

ORAZIO v. NELSON

by Dr Noemi Magri

The blunders and misreadings contained in 'Chapter 28 Orazio "Cogno/Coquo"' of Prof. Alan Nelson's Monstrous Adversary (2003) have made it necessary to publish the testimony of the inquiry made by the Venetian Inquisition into Orazio Cuoco in 1577 in the original.

The English translation of the document has already been published in the DVS *Newsletter* of Jan-Feb. 2002 and in *Great Oxford* (2004).

The original text given below, and the comments on the readings or explanations given by Prof. Nelson, including the major mistake of changing the young man's name, will clarify the content of the manuscript and amend wrong interpretations.

Orazio Cuoco is the young singer that Lord Oxford took with him to England in March 1576. The youth stayed eleven months in Oxford's service as a page, and in 1577 he left England to return home. On his arrival in Venice he was summoned to the Holy Inquisition and questioned. As is true of most testimonies of the Inquisition in Italy, the major concerns of the inquisitors were the avoidance of reading heretical (i.e. Protestant) books, the observance of fast days, and the eating of fish on Fridays. Keeping those laws meant 'living Catholically'. And that is what Orazio's inquisitor mainly wanted to know about Lord Oxford. No mention is here made of the lord's moral behaviour.

THE TESTIMONY

The original manuscript is held in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (Savi all'Eresia. Santo Uffizio. b. 41. Fascicolo Orazio Cuoco). [*The lines are intended to correspond to those in the original MS, but there may be a few spacing differences caused by transference of text by e-mail - Ed.*]. The text is partly in Latin and partly in Venetian Italian.

Transcript

(p.1 of the MS)

Die martis 27 mensis Augusti 1577

cum assistentia illustrissimi domini Pasqualis Ciconia.

Comparuit vocatur in Sanctissimo Offitio Horatius filius quondam
Francisci Coqui, clericus in ecclesia Sanctae Marinae et
Interrogatus de aetate respondit, "Io ho 17 anni".

Ei dictum, "Estu sta fuori della terra?"
Respondit "Signore, si".

Ei dictum, "In che luogo?" Respondit, "In Inghilterra".
Dicens interrogatus, "Lè un anno et mezo credo che
me parti de questa città per andar in Inghilterra".

Dicens interrogatus, "Io andai con un conte,
parente della Rezina de Inghilterra
nominato Millort de Uoxfor".

Millort de uoxfor¹

Ei dictum, " Quanto tempo estu stà in Inghilterra?"
Respondit, "XI mesi".

Dicens interrogatus, "Son stato sempre in casa de questo conte".

Ei dictum, "Che officio era el tuo in casa sua?"
Respondit, "Per paggio".

Ei dictum, "Estu stà con altri che con lui?"
Respondit, "Signore no, in Inghilterra".

Ei dictum, "Quanto è che ti sè partito de Inghilterra?"
Respondit, "Sete² over 8 mesi".

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Ei dictum, “Quanto è che ti è zonto qui?”
Respondit, “El di della Assumption della Madona proxima passata”.

(p.2 of the MS)

Ei dictum, “Con chi te partistu de Ingilterra?”
Respondit, “Solo, Signore”.

el capitan signor zuan
battista da monte¹

Ei dictum, “Di dove sei stato et con chi in questi 7 over otto mesi”.
Respondit, “Son stato in Fiandra 4 mesi con el capitan signore
Zuan Battista da Monte et poi son > ritornato <³
son partito d’Anversa dove stiti
quel tempo col ditto capitano et vinì
in Borgogna per passazo, da Borgogna in
Lorena per passazo et poi in Savogia
poi a Cremona, da Cremona a Mantoa,
da Mantoa a Padoa, da Padoa a Venetia”.

Ei dictum, “Dove lassastu el capitano?”
Respondit, “A Fontanelli, sora Cremona”.

Ei dictum, “Con chi estu vegnù da Fontanelle in qua?”
Respondit, “Solo”.
Ei dictum, “Chi te esse con el conte Inglese?” Respondit, “Nissuno”.

Ei dictum, “Con che mezo andastu con lui?”
Respondit, “El me sentì a cantar in organo
a Santa Maria Formosa et mi adimandò
se voleva andar con lui in Ingilterra et a questo modo andai”.
Ei dictum, “Domandasti consegio ad alcuno

(p.3 of the MS)

se dovevi andar o no?”
Respondit, “Domandai a mio patre et mia matre
li quali mi consigliorno che andasse et sono morti dal contagio”.

Ei dictum, “Questo conte dove si trovalo?”
Respondit, “In Ingilterra”.

Ei dictum, “Vivevalo Catholicamente?”
Respondit, “Signore no”.

Ei dictum, “Quando el te invidò andar con
lui in questa terra quanto stetelo dapoi a partirse?”
Respondit, “El di de zuoba grassa andai a star
in casa sua et si partì el luni di carnaval immediate siguente”.

Ei dictum, “Quel venere et sabbato seguenti
al zuoba che cosa se magnò in casa sua?”
Respondit, “Pesce”.

Ei dictum, “In Ingilterra et per il viazo
andando in Ingilterra che vita fevelo
nella XLma⁴ > per el viazo <³ et le vigilie?”
Respondit, “Pesce per el viazo perchè per le hostarie
non si dà carne”.

Ei dictum, “E in Ingilterra nelle vigilie veneri
et sabbati che cosa magnavalo?”
Respondit, “Carne e pesce”.

p. 4 of the MS)

Ei dictum, "In questi giorni fevelo magnar carne alla famegia?" Respondit, "Signore no".

Ei dictum, "Te halo fato magnar carne in zorni prohibiti?" Respondit, "Signore no, lhaveva ancho in casa un camarier et un servitore che erano catholici".

Ei dictum, "Te halo mai fatto andar alle prediche de heretici?" Respondit, "Signore no".

Ei dictum, "Estu andato ti alle prediche de heretici volontariamente?" Respondit, "Signore no, ma andava alla messa in casa delli Imbassiatori di Franza et Portogallo".

Ei dictum, "E' stato alcuno che in Inghilterra te habi voluto far lezer libri proibiti e insegnar la dotrina de eretici?"

Respondit, "Signore, si".

Ei dictum, "Chi sono Stati questi?" Respondit "Uno que si domandava messer Alexandro credo chel sia bandido da Venezia per la Religion. Un altro Ambroso da Venetia che è musicho della Rezina de Inghilterra qual ha doi figlioli et lui ha tolto moglie là con tuto che ho inteso che sua moglie vive qua in Venetia alla quale si dice anco che li mandava aiuto.

alexandro forrlan

furrlan

Ambroso da venetia musico della Regina de inghilterra qual ha doi figlioli Et ha tolto moglie

(p. 5 of the MS)

Cinque venetiani fratelli quali sono musici della Rezina fano flauti et viole Una gentildonna venetiana qual tien scuola.

Et vi sono anchora cinque venetiani fratelli i quali son musici della Rezina et fano flauti et viole et vi è una gentildonna Venetiana da Cà Malipiero la qual tiene scuola et insegna lezere et la lingua italiana et non so de altri".

Ei dictum, "Hastu mai parlà con la Rezina?" Respondit, "Signore si et ho cantato alla sua presentia". Dicens interrogatus, "La me ha voluto convertir alla sua fede". Dicens interrogatus, "Alcuni marcadanti cioè el signore Christopholo da Monte millanese me disse che sarei pervertido se stesevi qui et che non voleva che stesse altramente là et mi imbarcò per Fiandra in compagnia de altri marcadanti et mi dete 25 ducati per vegnir via".

Ei dictum, "Volesti licentia dal conte?" Respondit, "Signore no perchè el no me haveria lassado partir".

Ei dictum, "Per il viazo in Anversa et altri luoghi dove ti è sta hastu vivesto catholicamente?" Respondit, "Signore si son venuto

con soldati italiani catholici”.

Ei dictum, “Dapoi zonto qui ti è sta doman= dato del conte > da <³ con chi tu andasti da alcuno?”. Respondit, “Signore no”.

(p. 6 of the MS)

Ei dictum, “Chi praticava col conte in questa città?” Respondit, “Nissun qua della terra.

L’andava a messa alla giesia di Greci.

Et era persona che parlava ben la lingua latina et Italiana”.

Interrogatus sel conte lha voluto mai convertir alla sua fede respondit, “Signore no el lassava viver tuti a suo modo”.

Quibus habitis fuit licentiatus.

1. Written in the margin, on the left.
2. The Arabic numeral 7 is written above the word ‘sete’.
3. Crossed out in the manuscript.
4. “XLma”, abbreviation of ‘Quadragesima’ (= Lent)

COMMENTS

a) The first thing to consider is the youth’s surname. It appears that Prof. Nelson is not quite certain about the reading of it. Actually, in a previous article he published on the internet web, he reported ‘Cogno’; throughout *Monstrous Adversary* he used the form ‘Coquo’ and on page 462 of the book he changed it to ‘Cocco’. All three forms are wrong. (The right reading and explanation of the Italian handwriting of the name, which was notified to him some years ago, was completely ignored.)

The part of the text where the surname appears is in Latin: the word is ‘Coqui’, the genitive form of the name. As anyone knowing Latin will agree, the genitive of a name must be turned to the nominative when a name in Latin is translated into another language, unless it is left in its original provided it is given in the nominative.

The nominative of ‘Coqui’ is ‘Coquus’. In the past centuries, a surname in Latin was mainly used in official written documents: in real life the boy had an Italian name. The Italian for ‘Coquus’ is ‘Cuoco’ (‘Cook’ in English): it is well known that a surname often derived from a job, trade or profession. So, the youth’s name is ‘Orazio Cuoco’. As a result of the present study, the MS, which had never been transcribed before, has been labelled by the authorities of the Archivio di Stato of Venice ‘Fascicolo Orazio Cuoco’.

b) Prof. Nelson translates ‘Horatius filius quondam Francisci’ as ‘Orazio son of a certain Francesco’ (p.155): ‘a certain’ is wrong: ‘quondam’ means ‘late’ in the sense of ‘dead’; in fact, Orazio’s father, Francesco, had died of plague, as said further on in the testimony.

c) In the same line of the MS, Orazio is defined as ‘clericus’ of the Church of Santa Marina. Prof. Nelson renders it as ‘clerk’: this is also wrong. Referring to the church, a ‘clerk’ is a ‘clergyman or ecclesiastic’: a man who has been trained in a seminary in order to become a priest. It is evident that Orazio was not one. Here a ‘clericus’ is a little boy or an adolescent who serves Mass on the altar or sings in the church choir. The English equivalent is ‘altar boy’ or ‘choir boy’.

d) The inquisitor asks Orazio ‘Con chi te partistu de Ingilterra?’ (‘With whom did you leave England?’). He answers: ‘Solo, Signore’ (‘Alone, Sir.’). Prof. Nelson translates the answer as ‘Only with [certain] gentlemen [Signori]’: this is mistaken: he erroneously takes ‘Solo’ (‘Alone’) as ‘Only’,

and instead of the singular ‘Signore’ (‘Sir’) he reads the plural ‘Signori’ and translates it as ‘gentlemen’, thus changing the meaning of the original.

e) Orazio describes his return journey: ‘vini in Borgogna per passazo, da Borgogna in Lorena per passazo [...]’ (‘I went down to Burgundy in transit, from Burgundy to Lorraine in transit [...]'). Prof. Nelson translates as ‘I lived in Borgogne for a time’: that rendering is mistaken. The phrase ‘per passazo’ (‘in transit’) means that a traveller was allowed only to cross a country, not to ‘live’ in it. Prof. Nelson continues: ‘from Borgogne to Lorenzo, and in Lorenzo for a time’: the misreading or misinterpretation of ‘per passazo’ is repeated, and, rather oddly, the place name ‘Lorena’ (a region in France) is read as ‘Lorenzo’ which is a man’s name in Italian. This gross blunder would have been avoided by checking a map of France and by tracing Orazio’s journey on it. Inaccuracies result in producing nonsense.

f) In saying that the earl asked him if he wanted to go to England with him, Orazio said, ‘et a questo modo andai’ (‘so I went’). Prof. Nelson gives. ‘I came to this count’ (p.156): a rather ‘free’ and arbitrary reading.

g) With the intention of referring to the past and thus using a verb in the past tense, the inquisitor asked, ‘Vivevalo Catholicamente?’ Orazio: ‘Signore no’. (‘Was he [Lord Oxford] used to live Catholically?’ ‘No, Sir’). Prof. Nelson chooses to refer to the present time, too, thus arbitrarily stressing the Lord’s misbehaviour. ‘Does he live as a Catholic?’

Besides, throughout the text, he takes the singular ‘Signore’ as a plural: ‘Sirs, no’, ignoring that at the beginning of the testimony it is clearly said that the inquiry is carried out by only one inquisitor, and his name is also given: ‘cum assistentia illustrissimi domini Pasqualis Ciconia’ (‘in the presence of most illustrious Lord Pasquale Ciconia’). [Count Pasquale Ciconia was Doge of Venice from 1585 to 1595.]

h) Being asked, Orazio said that on the journey to England the earl ate fish ‘because no meat is served in inns’ (‘perchè per le hostarie no si dà carne’). Prof. Nelson departs from the original and does not mention the ‘hostarie’: ‘because there was no meat available’.

i) One question was about what food the earl used to eat in England ‘nelle vigilie, veneri et sabbati’.

Prof. Nelson gives a wrong reading of those words: ‘during Thursday in the vigil and on Saturday’. The right meaning is: ‘on fast days, Fridays and Saturdays’; besides that, the use of ‘vigil’ is not appropriate. English ‘vigil’ means ‘the eve of a holy day’: not necessarily does it imply fasting. Instead, Italian ‘vigilia’ (here ‘vigilie’ plural form) is a ‘fast day’, that is, a day, not necessarily an eve, when people should not eat meat nor rich food.

j) The inquisitor asks, ‘In questi giorni fevelo magnar carne alla famegia?’ (‘Did he let his [Oxford’s] family eat meat on these days?’). Orazio: ‘No, Sir’. The question in Prof. Nelson’s reading becomes: ‘On this occasion was there meat during the fasting period?’ Since Orazio’s answer is negative, it seems that here Prof. Nelson prefers to ignore the absence of wrongdoing by Lord Oxford.

k) Orazio says that ‘in his house the earl had an attendant (‘camarier’) and a manservant (‘servitore’) who were Catholic’. Prof. Nelson’s interpretation is the following: ‘In his house were also a ‘romanier’ and a gentleman who were Catholic’. By enclosing ‘romanier’ in inverted commas, Prof. Nelson meant to keep the original word. It is strange that he did not check the existence or meaning of that word. He would have found that ‘romanier’, in fact, does not exist. The right reading is ‘camarier’: a ‘camarier’ is a manservant who attends to someone’s bedroom, clothes, shoes, etc.

Furthermore, ‘gentleman’ is not the correct translation of the Italian ‘servitore’, which means ‘manservant’.

l) Further on in the text, 'Some merchants' ('Alcuni mercadanti') is wrongly interpreted as 'A certain merchant'. Then, Orazio says that one of the merchants said that Orazio would be 'perverted' ('pervertido') if he had stayed in England any longer.

'Pervert' was the word commonly used to mean 'turn aside from the right religious belief'; it refers to the misinterpretation of the Christian doctrine: and that is the meaning the word has in the present testimony. Prof. Nelson translates it as 'corrupted' (p.157), and in other parts of his book he maintains that the word means 'sexually abused'. On the contrary, 'pervert' contains no allusion to sexual perversion. To attach to 'perverted' the meaning of 'corrupted' would be to give the word an arbitrary interpretation. As anyone having some knowledge of Italian and Latin can see, no accusation, either implicit or explicit, against Lord Oxford is contained in the present testimony.

m) Orazio said he left England for 'Flanders' ('Fiandra'). 'Belgium' given by Prof. Nelson does not appear to be quite appropriate.

n) The inquisitor asked, 'Chi praticava col conte in questa città?' ('Who associated with the earl in this city?'). Orazio: 'Nissun qua della terra' ('No one here from this city'). Prof. Nelson does not follow the original: 'What did the earl do when he was in this city?' Orazio: 'He saw something of the country': this part is evidently Prof. Nelson's complete invention.

o) In the closing paragraph at the end of Chapter 28, Prof. Nelson writes that Orazio said that 'Oxford was a great lover of music': nowhere in the testimony is that said, though it is known that Oxford was a musician himself. But here Prof. Nelson makes the boy say what he has not said.

He also writes that the services in the Greek Church were 'in Latin (not Greek)': another wrong statement: services in a Greek-Orthodox church are and have always been in Greek.

He adds that the Church of the Greeks in Venice was 'notorious for attracting religious dissidents': that is another false, arbitrary, defamatory statement: it does not correspond to the historical truth. The Greek community of Venice was highly revered by everyone, including the Doge, the Senate and the city authorities. When the famous Greek military captain and diplomat Teodoro Paleologo (1452-1532) died, the Senators paid homage to the body and took part in the grand funeral arranged by the Signory.

Whether the blunders made by Prof. Nelson are due to wrong reading or misinterpretation of the original, or are a biased explanation of the content, is an issue that cannot be solved here. Most probably, all three hypotheses are true.

Monstrous Adversary is a biography of Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. It contains many documents, some of which were never published before. Comments and references are also provided.

One would expect to read a thorough story of the Earl's life and doings related in the most objective way possible - though a historian can hardly avoid the subjective treatment of the documentary material he deals with. Instead, from the very first pages the reader is overwhelmed with words of such hard criticism, contempt, and disparagement as to suggest that, at the time of writing the book, the biographer was prey to his fury, resentment, - one might say, hatred - for the English Lord.

Such feeling do condition a writer's mind and are bound to mar any research work. The result is that the historical documents in the book are distorted or twisted to conform to the writer's attitude. The biased presentation of facts, the various blunders and inaccuracies throughout the book appear to damage the reliability of the sources of information.

On considering the title chosen, one is led to conclude that the 'Adversary' is not simply the enemy of Queen Elizabeth's Court, De Vere's friends, relatives or people around him, but he is mainly a dangerous opponent to the supposed certainties on which Prof. Nelson has grounded his Stratfordian beliefs.

N.M.