

Notes

DUKES, *DOGI* AND *MOGÓGNI*: GENOA IN JOHN MARSTON'S *THE MALCONTENT*

To my knowledge, no editor of John Marston's *The Malcontent* (c. 1603, publ. 1604) thus far seems to have given much thought to a passage in its introductory epistle 'To the Reader', where the playwright warns readers 'that in some things I have willingly erred, as in supposing a Duke of Genoa, and in taking names different from that city's families'.¹ It is indisputable that the names and events in the play are fictional and do not closely mirror any specific episodes in the history of Genoa. It is also true that Genoa was not a dukedom but an oligarchic republic, as duly noted by George K. Hunter in the Revels Plays edition, whose remark others seem to have followed.² However, the oligarchic republic of Genoa was in fact ruled by a *doge*, a title that was commonly translated in early modern English as 'Duke', as Marston himself did, for instance, when he listed Doge Piero Sforza among the *dramatis personae* of *Antonio and Mellida* as 'Duke of Venice'.³

That translating *doge* as 'Duke' was common practice is amply testified in works printed in the early modern period. John Florio's *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598) provides the following, quite confusing definition of *doge*: 'a title which only the Dukes of Venice and Genoa have'.⁴ In *The historie of Italie* (1549), William Thomas points out that 'the astate [of Genoa] is holden by a Duke, chaungeable euery .ii. yere: who with .viii. gouernours and .viii. proctours

assigned vnto hym, ruleth the whole for the tyme'.⁵ Thomas refers to the Genoese *doge* as 'Duke', and so does George Abbot (1599) in *A briefe description of the whole world*: 'the State of Genua, commonly called the Genowaies, ∞. are governed by their Senate: but have a Duke as they have at Venice'.⁶ 'Duke' as a translation for *doge* also recurs in other plays of the period such as Henry Glapthorne's *The Ladies' Privilege* (c. 1637, publ. 1640)—which is coincidentally also set in Genoa—and John Fletcher, John Ford, Philip Massinger, and John Webster's *The Fair Maid of the Inn* (c. 1625, publ. 1647).⁷ This very equivalence possibly also lies behind the definition of the State of Genoa as the 'Dukedome of the Genuensians' in Gerhard Mercator's *Atlas* (1635).⁸ The potential confusion between *doge* and 'Duke' may have been further increased by the fact that the public palace of the *doge* was (and still is) called in Italian *Palazzo Ducale*—*ducale* being the adjective derived from both *doge* and *duca* (the Italian for 'Duke')—a building that Fynes Moryson at least twice mentions as the 'Dukes Pallace' in his *Itinerary* (1617).⁹

Consequently, it seems plausible to infer that rather than inventing a dukedom of Genoa from scratch, Marston is likely to have decided to play with the potential confusion between *doge* and 'Duke'—of which he must have been aware—as far as to transform the republic of Genoa into a dukedom pervaded by corruption, dishonesty, and moral debauchery, something which would indeed have not been very difficult to envision for Marston, especially if he was familiar—as it is more than plausible to imagine, given that his mother Maria Guarsi was a Florentine—with a proverbial saying about Genoa that had

¹ John Marston, *The Malcontent*, ed. George K. Hunter (Manchester, 1975), 'To the Reader', ll. 4–6. As we await Richard Dutton's new edition of the play in *The Complete Works of John Marston*, gen. ed. Martin Butler and Matthew Steggle (Oxford, 2020), other relatively recent editions of *The Malcontent* are those by Martin L. Wine (Lincoln, 1964); Bernard Harris (London, 1967); Macdonald P. Jackson and Michael Neill in *The Selected Plays of John Marston* (Cambridge, 1986); and W. David Kay (London, 1998).

² Marston, *Malcontent*, 4n5.

³ John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester, 1991), 57.

⁴ John Florio, *A worlde of wordes* (London, 1598), 111.

⁵ William Thomas, *The historie of Italie* (London, 1549), 162–3.

⁶ George Abbot, *A briefe description of the whole world* (London, 1599), 54.

⁷ Cf. the list of *dramatis personae* in both Henry Glapthorne, *The ladies privileged* (London, 1640), sig. A3r, and John Fletcher, John Ford, Philip Massinger, and John Webster, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, ed. Fredson Bowers, in Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon: Volume 10* (Cambridge, 1996), 559.

⁸ Gerhard Mercator, *Historia mundi: or Mercator's atlas* (London, 1635), 717.

⁹ Fynes Moryson, *Itinerary* (London, 1617), Part I, 166, 167.

apparently been coined by the citizens of the Republic of Pisa after the defeat against their sworn enemies of the Republic of Genoa at the battle of Meloria in 1284. This proverb is reported by several early modern English writers, among whom it will suffice to quote Moryson:

It is prouerbially said of this City;
Montagne senza legni, Mar' senza pesci, huomini senza fede, donne senza vergogna, Mori bianchi, Genoa superba:

That is, Mountaines without wood, Sea without fish, Men without faith, Weomen without shame, white Moores, *Genoa* the proud.¹⁰

At all events, what can be established beyond doubt is that Marston did not invent the political instability of Genoa. He did not need to. Pieces of information about it were abundantly available in Thomas's *Historie*:

About this tyme were so many commocions in the citee, for chosing of theyr Dukes, that I thinke there was neuer so muche alteration of rulers in one cōmon welth for the tyme. ∴ as longe as the rule of the common wealth consisted in the wil of the multitude, neuer was so inconstant an astate as that of Genoa: For amongst other in the chaunge betwene *Domenyke di Campo Fregoso* and *Nicolas Guarco* were .iii. Dukes in a daie: *Fregoso* deposed in the mornyng, and *Adorno* incontinently made, and at after noone *Adorno* deposed, and *Guarco* made.¹¹

Genoa's extreme—and, to be sure, almost darkly (if unwittingly) comical in Thomas's report—political instability made it an excellent fit for the events depicted in *The Malcontent*, where a series of political coups and devious machinations bring about a rapid-fire alternation of Dukes, as that title is successively held by Altofronto, Pietro Jacomo, Mendoza, and Altofronto again, in a not dissimilar fashion from the events reported by Thomas.

However, these might not have been the only reasons why Marston decided to set a play titled

The Malcontent in Genoa rather than anywhere else in Italy. On the contrary, it seems feasible to trace Marston's choice to the fact that the Genoese have been renowned since the Middle Ages for their unmistakable *mogógno*. *Mogognà* is an onomatopoeic verb in the Genoese dialect that defines a mixture of grumbling and grouching expressing discontent (in Italian, *malcontento*), which is so distinctive that this word passed from the Genoese dialect into the Italian language as *mugugno* (verb: *mugugnare*). The Genoese's customary *mogógno* seems to have been well known in Europe as early as the late Middle Ages, insofar as the sailors of the glorious Republic of Genoa could apparently be hired through two different types of contract, namely *con diritto di mogógno* (with the right of *mogógno*) and *senza diritto di mogógno* (without the right of *mogógno*). Legend has it that the vast majority of the Genoese sailors chose to be paid less as long as they could vent their discontent at liberty. Traces of this preference still populate everyday Genoese life through sundry proverbs in the local dialect conveying approximately the same idea:

Çinque frànchi de mēno ma o mogógno.
 (Five francs less but the *mogógno*.)

L'é mēgio 'na xàtta de menèstra de mēno e a libertæ de mogognà. (It is better to have a bowl of soup less but to retain the freedom to *mogognà*.)

'Na palànca de mēno, ma libertæ de mogógno. (Less money but the liberty of *mogógno*.)

Sénsa vin se nàvega, sénsa mogógno no. (Without wine you can sail, without *mogógno* you can't.)¹²

In short, Genoa's reputation as a place swarming with chronic malcontents may have had a role—however limited—in Marston's decision to set *The Malcontent* in that very city. In this sense, it is enthralling to consider that a 2002 school production of the play performed in Savona—another main city in Liguria, the same region where Genoa is located—was aptly titled *O mugugnone* (the man who always

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 168; see also Part III, 52. Cf. James Howell, *Instructions for forreine travell* (London, 1642), 103; Jerome Turler, *The Traveler* (London, 1575), 54.

¹¹ Thomas, *Historie*, 175–6.

¹² I am grateful to Franco Bampi for advice concerning the *grafia oficià* (official spelling) of the proverbs in the Genoese dialect.

mogóna). As is always the case with this kind of conjectural reconstructions, it is impossible to find indisputable evidence in support of this argument. Yet, I am confident that the notion that this particular character trait traditionally associated with the Genoese as early as the Middle Ages may have been among the factors behind Marston's choice of Genoa as a setting for a play titled *The Malcontent* is at the very

least reasonably plausible and deserves scholarly attention.

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