworking it, a monolingual Italian dictionary, handwritten by his father; while (*regarding the English words*) *he was the exclusive author of the English translation of the Italian words.*

It is a documented “*modus operandi*” (*the paternal “materials” are reworked and translated into English by John!*), which, according to “*the Floriana thesis*” by Santi Paladino, will be replicated also:

- (i) for example, in the *Second Fruits* (of which, Santi Paladino found a copy published in Italian by Michelangelo Florio), containing “*dialogues*”, which are “*‘theatrical’ in their projection of characters and everyday situations and they aim beyond a merely linguistic instruction, introducing the learner not only to the foreign language but also*

- to the foreign culture*” (Prof. Pfister); “*theatrical*” dialogues, which were characteristic of *that Italy, directly well known by Michelangelo, but not by John!*
- (ii) and again *in the real theatrical works that will be attributed to William of Stratford.*

THE ENTIRE TEXT OF THE STUDY IS AVAILABLE IN ITALIAN

“La genesi del primo dizionario di John Florio (1598): spunti per una ricerca”

in www.shakespeareandflorio.net