

'Venice in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore'

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John Ford and the Venetian Ambassador

At an early stage of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, while Soranzo is still a suitor for Annabella, we see him alone 'in his study, reading a book', which he later tells us contains Jacopo Sannazaro's encomium on Venice. Soranzo apparently both quotes from this and proposes a rewriting which would praise Annabella rather than Venice:¹

'Love's measure is extreme, the comfort pain,
The life unrest, and the reward disdain.'
What's here? Look't o'er again: 'tis so, so writes
This smooth licentious poet in his rhymes.
But Sannazar, thou liest, for had thy bosom
Felt such oppression as is laid on mine,
Thou wouldst have kissed the rod that made the smart.
To work then, happy Muse, and contradict
What Sannazar hath in his envy writ:
'Love's measure is the mean, sweet his annoys,
His pleasures life, and his reward all joys.'
Had Annabella lived when Sannazar
Did in his brief encomium celebrate
Venice, that queen of cities, he had left
That verse which gained him such a sum of gold,
And for only look from Annabell
Had writ of her, and her diviner cheeks.²

The Revels note points out that the lines attributed to Sannazaro have not been identified; although he did write an epigram 'On the marvelous city of Venice' and another 'On the flags

of the Venetians', neither bears any relation to anything in Soranzo's speech,³ and indeed Sannazaro was in fact associated almost exclusively with Naples, while *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* itself is set in Parma, with incidental mention of Livorno and Bologna. Why then might Ford have been thinking about Venice at this point?

Although Sannazaro was not a name associated with Venice, that of Annabella's husband, Soranzo, certainly was. There was a fourteenth-century Giovanni Soranzo who was Doge of Venice, succeeding in 1312; more to the point, though, was the fact that the Venetian ambassador to England in the early 1630s, the time when *'Tis Pity* was probably being composed, was also called Giovanni Soranzo. This Soranzo seems to have arrived in England in July 1629, since on 21 June 1631 he says 'On the 15th July next I shall have served for two years in this charge ... I therefore petition you to choose my successor'.⁴ The Doge and Senate duly obliged, and on 6 February 1632 Soranzo and his successor, Vincenzo Gussoni, who had previously been Venetian ambassador to the Netherlands, sent a joint despatch noting the latter's arrival.⁵ On 6 March 1632 Soranzo reports that 'I ... am quite ready to cross the sea and nothing prevents my journey except the wind, which keeps obstinately contrary, so that it has not yet been possible to get my baggage away from these shores'. By 26 March Gussoni is reporting alone instead of the joint reports the two have previously submitted,⁶ so Soranzo had presumably moved on to his next post in France. During his four years in London Soranzo made the acquaintance of several of Ford's early dedicatees: on 20 February 1632 he notes that 'Yesterday the Earls of Pembroke and Arundel came one after the other, on purpose to visit us at this embassy',⁷ Pembroke and Arundel having been two of the co-dedicatees of Ford's 1606 *Honour Triumphant*, and he also knew Lord Craven, dedicatee of *The Broken Heart*. However, he dismisses Craven as a 'thoughtless young man',⁸ and indeed he struggled to like much about London at all,

wrestling unhappily with the spelling of Harwich (Aruich), Guernsey (Garnasie) and Falmouth (Falmuz), complaining on 8 November 1630 of ‘a chronic illness which I have contracted in this Northern climate ... my discomfort becomes greater every day’,⁹ and lamenting on 2 August 1630 that ‘I have never been so harassed as I am at present owing to the overbearing behaviour of this barbarous and unreasonable race’.¹⁰ If Ford, independently or through his dedicatees, either knew him or knew of him, it is therefore perhaps not surprising that he gives his name to an unattractive character (perhaps the choice of the anti-hero Giovanni’s name was also influenced by that of the ambassador), and the dates of Soranzo’s presence in England may perhaps afford a pointer to the date of composition of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, of which we cannot at present say anything more firm than that it was published in 1633.

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Notes

¹ This can be compared with Gervase Markham and Lewis Machin’s *The Dumb Knight*, which is a source for *The Queen*, in which Precedent quotes from *Venus and Adonis*.

² John Ford, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, edited by Derek Roper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), II.ii.1-17.

³ Jacopo Sannazaro, *Latin Poetry*, translated by Michael C. J. Putnam (Cambridge, Mass.: I Tatti Renaissance Library, 2009), pp. 279 Epigrams, Book I, XXXV, and p. 323, Book II, XXXI.

⁴ Allen B. Hinds, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice: Volume 22, 1629-1632* (1919), pp. 508-521. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89284&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

⁵ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 583-594. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89292&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

⁶ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 594-603. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89293&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

⁷ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, , pp. 583-594. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89292&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

⁸ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 559-586. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89289&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

⁹ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 434-442. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89277&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

¹⁰ Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 383-396. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=89273&strquery=Giovanni%20Soranzo>

