

**VENETIAN MOMENTS IN EARLY MODERN  
ENGLISH POLITICAL THOUGHT**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the influence of the republic of Venice in early modern English political thought. It begins in Tudor England, by looking at three different writers' invocations of the republic, namely those of Thomas Starkey, William Thomas and Lewis Lewkenor. It will be argued that where these writers draw upon Venice, they do so in a nuanced way and as a response to particular moments of constitutional uncertainty in England. This thought – that Venice is called upon specifically when England's political set-up seemed in peril – will run throughout the entire work. Accordingly the second chapter, which deals with Jacobean England, will be significantly shorter than the two either side of it. This is because Jacobean England “witnessed the greatest stability that Britain saw between the Henrician reformation and the early eighteenth century” (Burgess, 2009: 142), i.e. the constitutional uncertainty which gave rise to our previous Venetian moments was not present. However, this stability was famously not to last into the Caroline period, which is where the third and final chapter will begin. We will initially see how Venice was drawn upon by writers on both sides of the argument between the king and Parliament in the early 1640s. After this, we will note the way in which in the early 1650s, with monarchy abolished but not forgotten, Venice became attractive as a republican state (like England), but one in which a princely element (which England had historically possessed) was also present. Finally, we will look at the thought of James Harrington, who exemplifies this work's argument well. That is to say, the basic suggestion put forward here is that we see Englishmen closely consider Venice at moments of difficulty as far as their own constitution goes. And it is with Harrington, who had concluded that England's ancient constitution was fundamentally broken, that we see Venice being considered with the most seriousness.

# VENETIAN MOMENTS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH POLITICAL THOUGHT

<b>Introduction</b>	1-4
<b>1. Tudor England</b>	
• <b>Introduction</b>	5-10
• <b>Starkey and Thomas</b>	11-16
• <b>Lewis Lewkenor</b>	16-24
• <b>Conclusion</b>	24-25
<b>2. Jacobean England</b>	
• <b>Introduction</b>	26
• <b>Thomas Coryat</b>	26-27
• <b>Jacobean constitutional stability</b>	27-31
• <b>Conclusion</b>	32
<b>3. Caroline and Interregnum England</b>	
• <b>Introduction</b>	33-35
• <b>From constitutional stability to Civil War</b>	35-37
• <b>Venice as an illustrator</b>	37-44
• <b>Venice as a republic with something of monarchy in it</b>	44-49
• <b>James Harrington</b>	49-54
• <b>Conclusion</b>	54-55
<b>Conclusion</b>	56-57
<b>Bibliography</b>	58-62



## Introduction

Writing in 1940, Zera Fink remarked that “the reputation of Venice in seventeenth-century England appears to have been almost totally neglected by English writers.” (Fink, 1940: 1). Fortunately, and at least in part owing to both Fink's aforementioned and later work (Fink, 1962: 28–51), this is no longer quite the case. However, it remains more or less accurate to say that the historiography has generally heeded Machiavelli's suggestion to pay more attention to the Roman strain of republicanism than the Venetian (Machiavelli, 2003: 123). The most obvious, and important example of this trend is found in the work of Quentin Skinner. For instance, in his *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), *La Serenissima* is dealt with in the space of a handful of pages. A few years later, and Skinner's focus on Machiavelli and the Roman republican tradition had sharpened even further (1981), leaving Venice distinctly out of focus and out of vogue. Then, by 1998, Skinner claimed to have uncovered an explicitly 'neo-Roman' theory of liberty, upheld by a veritable all-star list of English republicans – John Milton, Marchamont Nedham, James Harrington, Algernon Sidney, Henry Neville – as well as by some of their less well known colleagues, such as John Hall and Francis Osborne. With all of these thinkers apparently so unanimous on the nature of their republicanism, it is little wonder that Skinner's most recent intervention felt in a position to refer to “*the* republican theory” (2008: ix, emphasis added), when in actual fact, he was only dealing with Roman republicanism, transmitted by Machiavelli. It was almost as if Venice, so vaunted for its longevity, had never existed at all.

The basic aim of this dissertation will be to try and redress this, by tracking the influence of the republic of Venice in early modern English political thought. As noted above, it is not quite right to say that such an undertaking has been entirely passed over. Where Fink initially pointed, a number of historians have gone. However, the treatment provided has often taken the form of a small part of a much wider project. Jonathan Scott, for example, refers to Venice only

with regard to Marchamont Nedham and Algernon Sidney's criticism of it (Scott, 2004: 138, 148), or James Harrington's praise of it (ibid.: 24). J.G.A. Pocock (1975) delves a little bit deeper. More specifically, he details the way in which Gasparo Contarini's 1543 treatise *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum* became *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* in 1599, via the translation of Lewis Lewkenor, although little consideration is given with respect to its possible impact, in keeping with his wider thesis about the stunted development of civic consciousness in pre-Civil War England. Standing in opposition to this thesis of Pocock's is Markku Peltonen, who discusses Lewkenor's translation in a little more depth (Peltonen, 1995: 106–118), as part of his wider goal of “show(ing) the presence of humanism and some features of republicanism in English political thought from the 1570s to the 1630s” (ibid.: 15). The one author who has devoted an entire book specifically to Venice's influence on English political thought is John Eglin, in his *Venice Transfigured: The Myth of Venice in British Culture, 1660–1797* (2001). However, Eglin's decision to concentrate on this time period has been described as “puzzling” (de Vivo, 2004: 177), the suggestion being that given the aforementioned 1599 translation of Contarini, Eglin's study might have profited from an earlier starting point.

This piece of work will take up this suggestion, with the first chapter, beginning in Tudor England, looking at three writers who showed a particular interest in Venice. The first of these will be Thomas Starkey, whose *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset* was completed during the reign of Henry VIII (between 1529 and 1532 specifically). After this, William Thomas's 1549 *History of Italy* – or more specifically, the section of it on Venice – will be analysed. We will then skip forward fifty years and think about the aforementioned Lewis Lewkenor, whose translation *The Government and Commonwealth of Venice* was published in 1599. The analysis of each of these writers' use of Venice will be structured as a response to Andrew Hadfield's interpretation of them. Hadfield finds each of them to be straightforwardly turning to Venice as

an example on which England should remodel itself, a turn inspired by a general dissatisfaction with English political institutions. In the case of Thomas, I will find this analysis to be impossible to sustain. With the other two writers, I will suggest that Hadfield's interpretation oversimplifies what's actually going on with their respective uses of Venice, on two counts. Firstly, they both draw on Venice in more complex ways than he suggests, i.e. they are not simply trying to facilitate the conversion of monarchical England into republican Venice. Secondly, both of these writers' respective turns to Venice are not so much inspired by a general dissatisfaction with English political institutions as Hadfield's account suggests, rather than by particular moments of constitutional uncertainty. This thought – that English writers called upon Venice at moments of specific political precariousness – will run throughout the entire dissertation. Accordingly, the second chapter – devoted to Jacobean England – will take up much less space than the ones before and after it. As I will note, this period was one of relative constitutional stability, meaning that circumstances were not conducive to the kind of “Venetian moments” we see with Starkey and Lewkenor.

Such constitutional stability, of course, did not continue throughout the reign of Charles I, and it is in the lead up to the Civil War that the third and final chapter will begin. Here, we will see how writers drew on Venice both in support of and to criticise the king's position. I will show how, in particular, the figure of the Venetian doge (or duke) became a reference point by which the proper powers of the executive could be measured. For those supportive of the king in his dispute with Parliament – and indeed the king himself – the duke of Venice served as a useful shorthand for exactly what Charles would become if he was to cede to the various demands that were being made of him. On the other side of the argument, writers such as Henry Parker and William Prynne called upon the example of the duke to show that the powers of an executive can, and should be limited in certain ways (vitaly without leading to a state's ruin, as the longevity of Venice showed). We will then move on to see how Venice could be used in the

early 1650s, in the immediate aftermath of the regicide and the abolition of the monarchy.

As will be noted, this period saw England as a republic, but as a republic in which the memory of kingly government lived on. Here, it will be suggested that Venice provided a number of writers with a way in which both of the elements of this context could be spoken to. Put simply, Venice was, of course, a republic. But given the figure of the doge, it was a republic which also seemed to provide a degree of familiarity with the monarchical system that England had suddenly, and violently, left behind. The final part of the chapter will consider the work of James Harrington, with the hope being that our understanding of him will be better understood by placing him within the wider context of the dissertation as a whole. But as promised, let us begin in Tudor England.

## TUDOR ENGLAND

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to track the role that the republic of Venice played in 16<sup>th</sup> century English political thought. This will be done by looking at three different references to *La Serenissima*. Firstly, Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, which was composed during the reign of Henry VIII, more specifically between 1529 and 1532. (Mayer, 1989: x). Secondly, we will analyse the description of Venice that William Thomas put forward in his 1549 *History of Italy*. Finally, and in the most detail, our attention will turn to Lewis Lewkenor's 1599 translation of Gasparo Contarini's *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum – The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*. The questions posed in each case will be: to what purpose was Venice being put? What were these different writers hoping to achieve, and why might their attention have turned to Venice to try and achieve it?

The present analysis will broadly be structured as a response to one commentator, Andrew Hadfield, who provides a roughly similar answer in each of these three cases. To his mind, Starkey, Thomas and Lewkenor all drew attention to the Venetian system of government as a way of “reflecting on domestic affairs while avoiding explicit, potentially dangerous comment.” (Hadfield, 1998: 2). These reflections, on Hadfield's account, specifically involve the suggestion that monarchical England should reshape itself along Venetian republican lines. Before putting this interpretation to the test, however, it is initially necessary to try and say something about the intellectual contexts in which these texts appeared. The question we need to ask is, what could invocations of a republican form of government have meant to these writers' contemporaries, each living under a monarchical system of government? Could they have understood them in the way that Hadfield suggests they were supposed to, as a call to give serious consideration to “an alternative political vision”? (Hadfield, 1998a: 48).

To J.G.A Pocock's mind, such an alternative political vision was not viable in 16<sup>th</sup> century England, “an environment dominated by monarchical, legal, and theological concepts apparently in no way disposed to require the definition of England as a polis or the Englishman as a citizen.” (Pocock, 1975: 334). He continues by suggesting that “there is a *prima facie* case for holding that an ideology of civic activism was incompatible with either the institutions or the beliefs of a territorial monarchy.. the individual under a king (was left) with little function but to obey those above him in a hierarchical order and to pass on the duty of obedience to those below him.” (ibid.). In other words, we need to look beyond the 16<sup>th</sup> century to discover how “the Englishman acquired the means of seeing himself, in.. Venetian terms, as a classical citizen acting in a republic.” (ibid.: 336). So on this account, it is difficult to accept that Starkey, Thomas and Lewkenor could have been positing Venice as a genuine alternative to princely rule, in the way that Hadfield suggests. England's “territorial and jurisdictional monarchy” (ibid.: 335) was viewed, as Kevin Sharpe puts it, as “the natural, divine mode of government and (it) rendered alternative politics literally unimaginable.” (Sharpe, 2000: 223).

Patrick Collinson famously saw things slightly differently. In challenging Pocock's thesis – which he summed up as the view “that the commonwealth of England had no existence, apart from its head” (Collinson, 1994: 38), Collinson conceived of Elizabethan England as “a republic which happened also to be a monarchy: or vice versa.” (ibid.: 43). He drew attention to the disjunctive rather than connective understanding of the phrase “the queen and her ministers” (ibid.: 39) by detailing instances in which some of the latter took it upon themselves – in Pocock's words but at odds with his argument – “to act, to make decisions”. (1975: 335). More specifically, Collinson refers to events in 1572 and 1584, collectively known as the Elizabethan Exclusion Crisis. (Collinson, 1994: 43). The first of these dates saw parliament debating what to do with respect to Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic with both pretensions to the English throne and apparent links to the Ridolfi plot to assassinate Elizabeth. (ibid.: 46).

The question “was whether Mary Stuart should be executed or simply excluded from the succession” (ibid.), but either answer would importantly imply “that monarchy is taken to be not an indelible and sacred anointing but a public and localised office, like any other form of magistracy.” (ibid.: 47). And of course, this implication could be said to apply to Elizabeth as well. (ibid.).

Conscious of this implication, Elizabeth called a stop to parliament's moves against Mary. However, the issue did not go away, and fears for the queen's safety were only amplified by the assassination of the Protestant William of Orange by the Catholic Balthasar Gerard. Such fears led to the second event that Collinson details, the creation of the Bond of Association in 1584. As he explains, “this document engaged those who were sworn to its terms.. to pursue 'to the uttermost extermination' anybody attempting by any act, counsel or consent to bring harm to the queen's royal person, their comforters, aiders and abettors: and to resist the succession of any individual on whose behalf such acts might be attempted or committed.” (ibid.: 48). The Bond was signed by a variety of people: “Bishops, arch-deacons, deans and heads of houses.. The Cornish bond bears 115 names, that for Hertfordshire 106.. More than 200 inhabitants of the town of Cardigan took the oath, signed or marked and applied their seals.” (ibid.). The list continues and, Collinson suggests, provides a “vivid insight into both the autonomous political capacity of the Elizabethan republic and its extent and social depth” (ibid.): evidence of the kind of acting and decision making that Pocock's account did not identify. (Pocock, 1975: 335).

Paradoxically, then, an instrument designed to ensure the safety of the monarch “was also a quasi-republican statement. The circumstance it envisaged was the extinction of the queen and it provided for the sequel to that terrible event without reference to any laws of rights of succession.” (Collinson, 1994: 50). Even as the content of the Bond was shored up by a parliamentary “Act for the Surety of the Queen's Most Royal Person” (ibid.: 51), there was still

a silence with regards to the succession in such an emergency. Accordingly, Collinson claims, Burghley sought to establish “a regularised interregnum” (ibid.), suggesting “the readiness of the political nation.. to contemplate its own immediate political future, a future not only without Queen Elizabeth but without monarchy, at least for a season.” (ibid.: 45). Or as John Guy puts it more pithily, Burghley's plan was “aristocratic republicanism *par excellence*.” (Guy, 1995: 14-15).

So where does this leave us in terms of the question posed at the bottom of this chapter's second paragraph? On the one hand, Collinson serves as a salutary warning against immediately answering “no”: his work suggests that Englishmen *were* capable of thinking beyond monarchical means of political organisation. But on the other, Collinson is very cautious in concluding his examination of the monarchical republic: he did not claim that England “could.. have been ruled more or less permanently by a rational regime composed of a team of political equals, experiencing effective collegiality.” (Collinson, 1994: 55). Rather, he has “suggest(ed) no more than that Burghley and his colleagues.. were responding resourcefully and intelligently to a most unusual situation.” (ibid.). At this stage, then, it seems sensible to neither rule out the possibility that Venice could be put forward as a serious “alternative political vision” (Hadfield, 1998a: 48) as a Pocock–inspired analysis might, nor necessarily rule it in off the back of Collinson, given his careful closing statement.

A further reason to be cautious is that it is in Elizabethan England that Collinson identifies his quasi–republican moments. This is fine for our analysis of Lewkenor, but two of the cases we will be looking at – those of Starkey and Thomas – occur in the context of Henry VIII and Edward VI's respective reigns. With respect to Thomas, we might briefly note Collinson's characterisation of Edward's reign as “acephalous” (Collinson, 1994: 39): a context which, *prima facie*, would seem very well–disposed to the development of something resembling

Guy's "aristocratic republicanism". This thought has been pursued in more detail by Stephen Alford, who argues that "the Edwardian counsel for the estate, and the explorations of the advice and consultation presented in court sermons and advice literature, came very close to establishing a model political relationship between a king and his counsellors. The counsel for the estate embraced the public affairs of a kingdom governed by a king counselled." (Alford, 2002: 206). Whether Thomas's engagement with Venice was an attempt to influence this political relationship, as Hadfield suggests, remains to be seen.

Finally, on the face of it, the context within which Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue* appeared would seem to possess exactly the conditions – particularly in possessing a strong, established, adult king – that Pocock envisaged when he declared that Englishmen's minds were in the thrall of a territorial monarchy and poorly disposed to the prospect of alternative political thinking. However, as we will see, Starkey very much had various pre-existing modes of thought that he could draw upon when presenting his arguments. So with that said, it again seems reasonable to apply the same thought outlined at the bottom of the previous paragraph: despite writing in the context of a monarchical system, we shouldn't immediately rule out the Hadfieldian argument that Starkey was able to use Venice to go beyond it. All considered, then, the argument of this chapter will be that Pocock isn't quite right to suggest that the 16<sup>th</sup> century writers under discussion almost necessarily wouldn't have been able to draw upon Venetian republicanism, whilst Hadfield also isn't quite right to think that every time Venice was invoked by the 16<sup>th</sup> century writers under discussion, they were straightforwardly attempting to import the Venetian model in as a replacement for monarchical England's. Rather, we should look to the temperance of Collinson's position for guidance: when Venice *is* used by these writers, they are "responding resourcefully and intelligently" (Collinson, 1994: 55) to specific uncertain situations, rather than straightforwardly attempting to turn England into the republic, as Hadfield's interpretations all suggest.

That said, the first writer, Thomas Starkey, comes closest to fitting Hadfield's interpretation. As we will shortly see, he *did* formulate an alternative political vision to England's hereditary monarchy, and Venice certainly played an important part in this vision – the present analysis can agree with the thrust of his interpretation on that front. But it is still not a case of him straightforwardly remodelling England along Venetian lines. His intellectual activity is rather more one of fusion – Venice is used, but in a way that maps on to pre-existing English traditions – rather than out and out replacement. It will also be suggested – and here comes the Collinson inspired “responding resourcefully” idea – that Starkey's use of Venice might well have been a response to a specific moment of constitutional stress, in a way which Hadfield's argument doesn't appreciate. In the case of William Thomas, we will note how Hadfield's claim that Thomas straightforwardly calls upon Venice “as a model for Edward VI to follow” (Hadfield, 1998a: 49) is a significant misreading. Upon closer inspection of Thomas's *History of Italy*, it will become clear that he does no such thing. Finally, with regards to Lewis Lewkenor's use of Venice, we will see that Hadfield again claims to have identified a subversive crypto-republican seeking to remodel monarchical England along Venetian lines. A question mark will be set against the merits of this interpretation, and the aim will be to give other, more historically sensitive reasons for why Lewkenor decided to produce *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* when he did. Having said this, we will also note a slightly different aspect of Hadfield's interpretation of Lewkenor, in which he suggests that Lewkenor turned to Venice – with its reputation for longevity and immortality – as a response to his concerns about the issue of the Elizabethan succession. Again, this “responding resourcefully”, Collinson style view is much more promising, and will be bolstered by reference to Lewkenor's other work which Hadfield doesn't explore himself.

### Starkey and Thomas

As previously mentioned, Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset* was composed between 1529 and 1532. (Mayer, 1989: x). The work begins with the two disputants rehearsing the classical argument between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, with Lupset advancing the merits of the latter. The initially hesitant Pole eventually agrees with Lupset, and resolves that the pair “will search out as near as we can what is the very and true common weal, wherein it standeth, and when it most flourisheth”. (Starkey, 1948: 39). With this done, they will then “search out thereby the decay of our weal, with all the common faults and misorders of the same.” (ibid.: 39–40). Finally, the duo “will devise of the cause of this same decay and of the remedy and mean to restore the common weal again.” (ibid.).

One key aspect of the “decay of our weal” related to the declining quality of England's nobility. Pole, for instance, suggests that the “first and most principal of all ill customs used in our country commonly, and after my judgement, is that which toucheth the education of the nobility, whom we see customably brought up in hunting and hawking, dicing and carding, eating and drinking, and, in conclusion, in all vain pleasure, pastime and vanity.” (ibid.: 123). Pole continues on the theme of the nobility's vanity, remarking that “every one of them will keep a court like a prince; every one will have a great idle rout to wait upon him, to keep him company and pastime, as he that hath in himself no comfort at all, nor within his mind, heart and breast no cause of inward rejoicing, but hangeth only of outward vanity.” (ibid.: 123–4). Such vanity extends to the seemingly trivial, Pole contends, as “if the nobles, yea and many of their servants, be not apparelled in silks and velvets, they think they lack much of their honour; and if they have not at dinner and supper twenty dishes of diverse meats, they lack they chief point that pertaineth to their honour”. (ibid.: 124).

These shortcomings on the part of the nobility really do matter, because they have an important

role to play in Starkey's plan for the reform of England, in a way in which the Venetian influence becomes apparent. To be more specific, Starkey's fundamental proposition is that “tyranny in all commonalties is the ground of all ill, the well of all mischief and disorder, the root of all sedition, and ruin of all civility” (Starkey, 1948: 164), meaning that “the authority of the prince must be tempered and brought to order.” (ibid.: 165). This would be done by an aristocratic council “which should represent the whole body of the people.. to resist all tyranny which by any manner may grow upon the whole commonalty, and so to call parliament of the whole whensoever they see any peril of the loss of the liberty.” (ibid.: 166). The council would also have the duty “to elect and choose ever such men as they should judge meet to be about a prince, and to be very counsellors of the common wealth, and not to be corrupt by fear or affection.” (ibid.) Finally, the council should also authorise any of “the matters of peace and war debated by” (ibid.: 167) the prince and his own council. In addition to all of this, Starkey also suggested that the English monarchy should become elective rather than hereditary, because a “country cannot be long well governed nor maintained with good policy where all is ruled by the will of one not chosen by election but cometh to it by natural succesion”. (ibid.: 99).

That these recommendations – a powerful aristocratic element, and elective monarchy – resemble aspects of the Venetian model is clear. Indeed, as Glenn Burgess puts it, Starkey's “conciliar mechanism effectively reduced the king of England to the position of the Venetian doge.” (Burgess, 2009: 24). However, it is not simply the case that these recommendations *look* Venetian: rather, it is the specific example of the limited doge that is drawn upon in order for Starkey to explain how the system of elective monarchy could work in England. Against Lupset's objection that under such a system, “every man would study to attain thereto, and so all should fall into a confusion” (Starkey, 1948: 167), Pole explains that “for as in Venice is no great ambitious desire to be there Duke, because he is restrained to good order and politic, so

with us also should be of our king, if his power were tempered after the manner before described”. (ibid.). More generally, “the most noble city of Venice, which by the reason of the good order and policy that therein is used hath continued above a thousand years in one order and state” (ibid.: 163) is drawn upon to make the wider point about the potential potency of suitable institutional reform. In light of this, Andrew Hadfield's suggestion that Starkey's work “is heavily indebted to the myth of Venice as the perfect constitution and.. employs that myth as a stick with which to beat the comparatively flawed constitution of the English monarch” (Hadfield, 1998: 22) is understandable. For Hadfield, Starkey is straightforwardly “attempt(ing) to transform England into a republic inspired by Venetian models”. (ibid.: 23).

I would argue that Starkey's use of Venice is slightly more complex than this, however. Firstly, Hadfield's interpretation doesn't register how Starkey uses aspects of the Venetian model in a way which fuses it with pre-existing English traditions. As T.F. Mayer has shown, Starkey “went back to the constitutional traditions of the late middle ages for some of the inspiration for his conciliar checks on royal authority. He hoped to tip the balance in the system of divided sovereignty back towards the nobility, who had held it until they fumbled it away during Henry VI's reign, and had often expressed their programmes in the language of the commonweal.” (Mayer, 1989: 156). So rather than turning to Venice *ex nihilo*, as Hadfield's analysis would suggest, “Starkey's proposals revealed what might emerge from a mind able to fuse European traditions.. with the English baronial tradition.” (Guy, 2002: 300).

The second point is more specific, relating to Starkey's proposal of a Venetian-style elective monarchy. The suggestion here is that when Venice is explicitly turned to, it might well have been as a reaction to a specific political problem – that of Henry's divorce proceedings – in a way which Hadfield's account does not portray. As Kenneth Bartlett explains, Starkey (through his relationship with Pole) was heavily involved in the king's divorce, and would have realised

that “Henry, of course, required the divorce largely because of his lack of male heir, a dynastic catastrophe for the parvenu Tudors that might again inflame civil war.” (Bartlett, 1992: 106). If the English monarchy ran along elective lines, however, “the divorce would not have been necessary, even if possible. Henry's fear of the continuation of the male Tudor line would have evaporated and the concomitant events leading to dangerous religious experimentation would not have ensued.” (ibid.). Taken together, then, these two points tell us that Starkey did not turn to Venice to straightforwardly import a novel system into England – rather, he mapped certain aspects of it onto a prevailing tradition – and also that this turn might well have occurred at a specific moment of political uncertainty, as a result of a specific political problem. It was, to paraphrase Collinson, a resourceful response.

But what of the next writer to consider – William Thomas – who finished his *History of Italy* in 1549? By way of background information, Thomas's Italian travels began under inauspicious circumstances in 1545: facing gambling debts, he had fled there with money stolen from his patron. (Hamilton, 2005). Eventually arrested in Venice, Thomas paid back the money and decided to remain in Italy for a further three years. The *History of Italy* records his observations from these years, providing detailed descriptions of Rome and Venice, as well as less detailed descriptions of Naples, Florence, Milan and other Italian cities. These descriptions are preceded by a dedication to John Dudley, Earl of Warwick (and later to be Duke of Northumberland), in which Thomas extols the merits of travelling. These include the fact that travellers “shall see upon what little beginning many great states have risen, and how they that have had the power to rule.. have merited eternal slander and shame.” (Thomas, 1963: 3). It is on the basis of these types of remarks that Hadfield places the *History of Italy* “within the 'mirror for princes' tradition” (Hadfield, 1998: 30), and more specifically, it is Venice which “clearly stands out as the positive example” (ibid.: 26), “presumably as a model for Edward VI to follow.” (Hadfield, 1998a: 49). Central to Hadfield's contention is Thomas's account of

Venice's institutions. This, Hadfield begins by noting, includes “a description of the Doge as an 'honourable slave', because although his power seems great, it is in fact strictly limited by the citizens. There are ballots for everything, which means that the three citizens closest to the Doge, the Signor Capi, have greater powers than him because they are his nearest advisers.” (Hadfield, 1998: 28). What's more, Hadfield tells us, “Thomas is keen to represent Venice as a model for England to copy, always suggesting that its Utopian image can be adapted; that, indeed, in some respects it already has been. Hence in his laudatory description of the Great Council the opening comment is that it serves the same function as the English parliament.” (ibid.: 29).

Undoubtedly, Thomas does say much in praise of Venice. But closer inspection of the text itself reveals that his account of it is far from “Utopian”, as Hadfield would have it. Rather, Thomas's admiration is mixed with a number of less effusive observations. So whilst Hadfield claims that “everyone, according to Thomas, lives like a prince rather than a private citizen” (ibid.: 28), Thomas *in fact* notes how Venice's poor folk regularly complain about a lack of water, despite the “great number of.. wells and plenty of rain”. (Thomas, 1963: 68). Similarly, Hadfield fails to properly note Thomas's deprecatory remarks about Venice's high levels of taxation – “a thing to be wondered at than believed” – reporting that a friend of his “sware to me by his faith that Christians lived a great deal better under the Turk than under the Venetians.” (ibid.: 69). Despite this high level of taxation, Thomas notes that after all of their spending on “their continual costly buildings, and.. the unreasonable charge of their Arsenale and of their galleys abroad”, the government of Venice “cannot lay up any great sum at the year's end.” (ibid.: 75). Perhaps Hadfield's most significant omission comes in relation to Thomas's conclusion on Venice's legal system. This is that “there can be no better order of justice in a commonwealth than theirs *if it were duly observed.*” (ibid.: 77, emphasis added). That it is not observed is put down to “corruption.. amongst the judges”. (ibid.)

So then, taken together, Thomas's account of Venice is a great deal more ambivalent than Hadfield portrays it. Indeed, shortly after the *History of Italy* was published, Thomas was appointed as a tutor to Edward, providing him with the perfect opportunity to press the Venetian model directly to the king if he so pleased. In actual fact, Thomas did no such thing, with the political education he provided Edward being indebted to Machiavelli, rather than Venice. (Pollnitz, unpublished paper).

### **Lewis Lewkenor**

The final writer under consideration is Lewis Lewkenor, who in 1599 published a translation of Gasparo Contarini's *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum*, thereby producing *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*. This translation consists of five different books. The first book is a general overview of Venetian government and how it arose. The second book details the office of the doge, whilst the third explains the function of the Senate and the Council of Ten. The fourth book discusses civil matters in the city of Venice itself, and the fifth informs the reader about the administration and government of Venice's territories. Added to the end of the translation are “sundry notes and collections which” Lewkenor has “gathered as well by reading and observation, also by conference with Venetian Gentleman, skilfull in the state of their countrey”. (Lewkenor, 1599: 150). These include excerpts from Gianotti, as well as the history of the various holders of the office of the doge, up until 1585.

Set before the translation are the dedicatory epistle to Anne Dudley, countess of Warwick, Lewkenor's introduction to the reader, and number of sonnets. The first of these immediately sets the laudatory tone in which Lewkenor discusses Venice, referring to it as “gloriously shining in the cleere knowledge of her owne incomparable worthinesse” (Lewkenor, 1599: §2), requesting that Anne “will vouchsafe to be a gentle & propitious defendresse to this renowned

Commonwealth, that nothing more desireth then to bee gracious in your sight, and here frankly offreth unto your view the naked full discoverie of her faire and beautiful lineaments”. (ibid.: §3). The introduction continues the praise, with Lewkenor relaying information about how Venice would impress even the most experienced of travellers, who “though sundrie of them had been in the farthest parts of Asia and Affrica, yet coming once to speake of the cittie of Venice, they would inforce their speech to the highest of all admiration”. (ibid.: A1). All sorts of people could be impressed by Venice, as “some of the youthfuller sort, would extoll to the skies their humanitie towards strangers”, whilst “other of a greaver humor would dilate of the greatnes of their Empire, the gravitie of their prince, the majesty of their Senate”. (ibid.: A2). So then, Lewkenor's positive feelings about Venice seem clear enough. But what was he up to – what was he hoping to achieve by undertaking this translation?

Hadfield's story about Lewkenor is familiar once more. He suggests that Lewkenor's attention turned to Venice as a way “of criticising a repressive government at home and attempt(ing) to formulate an alternative political vision when direct comment was difficult.” (Hadfield, 1998a.: 47–8). He places *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* firmly within “the rapid expansion of literary and historical genres as fora for political debate”, an expansion “fostered by Elizabeth's increasingly distant and autocratic government”. (ibid.: 50). More specifically, Hadfield identifies a “republican sub–text” in Lewkenor's translation. Contextually speaking, Hadfield's identification of this sub–text relies upon his suggestion that Lewkenor's acquaintances “would seem to place him within the circle of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex.” (ibid.: 51). This possible link serves as something of a smoking gun in Hadfield's argument, which very much aligns itself with the view of the earl as “a keen student of alternative continental models of government”, eager to consider the “attractions of democratic republicanism.” (Brennan, 2005: 81). Indeed, when writing elsewhere about Edmund Spenser, Hadfield points to a connection with Essex as evidence of “republican leanings” in the poet,

(Hadfield, 1998b: 172), and it seems as if Lewkenor's possible connection is proof of the same thing. For Hadfield, Lewkenor is a republican trying to argue that England “should copy the political and legal example of the virgin of Venice”. (Hadfield, 1998a: 55).

In the course of making this argument, Hadfield brushes aside an annotation which Lewkenor makes alongside a passage in the translation which claims that “the gouernment of men to bee unfitly granted to one alone” – as in a monarchical system. Lewkenor's annotation acknowledges that the success of Venice might seem to back this statement up, before going on to state that “there was never any example of any other great commonwealth but that did soone perish by the plurality of commande: all great philosophers chiefly extolling the monarchy; & all of course of times & examples confirming their opinion.” (Lewkenor, 1599: 10). According to Hadfield, however, “it is hard to believe that the true voice of Lewkenor is that of the marginal annotator.” (Hadfield, 1998a: 57). To try and prove this, he refers us to later comments within the translation itself which state that “though in the opinion of many men, the kingly domination is of highest esteeme and greatest account.. the government of the multitude is farre more convenient to the assemblie of citizens, which experience the mistresse of all thinges doth elegantly teach us, because that wee have not read that there was among ancientes any soverainty of a king, neyther have wee in our time seene any that had not soone declyned into tyranny” (Lewkenor, 1599: 13). “That these comments”, Hadfield suggests, “reverse the earlier marginal annotation is clear.” (Hadfield, 1998a: 58). Accordingly, we must disregard them and conclude with Hadfield that the purpose of Lewkenor's translation is to show that “monarchy will sooner or later degenerate into tyranny, perhaps in England in 1599 it already had” (ibid.: 59), and that in Venice, England has a model which it can copy.

We are, however, provided with no explanation as to why we should prioritise these later comments within the translation itself over Lewkenor's own earlier comments in the

annotation. Hadfield's argument seems to be essentially circular: we know that these later comments are really what Lewkenor thinks because he's a republican, and he's a republican because these later comments are what he really thinks.<sup>1</sup> But this will not do. These comments are not necessarily proof of Lewkenor's supposed hankering for a change in England from monarchy to a republic, with Venice being used as a model on which this change could be based on. The case for this looks a bit flimsy, and seems to come about without consideration for any possible alternative explanation.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the aim now will be to suggest another possible explanation for Lewkenor's turn to Venice. Doing so will require thinking slightly differently about the nature of any possible connection to the earl of Essex, as well as paying more attention to the biographical information that we have about Lewkenor himself.

Significantly, he was a Catholic. Indeed he was a Catholic who, by 1580, felt it necessary to escape England and go into exile in the Low Countries. Hadfield refers to Lewkenor as “a government official who served in Spain” (ibid.: 51), a characterisation which misses the vital detail that Lewkenor's service was on behalf of the Spanish crown, not the English. Indeed, Lewkenor rose to become a captain in the Spanish army, however his military career was ended by a severe arm injury. (Clayton, 2005). Financial difficulties soon followed, and as Albert Loomie informs us, “by 1587 he had been reduced to the sorry expedient of begging an exemption from a tax on beer and bread in order to live. Finally, by June 1590 he begged a passport for England from Sir Robert Sydney, the Governor of Flushing.” (Loomie, 1963: 10). As Marco Nievergelt observes, Lewkenor returned to England not only poor and injured, but also guilty of a “twofold betrayed in the forms of both treason and heresy”. (Nievergelt, 2008). In short, it seems fair to suggest that when Lewkenor returned to England in the 1590s, he had some serious explaining to do, and favour to be won. And one significant part of Lewkenor's

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, a comparison between the original and Lewkenor's translation suggests that “Lewkenor translates closely”, i.e. his own personal thoughts are more likely to be found in the annotations rather than in the translation itself. (See Hammerton, 1987: 396 for more.)

<sup>2</sup> I.e., “*why else could Lewkenor have turned to Venice? He must have done so because he wants England to remodel itself on it.*”

explanation for his indiscretions of the previous decade was his *A Discourse on the Usage of the English Fugitives, by the Spaniard*, published at the beginning of 1595. It warns English Catholics considering defecting to Spain “that under heaven there is no state so wickedly, impiously, and devouringly governed in matter of religion and conscience, as these here under the Spaniard.” (Lewkenor, 1595). The misery of these English Catholics in Spanish service is quite literally unbelievable, and “would rather breede in your admiration than beleefe, so farre doth the same exceed the compasse of all other tyrannies that ever were used”. (ibid.). The barbarous nature of the Spaniards is summed up by Lewkenor's suggestion that those living under Spanish command who are close to death are “in a maner happier, because they are at an ende of theyr miseries”. (ibid.). In sum, the Spanish are so savage that it is better to be dead than live under them.

On one level, then, this is a straightforward work of anti-Spanish propaganda. On another level, however, the *Discourse* is a work of explanation and self-justification on the part of Lewkenor. He acknowledges the “long and painefull troubles and experience” he endured whilst in the Spanish service, has since come to comprehend “the impietie of this place and the wicked and detestable end whereto their drifts & practises are directed,” and has “long since retired my self, liuing aloofe from them, abandoning and vtterly reiecting the merit of my long seruice, & all such hopes and prefermentes, which I might as well as anie man else of my qualitie of my nation haue pretended and should haue as soone obtained.” (ibid.). Having seen the error of his ways, he is now “desiring to spend my poore talent, and the residue of my life in the seruice of her Maiestie, my most honorable princesse & soueraigne Ladie, whom God of his euerlasting goodnesse blesse with many yeres, & endles prosperity, to the ioy of hir subiects, and all faithfull christians dispersed throughout the whole world.” (ibid.) The *Discourse*, then, sees Lewkenor positioning himself as a Catholic loyalist. More specifically, it sees him positioning himself as loyal Catholic with first hand experience of foreign affairs. But

how does this relate to our understanding of Lewkenor's attention turning to Venice?

I would suggest that it might lead us to reconsider any possible connection between Lewkenor and the earl of Essex – a connection which Hadfield's interpretation sees as indicative of Lewkenor's supposed republicanism. As Alex Gajda notes, by “the mid fifteen–nineties the earl of Essex was strongly associated with the cause of Catholic loyalism and Catholic toleration”, having “facilitated the rehabilitation or individual protection of a number of Catholics”. (Gajda, 2008: 432). More specifically, Essex was “acutely aware that Catholic exiles seeking.. to return to England” – as Lewkenor had been – “could provide vital intelligence about Spanish affairs.” (ibid.). One aspect of this hunt for intelligence became increasingly focused on Italy, as “the various Italian states remained important as the meeting–point of the European and Mediterranean worlds, and key contributors to Spanish military power.” (Hammer, 1999: 178). What's more, “those Italian states which resisted Spanish influence, such as Venice and Florence, had appeal as potential allies for England.” (ibid.: 178–9). In this connection, Essex sent Dr Henry Hawkyns out to Venice in 1595, although Hawkyns' “stiff” Protestantism limited his capability to work in the Catholic state. (ibid.: 181).<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, this appointment (and particularly the high costs it involved) is very much suggestive of the earl's interest in Venice, and so it does not seem unreasonable to propose that the translation of Lewkenor – keen to reprise his role as an authority on foreign affairs that he took up in the *Discourse* – could be understood with this interest in mind. Indeed, Lewkenor's introduction suggests that his turn to Venice has an element of unfinished business about it: “during my time of travell (destinate to more unhappy courses), I was not so fortunate as to bee a beholder of the glorie thereof”. (Lewkenor, 1599: A2). However, he is now – albeit vicariously – reprising his previous role as one of those hardy types who “have enabled and made themselves fit to do their countrie service”, despite being “runne through all difficulties,

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<sup>3</sup> See also Ungerer, 1976, v. II: 185–92.

subject to reprehension, and uncertaine of reward” (ibid.: A). And even though his translation would not constitute “intelligence” in the normal sense of the word, it would have certainly served as a useful source for the “model of the kind of applied scholarship that Essex was known to favour for practical usage”, given the fact that “the earl and his fellows urged the production of political papers based on the reading of history, political tracts and personal observation.” (Gajda, 2008: 428–9).

So then, I would propose that it is not as simple as Lewkenor straightforwardly turning to Venice in the hope that England might remodel itself along republican lines, as Hadfield suggests. But at the same time, that does not mean that Lewkenor did not use Venice to reflect on English political issues at all. This is partially suggested by Hadfield, when he claims that Lewkenor turned to Venice, with its reputation for stability and longevity, as a reaction to “uncertainty as to what sort of regime would follow (Elizabeth's) death”. (Hadfield, 1998a: 50). Such an interpretation can be supported by pointing towards parts of the translation referring to “the brevitie of life, and mans fraile disposition” (Lewkenor, 1599: 13), as well as Lewkenor's introduction to the reader which speaks of the “13 hundred yeares since the first foundation” of Venice, which is “in an estate so perpetually flourishing & unblemished” (ibid.: A3). However there is more that can be said in support of this interpretation which Hadfield doesn't touch upon. More specifically, this interpretation is significantly bolstered by paying some attention to a different translation of Lewkenor's, that of Olivier de La Marche's *Le Chevalier Délibéré*, or *The Resolved Gentleman* (1594).

As Marco Nievergelt points out, “Lewkenor ostensibly presents (t)his work as a politically neutral, self-effacing humanist translation, undertaken in the interest of learning and moral virtue”. (Nievergelt, 2008). However, the reader is immediately alerted to the possibility that something else might be going on by the poem's epigraph – “Le temps s'en va” – “time

disappears quickly". This message is repeated throughout the work, which Nievergelt describes as a "meditation on human mortality", written in the context of "the succession crisis in full swing, an ageing regime, and no dynastic or other political renewal in sight". (ibid.) The translation begins by casting Lewkenor as a wandering knight, conscious of an "euer victoriousemie, called DEATH", who "who entertayneth in his dayly wages, two myghtie and puissant Champions, the one called Accident, the other Debilitie". (Lewkenor, 1594). More specifically, the text then goes on to note the mortality of a number of famous historical leaders. Examples of this range from "most glorious Caesar," who "hauing vanquished all publique enemies, was by a priuate conspiracie of his dissembled freendes, stabbed & murdered in the senate house, Accident did strangely bring him to this tragical end" to the "great King Agamemnon", who "by the wicked consent of his detestable wife, was trecherouslie slaine by Aegistus." (ibid.).

Almost immediately after recounting the fate of these rulers, Lewkenor continues to press home the impermanence of life by entering "a vallie, that did directly leade me to a plaine, which in appearance seemed to be aboue measure great and spatious. This plaine I speak of, is called *Time*, which though it be large & farre extended, yet scarcely doth the passenger come unto it, when he is alredie beyonde it". (ibid.). Aside from his personal armour, we are told that the only item Lewkenor had to defend himself on this journey through the plain of time is his "Lance of *Good gouerment*", a situation which becomes serious when a rival knight with the coat of arms "*Constant suffring*" comes charging across the plain at him. Despite initially defending himself with his lance of good government, Lewkenor's assailant manages to land "so manie sturdie strokes, with his sworde of *Many yeers*", so that eventually, Lewkenor's "lance of *Good gouerment* flew into peeces: wherewith, and thorow the thumps which he had geuen me, my head began to be giddie, my legges to faint, and my eyes to dazle". (ibid.). This imagery of good government being repeatedly struck by many years until it breaks is highly suggestive. It gives us a strong indication of how the Elizabethan succession crisis of the 1590s

was on Lewkenor's mind, and how Venice – so feted for its longevity and stability – could provide a means through which he could express this concern. To repeat, however, using Venice to comment on one particularly pressing constitutional issue is not the same thing as using Venice to try and replace England's monarchical constitution altogether, as the first aspect of Hadfield's interpretation suggests. It was perfectly possible to be concerned about the succession without wanting to do away with the system of monarchy in its entirety. I would suggest that this position best fits what Lewkenor was up to.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse three different references to Venice in 16<sup>th</sup> century England: Thomas Starkey, William Thomas, and Lewis Lewkenor. This analysis was structured as a response to Andrew Hadfield's interpretation of each of these writers, an interpretation which found them all turning to the Venetian republic as a model on which monarchical England could be reformed upon. In each case, this supposed desire for reform came from a general dissatisfaction with England's political institutions. With William Thomas, it was suggested that Hadfield's analysis was a long way wide of the mark. Thomas's description of Venice was a great deal more critical than Hadfield presents it, and when Thomas was in fact appointed as a tutor to King Edward – providing him with the opportunity to press the Venetian model on the young monarch if he so pleased – he did no such thing.

There was something more to Hadfield's analysis of Starkey and Lewkenor, but again, neither of these writers' respective engagements with Venice were as straightforward as he presents it. Starkey's *Dialogue* came close to Hadfield's “remodelling” thesis, but his invocation of Venice was less a call for an out and out replacement of England's institutions, and more an attempt to fuse certain aspects of the Venetian system with pre-existing, native traditions. What's more, it

was suggested that his most distinctive Venetian suggestion – the system of elective monarchy – might well have been introduced as a response to a particular issue of constitutional uncertainty (Henry VIII's divorce proceedings), in a way in which Hadfield's account does not appreciate. This thought – that Venice was turned to in the face of constitutional strife – was also found to work with the analysis of Lewkenor. More specifically – and this was attested to by referring to some of his other work from the 1590s – it seemed to be the case that Lewkenor was particularly worried about the fate of the English polity with regard to the succession question. With this in mind, it was suggested that by turning to Venice, with its reputation for longevity and stability, Lewkenor was able to pass comment on this sensitive political issue in an indirect manner. However, a distinction between passing comment like this, on the one hand, and simply wanting to see monarchical England straightforwardly become republican Venice, on the other, was drawn. The latter of these is again what Hadfield finds to be going on with Lewkenor, but the evidence for this view was judged to be lacking. Where Hadfield saw a possible connection between Lewkenor and the earl of Essex as evidence of the republicanism of the former, it was suggested that such a connection might well in fact be to do with something entirely different. In sum, then, it was found that where writers did draw upon Venice, they did so in a more subtle way than by simply trying to turn England into the republic, and what's more, they did so at moments of particular constitutional stress rather than out of a general dissatisfaction with England's political arrangements.

## JACOBAN ENGLAND

### Introduction

This chapter will survey the use to which Venice was (or wasn't) put in Jacobean England. This will begin by again briefly turning to Andrew Hadfield, specifically in terms of his interpretation of Thomas Coryat. And once more, I will suggest that Hadfield's analysis – which again finds an English writer straightforwardly turning to Venice as an example upon which England might reconfigure itself – is too indeterminate and vague to be accepted. Beyond this, the argument I will advance here is that political circumstances in Jacobean England (and in fact in Venice, as well) were ill-disposed to the kind of “Venetian moments” we see with Starkey and Lewkenor. But let's begin with Hadfield and Thomas Coryat.

### Thomas Coryat

Coryat was a traveller and writer with an “aptitude for histrionics, curiosity to see the world, and a thirst for personal fame.” (Strachan, 2004). He left England in 1608 and made his way through France, Italy and Switzerland, recording his experiences in his 1611 book *Coryat's Crudities*. This hefty tome of 864 pages “was intended to encourage courtiers and gallants to enrich their minds by continental travel. It contains illustrations, historical data, architectural descriptions, local customs, prices, exchange rates, and food and drink”. (ibid.). As this description would suggest, Coryat seems less interested in the political structures of the countries he visits, and indeed he disavows any particular interest in the government of Venice. Hadfield begins by acknowledging this, but nevertheless opines that Coryat's “fundamental aim appears to be to emphasise the importance of Venice in Europe as a symbolic core of democratic values and traditions.” (Hadfield, 1998: 64). Hadfield's proof for this, textually speaking, centres upon Coryat's traditional description of Venice as an exemplar of the mixed state, “contayning in it an Idea of the three principall governments of the auncient Athenians

and Romans, namely the Monarchicall, the Oligarchicall, and the Democraticall”, “as well governed as any City upon the face of the whole earth ever was”. (in *ibid.*: 65). On top of this, Hadfield refers to Coryat's story about seeing “pictures of famous Kings on the wall of the Duke's Palace, one of whom was James I. Such a sight caused him great delight.. especially considering the fact that James's picture was placed 'in the very middle.. which I think was placed there not without great consideration; for I beeeve they remembered the old speech when they hanged up his picture: In medio consistit virtus”. (*ibid.*: 66). This motto – “the middle contains virtue” – according to Hadfield, “might appear to be a message James would do well to heed himself, one which the city of Venice exemplifies rather better than the political institutions of the country he ruled.” (*ibid.*). I think it's reasonable to suggest – and indeed the “might appear” hints towards this as well – that this is vague evidence at best, despite Hadfield's protestations that Coryat had “enough clues for the initiated to read the right message of the text and gauge the writer's hostility to the status quo” (*ibid.*: 65–6). Of course, the nature of Hadfield's case here – (Coryat provides “clues” as to what he means, if you aren't able to see them, you are not “initiated”) – makes it difficult to explicitly disprove. Nevertheless, it's possible to think about the political context of the period under discussion, a process which can help us understand why it might be unlikely that Coryat, or indeed any other writer, would feel the need to turn to Venice in a similar way to that of Starkey or Lewkenor. That will be the aim here.

### **Jacobean constitutional stability**

Recall the conclusion that was drawn about the two aforementioned writers. One aspect of this was that they did not simply turn to Venice out of a general dissatisfaction with English political institutions, as Hadfield's account would lead us to think. Rather, in both cases, the writers turned to Venice when faced with specific moments of constitutional uncertainty –

Starkey's interest in a Venetian style elective monarchy was a reaction to the uncertain circumstances that arose with Henry VIII's divorce proceedings, whilst one aspect of Lewkenor's interest in Venice – with its reputation for stability and longevity – could reasonably be understood in the context of fears over the succession towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. As these fears indicate, James's peaceful accession was initially by no means guaranteed, as there were “in effect, about a dozen people who in the 1590s could present themselves, with varying degrees of optimism, as the future occupants of Elizabeth's throne.” (Hurtsfield, 1961: 372). James's claim, for example, was troubled by rumours about his parentage, as well as the more pressing difficulty of his status as an alien. (Nenner, 1995: 58).

However, James also had a lot going in his favour, most notably in that he could “provide welcome relief from the dynastic insecurity that had plagued England for almost a century.” This was because, “unlike the last three Tudors, James had children, and unlike Henry VIII, James by 1600 had produced two legitimate sons.” (ibid.: 57). Indeed, by the time of Elizabeth's death in 1604, “there was no longer any doubt in England as to who would come in.” (Hurtsfield, 1961: 396). The proclamation announcing James's accession emphasised his hereditary claim, proclaiming him king “by law, by lineal succession, and undoubted right.” (in Nenner, 1995: 61). On top of this, “the first act of James's first parliament recognised in law.. that the crown 'did by inherent birthright and lawfull and undoubted succession, descend and come to your moste excellent Majestie, as being lineallie justly and lawfullie next and sole heire of the Blood Royall of this Realme.’” (ibid.: 61–2). The fact that James had two male children, as just mentioned, made such claims convenient. Indeed, “even after the death of Prince Henry in 1612, the continuation of the Stuart monarchy was not at risk so long as James's second son, Charles, was available to assume his brother's place as next in the heritable line.” (ibid.: 64). In the first place, then, this reasonable degree of certainty over the future destination of the crown produced the constitutional stability which precluded the need to turn

to Venice in the sort of way that Starkey and Lewkenor had done. Moreover, on top of this, such stability provided James with the circumstances in which he could confidently assert and establish his own view of divine right monarchy, thereby further tightening up the intellectual space in which a turn to an alternative political model could occur in. (Smuts, 2003: 273).

What's more, at around the time that James was advancing this case, events in Venice – specifically in the form of the interdict crisis – conspired to bolster it further. This crisis began towards the end of 1605, when the Pope instructed his envoy to “serve notice that unless the Venetian government promptly revoked several laws which his Holiness considered infringements on the rights and liberties of the church, he would excommunicate the Senate as a body and impose an interdict on all territories of the Republic.” (Bouwsmas, 1968: 339). These various laws each aimed at restricting “the economic and political power of ecclesiastics in the Venetian state” (ibid.: 334), by limiting the length of time that a layman could transfer his property to the church to two years, for example. To add to Rome's grievances, Venice then “asserted with conspicuous vigour, in two specific instances, her right to try clergy accused of major crimes in civil courts.” (ibid.: 346). This was anathema to the recently elected Paul V, who promptly warned Venice that “if ever the dignity of the Apostolic See should be offended, if ecclesiastical liberty and immunity should be impugned, if the decretals and canons should be despised, and if the rights of the Church and the privileges of ecclesiastical persons should be violated.. do not think that we will dissimulate in any way, or be lacking in our duty.” (in ibid.: 349). Negotiations between the Pope and the republic began, with Venice noting that similar jurisdictional arrangements existed elsewhere in the Catholic world. (ibid.: 357) Despite this, in April 1606 the Pope “assembled his consistory and announced the excommunication of the doge and Senate and the interdiction of all territories under Venetian rule unless Venice submitted completely within twenty–four days.” (ibid.: 372). Venice refused, and the interdiction took effect in the following month. A few days later, and “the doge

addressed a letter to all ecclesiastics in lands ruled by Venice informing them that, since Venice recognised no superior in temporal things, the censures announced in Rome were to be regarded as 'not only unjust and undeserved but also as null and of no value and thus invalid.'" (ibid.: 374).

This view, and the story of the interdict more generally would find a particularly receptive audience in England. Parallels could easily be drawn between Venice, under siege by a papacy with pretensions to secular power and England, with the Catholic Gunpowder Plot still fresh in the memory. Indeed, such a comparison was explicitly made by the Earl of Northampton, Henry Howard, who was responsible for setting out the government's case against Henry Garnet, a leading English Jesuit who had come under suspicion for being privy to the Plot's details. As Linda Levy Peck notes, the bulk of Howard's *A True and Perfect Relation of the whole proceedings against the late most barbarous Traitors* "was taken up by a long dissertation on the papal usurpation of temporal power and a history of Jesuitical conspiracies." (Peck, 1982: 111). James himself "took a great interest in the controversy over the Venetian interdict" (Sommerville, 1991: 61), with the shared Anglo–Venetian concern about papal assaults on temporal power explicitly raised by the controversy over the Oath of Allegiance in 1606.

This oath "renounc(ed) the pope's claims to be able to depose kings and released subjects from allegiance to their sovereigns", with "any recusant who twice refused the oath.. liable to the penalties of praemunire". (Sommerville, 1995: xx). Paul V twice demanded that English Catholics should refuse to take the oath, inspiring James to write his *Triplici Nodo* in which he explicitly compared the Pope's quarrel with England with that of Venice: "I am sure the Supremacie of Kings may, & will ever be better maintained by the word of God (which must ever be the trew rule to discerne all waighty heads of doctrine by) to be the threw and proper

office of Christian Kings in their own dominions, then he will ever be able to maintaine his annihilating Kings, and their authorities,.. wherewith.. his late Bookes against *Venice* are filled.” (ibid.: 128). Venice under the interdict, then, shared the same concern as England did, and in affirming its own supreme jurisdictional authority, provided the perfect example of how to act. As James remarked: “the world would indeed be fortunate if every Prince would open his eyes and behave as the Republic does.” (in Mackenney, 2000: 200). Indeed, the way in which Venice became increasingly thought of for its anti-papal stance rather than its constitution is well reflected by a translation which appeared in 1612. William Shute's rendering of Thomas de Fougasses's *The general historie of the magnificent state of Venice*, which Markku Peltonen identifies as being first and foremost concerned with the republic's mixed constitution (Peltonen, 1995: 178), in fact begins by with a swipe at present day Rome, claiming that “that which now Vsurps that name is not Rome, but her Carkasse, or rather Sepulcher”. (Shute, 1612). Large parts of the *historie* are then taken up not by the Contarini style feting of the republic's constitution, but rather by a recital of Venice's relations with the papacy, with the text culminating in an account of the recent interdict. In other words, it is Venice as the anti-papal champion, rather than Venice as the perfect constitution which seems to interest Englishmen at this point. And this continued throughout James's reign, with the anti-papal work of men such as Paolo Sarpi and Marco Antonio de Dominis<sup>4</sup> being brought into England via the English ambassador at Venice, Sir Henry Wotton, who acted “as a broker between the Venetian political and intellectual elite and many English intellectuals”. (Tuck, 1993: 101). Moreover, as Richard Mackenney has argued, the Jacobean period also saw Venice begin to emerge “as a polity defined primarily on principles of 'reason of state'”. (Mackenney, 2000: 185).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For de Dominis, see Patterson, 2000: 220–59.

<sup>5</sup> Such an emergence appears to have been identified as early as 1612 by Sir Dudley Carleton, English ambassador in Venice at this time, as he remarked that “whereas other Governments are ruled by lawes the Venetian hath little other than reason of state to which they doe resort in all occasions as that which gives lato all other lawes”. (in Chambers & Pullan, 2001: 30).

### **Conclusion**

In sum, then, a combination of the circumstances in both England (particularly in terms of its constitutional stability) and Venice (with the republic becoming famous for its anti-papal stance, and to a lesser extent for its use of 'reason of state') in the Jacobean period meant that the sort of “Venetian moments” we saw with Starkey and Lewkenor were not present. But these circumstances were not to endure.

## CAROLINE AND INTERREGNUM ENGLAND

### Introduction

The underlying argument of the previous, short chapter, was that the constitutional stability engendered during James I's reign resulted in circumstances inconducive to sort of “Venetian moments” that we saw with Starkey and Lewkenor in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, by the time of his father's death, “there was no retrospective need to rehearse and justify James's right to be king, nor to state that, as his father's heir apparent, Charles had a complete and perfect right to succeed to the English throne.” (Nenner, 1995: 65). Of course, it goes without saying that this stable position of Charles's was ultimately not to last, and it will be the first task of this chapter to explain how this stability gave way to the tumultuous circumstances of the late 1630s and early 1640s. We will then go on to see how these circumstances – in which the proper role of the king in England's constitution was hotly debated – provided fertile ground in which writers could turn to Venice, and often more specifically the figure of the Venetian doge, in order to bolster their arguments.

Whereas Zera Fink suggested that in the 1640s, “royalists could look at (Venice) and see that the doge was a sort of king” (Fink, 1940: 159), we will see how the figure of the doge in fact became royalist shorthand for exactly what a king is *not*. What's more, this sharp distinction between an English king and a Venetian duke provided royalist writers with a way in which they could illustrate their wider argument, that those demanding adjustments of the king's constitutional powers were in fact attempting to alter the English constitution in to some sort of unknown, foreign arrangement. Such a charge seems to have concerned those it was directed against, with Glenn Burgess noting “that the political theories that the parliamentary spokesmen produced attempted as much as possible to appeal to shared and conventional principles, and would avoid wherever they could intellectual innovation or the appeal to new

(and therefore divisive) principles.” (Burgess, 2009: 193). Nonetheless, we will see how two writers who argued in defence of parliamentary actions and demands – Henry Parker and William Prynne – were able to draw upon Venice (and again, the Venetian doge in particular) to decorate their own arguments. Having looked at these various invocations of Venice during the late 1630s and early 1640s, we will then move forward to the early 1650s. Contextually speaking, the most obviously significant development between these two periods was the execution of Charles in January 1649 followed some months later by the abolition of the institution of monarchy itself. The writers we will look at in this period, then, were each faced with the constitutional question of “what now?”, and in differing degrees, drew upon Venice as part of their answer to this question. Indeed it is at this juncture that the characterisation of the doge as “a sort of king” (Fink, 1940: 193) comes to the fore, with Venice – a republic, but a republic with a certain degree of familiarity in having a quasi-king – representing an example of what bewildered Englishmen might reasonably turn to whilst trying to conceptualise the nature of their own non-monarchical experiment.

As we will see, even a man as heavily involved in the execution of Charles as John Cook – prosecutor at the king's trial – was willing to countenance a kingly element in England's new constitutional arrangement, provided that this kingly element was modelled along the lines of a Venetian duke. The second writer under discussion in this section – Francis Osborne – did much the same. Finally in this section, our attention will turn to the historian and translator James Howell, who in 1651 produced his *A survey of the signorie of Venice, of her admired policy, and method of government*. (Howell, 1651). Once again, we will find a writer attempting to adjust to life in non-monarchical England by turning to Venice as a moderated, and not altogether unfamiliar, form of political organisation. The final section of this chapter will fittingly look at perhaps the most famous use of Venice in English political thought – James Harrington's 1656 *Oceana*. Although much of the way in which Harrington drew upon

Venice is well rehearsed, it is hoped that placing it within the wider context of this dissertation as a whole will prove profitable. But before all of this, we must go back to Charles.

### **From constitutional stability to Civil War**

As has already been noted, Charles's position at the start of his reign was – as “the only Stuart monarch whose right to succeed to the throne had never been in question” (Nenner, 1995: 66) – strong, constitutionally speaking. In other words, the chances of seeing any “Venetian moments” in the time immediately surrounding Charles's succession would seem slim. That said, clear signs of future trouble began to appear as early as 1628. He had called parliament in order to fund the overseas war effort against the French, but MPs showed more interest in constitutional issues arising from a loan which had been collected two years previously, despite being deeply unpopular and seeing “seventy–six prominent gentlemen” arrested and detained “for refusing to lend and for obstructing the work of local collectors.” (Kishlansky and Morrill, 2004). Tensions then rose once more in 1629, with Charles again calling parliament in order to secure more funding for his European war effort. Again, however, the Commons had different ideas, using the opportunity of their meeting to attack Charles's religious policies. Charles quickly brought the session to a close.

With this, Charles realised that he simply did not have the money to pursue the aforementioned war effort, and peace with both France and Spain quickly followed. (ibid.). The king's focus inevitably had to shift from foreign to domestic matters, and it is with this shift that we see the beginnings of his problems in the late 1630s and early 1640s (and in turn, the uncertain constitutional circumstances in which Venetian moments might occur). To be more specific, then, Charles's focus turned to church matters in the Scottish part of his kingdom, issues which had “lain dormant while the new king's focus was on war and diplomacy.” (ibid.). This

involved an attempt “to fulfil his father's plan for new canons and a uniform liturgy for the church” (ibid.), through the introduction of a common prayer book. This introduction, in 1637, “led to street riots, attacks upon bishops and privy councillors, and threats against the king's ecclesiastical authority. Whilst Charles agreed to withdraw the prayer book, the Scots had initiated a covenant by which they banded together to regain control of an independent church. By the time the king could digest the implications of these developments, the covenanters had moved on to positions that undermined royal prerogatives, demanding the abolition of episcopacy and the independence of general assemblies and ultimately of the Scottish parliament. The covenanters rapidly came to demand things which Charles's conscience could not permit him to concede.” (ibid.). He had no other option but to raise an army and march north in order to suppress the rebellion. But this army faced the familiar problem of being insufficiently funded, and Charles opted to call a parliament for the first time in over a decade, in order to try and raise the necessary money to effectively bring order to his northern realm. Charles was counting on the anti-Scottish sentiment of his MPs to be enough for them to provide him with the finances that his campaign would require, but negotiations over the conditions upon which money might be voted for stalled. Despite the king's formal offer of abandoning the controversial ship money levy in order for a one off grant, parliament failed to provide an answer. Charles had come to believe that his offer would be turned down, and so on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1640, he dissolved parliament. (ibid.). Despite his failure to secure the money to fund his military effort, Charles went ahead with it anyway.

This proved to be a huge mistake, with the Scots grabbing the initiative and invading England. When Charles had to recall parliament, MPs could not fail to be aware of their position of strength and “power to introduce changes to the government of church and state in England”. (Morris, 2001: 19). Accordingly it is here – with Charles's initial position of constitutional strength having given way to the very real prospect of changes in the political set up of the

country – that we might possibly expect to see Venice being drawn upon. It did not happen immediately. In February 1641, for example, Charles's right to dissolve parliament without the consent of the latter was removed, but without any recourse to the Venetian model to justify the move. We can say the same about the Triennial Act, which was brought in at a similar time, to guarantee that parliament would meet at least once every three years. The Grand Remonstrance, narrowly passed in November and presented to Charles in the following month, presented numerous grievances to the King but none that drew on Venice for supporting evidence. In June of the following year, parliament produced the Nineteen Propositions – “the demands for which they were actually to fight” (Burgess, 2009: 200). Again, these wide ranging propositions stuck to native arguments rather than turning to any aspect of the Venetian model.

### **Venice as an illustrator**

Despite this, however, each of these aforementioned interventions were fundamentally concerned with the question of the king's power, and how it might be limited by handing over some of his responsibilities to parliamentary control. Whilst the authors of a text such as the Nineteen Propositions remained committed to “the just and faithful performance of their duty to your Majesty and this Kingdom” (1642), or, in other words, the idea of a mixed monarchy, “it was the nature of the mixture – where the balance lay between the constituent elements of King, Lords, and Commons – that determined whether kingship was an active, or merely decorative, element in the mix.. A state that was outwardly monarchical could simultaneously be, for all practical purposes of authority and power, indistinguishable from a state – like Venice.. – which was formally a republic.” (Adamson, 2007: 516–7). Put differently, then, whilst none of the above explicitly mentions Venice, they do raise the types of questions that respondents could call upon the example of the Venetian duke to answer.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, it was

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Adamson uses the term 'Venetianization' throughout his book to describe the attempts at limiting the

in fact Charles himself who did this, in the *Answer to the xix propositions*. But as we will see, his wider argument also shows why during the 1640s, the example of the Venetian duke would only be used as illustration rather than anything more extensive or systematic.

Drafted by Falkland, Hyde and Culpepper, the *Answer* “laid down a case for the king that proclaimed loudly its own moderation.” (Burgess, 2009: 205). It immediately identified the propositions as the work of “Caballists” (Charles I, 1642), who in going about “their Businesse”, “thought fit to remove a troublesome rub in their way, the Law.” (ibid.). From the outset, then, the work identifies Charles's adversaries as subversive innovators, who have “broached new Doctrine, That we are obliged to passe all Laws that shall be offered to Us by both Houses (howsoever Our own Judgement and Conscience shall be unsatisfied with them)”. (ibid.). What makes it worse is that these innovators are by no means representative of parliament as a whole, with Charles noting that “very many of both Houses were absent, and many dissented from all those particulars We complain of”, meaning that he can confidently remain “most confident of the Loyaltie, good Affections, and Integritie of the Intentions of that great Bodie” as a whole. (ibid.). Nonetheless, given that the propositions were put forward in the name of the Houses of Parliament, Charles felt obliged to respond to their specific points.

In so doing, he identified a slippery slope. Having rejected the demand that his privy councillors should always be approved by parliament, Charles suggested that this is “but one link of a great Chain, and but the first round of that Ladder, by which Our Just, Ancient, Regall Power is endeavoured to be fetched down to the ground: For it appears plainly, That it is not with the persons now chosen, but with Our chusing, that you are displeased”. (ibid.). For Charles to accede to this, and other demands, would upset the traditional balance between “Absolute Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy,” which “the experience and wisdom of your

Ancestors hath so moulded,” so “as to give to this Kingdom (as far as human prudence can provide) the conveniences of all three, without the inconveniencies of any one”. (ibid.). And Charles's message is clear: “Nolumus Leges Angliae mutari” – “we are unwilling to change the laws of England”. (ibid.). Or, as he had put it earlier in the piece, “we call God to witnesse, that as for Our Subjects’ sake these Rights are vested in Us, so for their sakes, as well as for Our own, We are resolved not to quit them, nor to subvert (though in a Parliamentary way) the ancient, equall, happy,well–poised, and never–enough commended Constitution of the Government of this Kingdom,”, as doing so would “make Ourselves of a King of England a Duke of Venice, and this of a Kingdom a Republique.” (ibid.).

It was the *Answer* from the King, then, that introduced the comparison between the duke of Venice and his own position into early 1640s discourse. However, at the same time, his wider argument in the *Answer* – which sought to portray himself as the defender of the traditional English system against the assaults of innovational “Caballists” goes some way to suggest why any invocation of Venice on the part of parliamentarian writers would tend to be tempered by the need to keep their arguments native in appearance. Indeed, we can see some of this in a written response to the *Answer*, Henry Parker's *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses* (1642), written under the name of the *Observer*. Parker's general purpose is to argue in support of the shrinking of the king's prerogative power, as “that King is most great and glorious, which hath the most and strongest subjects, and not he which tramples upon the most contemptible vassell”. (Parker, 1642). However, just as Charles had made sure to portray himself as the defender of England's ancient traditions, Parker was eager to disavow any suggestion that his argument was innovatory or subversive. He claims to write not “in favour of any alteration in England, I am as zealously addicted to monarchy, as any man can, without dotage”, however, his argument also importantly involves recourse to “the transcendent (rule) of all Politiques, to the Paramount Law that shall give Law to all humane

Lawes whatsoever,.. Salus Populi”. (ibid.). This universalist, “strangely cosmopolitan” (Mendle, 1985: 131) aspect of his work opened up the space in which he could appeal to the experience of other nations in order to support his claims, and it is here that the example of the Venetian duke is used.

Commenting on the key question – “the maine question now”, as Parker put it – of whether Charles's advice should come from his private councillors or parliament, Parker remarked that “if Princes may be admitted to prefer such weak opinions before Parliamentary motives and petitions, in those things which concerne the Lives, Estates, and Liberties of thousands, what vain things are Parliaments, what unlimitable things are Princes, what miserable things are Subiects?” (Parker, 1642). Immediately after this, he vows that “I will enlarge my selfe no longer upon this endlesse Theme” (ibid.), instructing his reader to simply “look upon the Venetians, and such other free Nations”, asking “why are they so extreemly iealous over their Princes, is it for feare lest they should attaine to an absolute power? Is it meerey for feare of this bondage, that their Princes will dote upon their owne wills, and despite publike Councils and Laws, in respect of their owne private opinions”? Venice is living proof that a king's power can and should be limited in a flourishing state: “for what is more plan then this,” Parker asks, “that the Venetians live more happily under their conditionate Duke, then the Turks do under their most absolute Emperours.” (ibid.).

To repeat, Parker's use of Venice here is little more than illustrative – with the need to avoid presenting arguments which appear too innovative ensuring this – however, the figure of the limited duke provides him with a convenient way of bolstering his argument in favour of reducing Charles's powers. Despite this, a work produced directly in response to Parker's – John Bramhall's *The serpent salve*, took the comparison between England and Venice very seriously indeed. In analysing the demands of men such as Parker for greater parliamentary

power, Bramhall saw them as producing a dangerous split in power, which “threatenes Ruine and Dissipation of the whole Kingdome” in contrast to “When the King and Parliament are united”, which “promiseth Happy and Halcionian Dayes to the Subject”. (Bramhall, 1643). Bramhall's understanding of the English polity was an organic one, as reflected by his suggestion that “all great and sudden Changes are dangerous to the Body Naturall, but much more to the Body Politick. Time and Custome beget Reverence and Admiration in the minds of all men; frequent Alterations produce nothing but Contempt”. (ibid.). Having said this, he then in fact turns to Venice to augment his point. Whereas Parker had assigned Venice's happiness to its “conditionate Duke” (Parker, 1642), Bramhall argued that in fact, “the glory of Venice is perpetuated not so much by the strong Situation, as by that Sanction or Constitution, that it is not lawfull for any man to make mention of a new Law to the grand Counsell, before it have been first discussed and allowed by a selected Company, of their most intelligent most experienced Citizens.” (Bramhall, 1643).

Despite this instance of Venice being spoken of in complimentary terms by a royalist writer, it was not long before Bramhall turned to a comparison between the republic and England in order to warn against Parker's arguments. In response to Parker's demands that the king's advisers should be approved by parliament, whilst simultaneously maintaining that he is not “in favour of any alteration in England,” and “zealously addicted to monarchy” (Parker, 1642), Bramhall scathingly notes that “yet still he protests for Monarchy, A fine Monarchy indeed, a great and glorius Monarchy, an Aristo–Democracy nicknamed Monarchy, a circumscribed, conditionate, dependent Monarchy, a Mock–Monarchy, a Monarchy without coercive Power, able to protect, not to punish; that is in effect neither to protect nor punish, a Monarch subordinate to a Superiour and accountable to Subjects, that may deny nothing, a Monarchy in the Rights whereof another challengeth an interest Paramount.” (Bramhall, 1643). All in all, Parker “is more blind then a Beetle that sees not whither all this tends,” – and here comes the

comparison once more – “To advance King Charles to the high and mighty Dignity of a Duke of Venice”. (ibid.). This simply cannot be allowed to happen, for Bramhall. He continues to say “it were to be wished that” Parker “would first make tryall of this modell of Government in his own House for a yeare or two and then tell us how he likes it. That Form may fit the Citty of Venice that will not fit the Kingdome of England.” (ibid.).

Irrespective of Bramhall's warnings against Parker's positive references to Venice, in the same year we can identify William Prynne as doing something comparable to him. His *The soveraigne power of parliaments* was the officially commissioned defence of parliament's actions both with respect to the outbreak of war and “actions taken by the parliamentary army during the campaign itself.” (Lamont, 2008). Again, we see the dual strategy of presenting his arguments as English, telling readers that he will not “trouble you with Foraine Authorities.. I shall onely acquaint you with the resolutions of some eminent ancient Lawyers of our owne” (Prynne, 1643) whilst also announcing to the reader at the outset that he will be “fortifying all my Reasons, with such Domesticke, Foraine Precedents, and Authorities of all sorts”. (ibid.). Indeed, it is in this “fortifying” that we can see Prynne using the Venetian example in a number of different ways. For example, consider how Prynne goes about proving his point that “Parliament is the most high and absolute power, the supreamest and most ancient Court of the Realme of England, and hath the power of the whole Realme, both Head and Body”, “having power upon just grounds to alter the very common Law of England; to abrogate and repeale old Lawes, to enact new Lawes of all sorts, to impose taxes upon the people”, possessing “power to declare the meaning of any doubtfull Lawes, and to repeale all Patents, Charters, Grants, and Iudgements whatsoever of the King or any other Courts of Iustice.. not onely without, but against the Kings personall consent, so farre as finally to oblige both King and Subjects.” (ibid.). Initially, this claim is chiefly backed up with reference to the English sources of Sir Thomas Smith and Sir John Fortescue, but Prynne is also quick to illustrate his point that

a king is not a prerequisite for passing legislation by noting that “there are good and binding Lawes in many Aristocraticall and Democraticall States”, such as “Venice.. where there are no Kings at all”. (ibid.).

A similar thing occurs when Prynne turns his attention to the case for non-resistance based upon the teachings of St. Peter, that “for the punishment of evill doers, and for the praise of them that doe well, &c. Feare God, Honour the King; wee must submit to Kings and honour Kings, who are the supream Governours; therefore we may in no case forcibly resist them or their Officers, though they degenerate into Tyrants.” (ibid.). That is to say, Prynne initially looks to English tradition in support of his argument, noting that “this Text doth not say, That the King is the supreame soveraigne Power, as most mistake; but supreame Governour”, in the same way that “the very Oath of Supremacie” passed in Elizabeth's reign “gives our Kings this Title, Supreame Governour within these his Realms.” (ibid.). However, immediately after this, Prynne augments his claim by pointing out that elsewhere in the world, “Kings may be properly called Supream Magistrates or Governours in their Realms, in respect of the actuall administration of government and justice.. and yet not be the Sovereign Power”, as “the Dukes of Venice in that State” show. “To argue therefore, that Kings are the highest Sovereign Power, because they are the highest particular Governours and Magistrates in their Realms, as our Antagonists do; is a meer Fallacie, and Inconsequent, since I have proved our own, and most other Kings, not to be the highest Powers, though they be the Supreamest Governours.” (ibid.).

This method of referring to Venice to illustrate his view is also used with respect to the debate over who Charles's advisers should be – a debate which, as we've already seen, was deeply important in the run up to the outbreak of war. In reply to the “grand Complaint of the King and Royalists” that parliament's demands “to recommend and nominate to the King his Privie Counsellours, Iudges, with other great Officers of State” represents “a great affront, an

intollerable encroachment on the Prerogative Royall” (ibid.), Prynne's immediate evidence is once again found in English history, initially noting that “Sherifs, (as likewise the Conservators of the Peace) in every County through the Realme, were anciently elected onely by the Parliament and People; not the King”. (ibid.). Further evidence, dependent upon English custom is provided until Prynne reaches his ninth point, that “it hath beene, and yet is usuall in most Forraigne Kingdomes, for the Senate and people to elect their publike Offi(cers) and Magistrates, without any diminution to their Kings Prerogative” (ibid.), such as “in Venice,” where “the Senate and people chuse all the great publike Officers, not the Duke”. (ibid.). Again then, it is not as if the Venetian example is at the forefront of Prynne's argument – his initial evidence is drawn from English history, reflecting the aforementioned need for arguments to be seen as based on conventional principles – but it does provide him with a convenient way of illustrating the point that he is trying to make.

### **Venice as a republic with something of monarchy in it**

If circumstances were such in the early 1640s that Venice (and more specifically, the figure of the Venetian duke) would largely just be used to illustrate wider arguments, the next period under discussion – the early 1650s – would seem to present the potential for a different case. Whereas previously, any invocation of the Venetian model would be tempered by the need to keep their arguments as English in appearance as possible, with the king executed and monarchy abolished, it would seem reasonable to suggest that writers in this period might have felt more able to think seriously about Venice as an alternative political model, rather than simply as a means by which they could illustrate their arguments. However, as Harold Nenner notes, “abolishing the monarchy proved to be easier than eliminating the need for a king” (Nenner, 1995: 72), and even “by the end of 1651, with the fugitive Charles Stuart having been defeated at Worcester and now in exile on the Continent, and almost three years having passed

since the inception of the Commonwealth of England, the revival of monarchical government was still a possibility.” (ibid.: 73). In other words, the writers looked at here were in the tricky situation of living in a republic, but living in a republic in which the memory of kingship was very much still alive.<sup>7</sup> Their arguments needed to accommodate this.

We can see some of this even in as forthright a critic of monarchy as the regicide, John Cook, in his 1651 text *Monarchy, no creature of God's making*. Addressing parliament as “most renowned Senators”, Cook's work set out to prove “by Scripture and Reason, that Monarchicall Government is against the minde of God”, “And that the Execution of the late King was one of the fattest sacrifices that ever Queen Iustice had” (Cook, 1651). This task remained necessary because even out of those who supported the regicide and abolition of monarchy, “few understand the true ground and reason” of these events, “looking no further then at the wickednes of Kings, their oppressing; burdening, impoverishing, and enslaving the people, and so make it an Act of selfe–love to ease themselves in casting their riders”. (ibid.). In place of this explanation, Cook wished to argue that parliament abolished “the kingly office in England and Ireland” quite simply “because God commanded them so to doe,” it was not “out of any affection of change, nor yet onely for the ease of the People,” but rather “from a Divine precept and consciencious principle in the faithfull discharge of their duty to God and man”. (ibid.).

As these remarks of Cook's indicate, his commitment to the abolition of monarchy is not in doubt. However, the very fact that he was having to write in order to argue this position is suggestive of the continuing sympathy with the monarchical form of government, and the familiarity which it provided. As Nenner again puts it, “even Charles I, who had subjected England to eleven years of personal rule and who had been condemned in the end as a tyrant, governed in accordance with the rule of law and was sympathetic to the legal limits on

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the prevalence of *de facto* arguments in this period would seem indicative of English writers' failure to come to a more principled non-monarchical settlement.

monarchical power. A commonwealth, on the other hand, in which sovereignty was vested solely in the House of Commons as representative of the people, was a disturbing unknown.” (Nenner, 1995: 72). Cook's references to Venice seem to speak to this concern for a degree of familiarity. Despite his broadsides against monarchy, he is able to say that “it is not the name of a King but the boundlesse power which I argue against” (Cook, 1651), meaning that his position can allow that “if any people shall place the Legislative power in Parliamentary authority and give unto one man the Title of King for their better correspondency with forraigne Kingdomes, with no more power to hurt the people, than the Duke of Venice.. such a goverment may be Iust and Rationall”. (ibid.). Later on in the piece, Cook goes on to again refer to the possibility of “a King that is guided and directed by his Parliaments or Counsells who in cases of Competition must yeeld to them with such power as a Duke of Venice”, once more indicating that Venice could be drawn upon to provide some sort of familiarity, potentially acceptable to both ardent supporters of the commonwealth (like Cook) as well as those less sure about England's new political arrangements.

We see something similar going on a year later, with Francis Osborne. Again, like Cook, Osborne is writing in support of the new commonwealth, as indicated by the title of his work, *A Perswasive to a Mutual Compliance under the Present Government, Together with a please for a Free State compared with Monarchy*. And again, as with Cook, Osborne dedicates pages of his work to the criticism of monarchy, but again draws on the duke of Venice as an example of an acceptable figurehead who could have “the custody of such Honours and Ceremonies, as are not, with decency or conveniency, communicable to more then one”. (Osborne, 1652: 36). Indeed, he goes beyond merely countenancing the existence of such a figure in England's new commonwealth, rather stating that “such a Prince is not likely (nor in my poor judgement fit) to be kept from a Common–wealth: Provided” – as with the duke of Venice – “his admittance be with that Caution, as no trespass may be committed upon the Peoples Liberty.” (ibid.). Once

more, then, Venice provides a type of middle ground for those writing in support of the commonwealth, but aware that a desire for the familiarity of government featuring a prince like figure would not immediately disappear.

However, it was the historian and translator James Howell who considered Venice in the most detail in this period, and he provides us with the best example of the Italian republic being turned to as some sort of familiar *via media* in the uncertain circumstances of post-monarchical England. Indeed, this search for a middle path is initially suggested by Howell's previous work. Imprisoned for eight years in London from 1643, on account of his royalist sympathies (Woolf, 2004), he produced his *Down-right dealing, or The despised Protestant speaking plain English* in 1647, a work addressed to the both the king and parliament, with the aim of bringing peace to "this divided and self-destroying Kingdome." (Howell, 1647). Howell warned parliament that "unless you do immediately administer justice and execute judgement impartially and endeavour to settle a firm and lasting peace, whereby the King may be with due honour invested, and the Kingdome in its just liberty secured; truly the Kingdome shall not onely have been by you already exposed to many hazzards, (besides the large expence of blood and treasure) but shall for the future be necessitated, to curse the time that ever they entrusted you" (ibid.), whilst also asking Charles, "will not your Majesty part with a superfluous sprig.. of honour or power for the saving of your poor people? What man would not lose one member to save all the rest? Are you so far in love with the shaddow that to preserve it, you will hazzard the losse, nay ruin of the substance?" (ibid.). Of course, the efforts of this self-described "impartial observer" came to little, and when Howell was finally released from prison in 1650, he found himself "adjusting to the prospect of life in a republic". (Woolf, 2004). I would suggest that it is within the context of making this adjustment that Howell turned to Venice, with his 1651 *Survay of the Signorie of Venice, of her Admired Policy and Method of Government*.

Addressed to the “Most Noble Senators” of the Rump, the reason for Howell's interest in the Venetian system of government is immediately announced: its longevity and stability. “Length of Age argues strength of Constitution; and as in Naturall bodies, so this Rule holds good likewise in Politicall”, notes Howell, and thus “it may be inferrd, that the Signorie of Venice from Her Infancy was of a strong Symmetry, well nursd, and swaddled with wholsom Lawes, which are no other than the ligaments of a State, or the Arteries whereby the bloud is directed and strengthened to run through all the veines in due proportion”. (Howell, 1651). Howell reiterates that his focus will be on Venice's “policy and soul”, “whereon her government and whole incolumity depends”, as this type of information is “far more advantagious and usefull” than mere knowledge of “the pedigree of a Peeple, Countrey or Cittie; or to know their power and wealth, their exploits and extent of territory”. These topics provide “only matter of discours”, whereas “Government is that great hinge wheron all Kingdoms and Commonwealths do move”. (ibid.). And in England's uncertain constitutional circumstances of the early 1650s, the question of political organisation could hardly have been more pressing. But what was it about Venice's government that afforded it such stability, or put differently, what was it about Venice's government that Howell suggested “may be things for imitation”? (ibid.).

Howell's answer to this question is phrased in strikingly familiar terms: “The Venetian Government is a compounded thing, for it is a mixture of all kinds of goverments, if the division of the Philosopher into Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy be allowed to be perfect”. In other words, “this goverment may be sayed to have a grain of Monarchy, a dose of Democracy, and a dramm if not an ounce of Optimacy” (ibid.) – a balanced system standing in contrast to the Rump parliament governing alone, having abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords. What's more, within this balanced system, Howell pays particular attention to the role of the

duke (or “Prince”, as he puts it). As ever, it is immediately noted that the duke's power is “dependent”, however he is simultaneously described as “regal”, with the fundamental duty of “represent(ing) the whole honor and Majesty of the State”. (ibid.). More generally, the primary reason that Howell gives for the continuing liberty of Venice is its constitutional cautiousness: the republic “hath bin allwayes constant to her self, and to her first fundamentalls & principles, for She hath bin allwayes an enemy to change”, appreciating that “the change of custom useth to perturb a State more by its noveltie, than advantage it by its utilitie” (ibid.). Taking these things – a mixed state, with an emphasis on the role of the princely element of it, plus this aversion to constitutional novelty – and Howell is able to use Venice (nominally a republic) in order to argue for a position that is not a million miles away from the constitutional royalism of the previous decade. Whether we classify this as “the best way (for Howell) to reconcile his continuing royalism with the fashions of the moment” (Wootton, 1994: 345), or a suggestion of what would “be necessary in the new Commonwealth if its descent into the chaos of a popular state was to be arrested” (Woolf, 2004), Howell's admiration of Venice at least enabled him to give a nod to those in support of the newly established commonwealth on the one side, whilst – in a similar way to how Cook and Osborne both did as well – also leaving open the possibility of “a settlement with something of monarchy in it”. (Nenner, 1995: x).

### **James Harrington**

Indeed, a settlement with something of monarchy in it was not long in coming. In 1653, frustrated by the Rump's failure to come to a constitutional settlement of its own, the Army, led by Cromwell, dissolved parliament. In its place later that year first came Barebone's Parliament, followed by the Instrument of Government, and it is in the latter of these that we begin to see the aforementioned conservative impulse for a system in which a princely element was present – specifically in that Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector. As the first point of

the Instrument itself puts it, “the supreme legislative authority of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging, *shall be and reside in one person*, and the people assembled in Parliament; *the style of which person shall be the Lord Protector* of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland.” Moreover, “the exercise of the chief magistracy and the administration of the government over the said countries and dominions, and the people thereof, shall be in the Lord Protector, assisted with a council”, and this position of Lord Protector was to belong to Cromwell “for his life”. (Instrument, 1653).

But of course, this arrangement which formally reintroduced an element of one–man rule into the nation's constitution, was not to last. And after a 15 month period of direct military rule – that of the Major–Generals – another attempt at constitutional settlement moved even closer to England's ancient constitution. This was the Humble Petition and Advice (1657), which offered Cromwell the crown. And although, after taking months to agonise over the decision, he rejected this particular title, it was still decided “that your Highness will be pleased during your lifetime to appoint and declare the person who shall, immediately after your death, succeed you in the Government of these nations.” (Humble Petition and Advice, 1657). If one considers that in addition to this reinstatement of a hereditary executive was the decree that “your Highness will for the future be pleased to call Parliaments consisting of two Houses” (ibid.), it becomes clear just how closely the outlines of this new settlement resembled the traditional set–up of King, Lords and Commons, a point which is vitally important for an understanding of James Harrington – and his use of Venice.

To be more specific. Harrington's 1656 book *Oceana* was written with the fundamental premise that this traditional set–up was fundamentally inappropriate to England's situation. To prove this, Harrington takes the reader through his particular account of recent English history

(albeit with the names changed), suggesting that Henry VII (“Panurgus”)’s moves to lessen the power of the nobility “first began to open those sluices that have since overwhelmed not the king only, but the throne; for whereas a nobility striketh not at the throne, without which they cannot subsist, but at some king that they do not like, popular power striketh through the king at the throne, as that which is incompatible with it.” (Harrington, 1977: 197). In other words, the power (held by the position of land) that Henry VII took away from the nobility ended up being spread downwards into the population as a whole. This process was only advanced by Henry VIII (“Coraunus”)’s dissolution of the monasteries, and then by Queen Elizabeth (“Parthenia”), “who, converting her reign through the perpetual love tricks that passed between her and her people into a kind of romance, wholly neglected the nobility.” (ibid.: 198). This shift in economic power away from the nobility and to the wider populace meant that England’s constitution no longer tallied up with reality. By the early 1640s, the king no longer had the nobility “which alone had stood in this gap.. between (himself) and the commons”, and “a monarchy divested of her nobility hath no refuge under heaven but an army.” (ibid.).

All told, it was this historical process, and the resultant “dissolution of this government (which) caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government.” (ibid.). Put differently, Harrington was firmly of the opinion that a rethinking of the whole shooting match was in order. And he was of this opinion at exactly the time when, as the eventual appearance of the Humble Petition and Advice showed, moves for “the reversion to the ancient constitution and the elements of hereditary power upon which it was based” (Pocock, 1977: 41) were afoot. Given this combination of factors, it seems reasonable that we might expect to see something more thorough and systematic going on with Harrington’s use of Venice than we have previously seen. Whereas other writers – for example, Henry Parker and William Prynne – had drawn upon Venice in what was termed an “illustrative” fashion, conscious of the need to keep

their wider arguments native in appearance – Harrington explicitly disavowed the constitutional set-up to which these writers made their arguments bend. There was accordingly a great deal more intellectual space in which he could operate, and the Venetian model – or at least parts of it – could come to occupy this space.

And so it proved. As Glenn Burgess puts it, “Harrington.. had no great faith in people.” (Burgess, 2009: 346). Indeed, by his own startlingly frank admission, Harrington's view of human nature aligned closely with that of Thomas Hobbes, whose treatises on this topic “are the greatest of new lights, and those which I have followed and shall follow.” (Harrington, 1977a: 423). The corollary of this was that “the spirit of the people is no wise to be trusted with their liberty, but by stated laws or orders; so the trust is not in the spirit of the people, but in the frame of those orders”. (Harrington, 1977b: 737). England's recent experiences had taught Harrington that political stability could not be maintained without the correct institutions – or “orders”, as he put it – to channel people's passions appropriately. But in Venice, Harrington found living proof that such an undertaking was possible. As he puts it, “for as man is sinful, but yet the world is perfect, so may the citizen be sinful and yet the commonwealth be perfect. And as man, seeing the world is perfect, can never commit any such sin as can render it imperfect or bring it unto a natural dissolution, so the citizen, where the commonwealth is perfect, can never commit any such crime as can render it imperfect or bring it unto a natural dissolution.” (Harrington, 1977: 320). The citizens of Venice are “men that are not without sin”, just as everywhere else in the world, yet because of its institutions, it “is the only commonwealth in the make whereof no man can find a cause of dissolution; for which reason we behold her.. at this day with one thousand years upon her back, for any internal cause as young, as fresh and free from decay or any appearance of it, as she was born.” (ibid.: 320–1). But what specifically was it about Venice's institutions that afforded the republic such longevity? While there are numerous aspects of the Venetian model that Harrington sought to

copy – for example, he shaped Oceana's emergency dictator along the lines of the republic's Council of Ten<sup>8</sup> – there are two points of Venetian influence which are of particular importance to his political theory.

The first of these relates to Harrington's newly uncovered distinction between “equal and unequal” commonwealths. As he notes, “to make a commonwealth unequal is to divide it into parties, which setteth them at perpetual variance”, whereas “in an equal commonwealth, there can be no more strife than there can be overbalance in equal weights”. (ibid.: 180). This equal balance can only be maintained by a commonwealth's “superstructures, that is to say.. her rotation”, i.e. “equal vicissitude in government, or succession unto magistracy conferred for such convenient terms, enjoying equal vacations, as take in the whole body by parts, succeeding others through the free election or suffrage of the people.” (ibid.: 180–1). In turn, this “election or suffrage of the people is freest where it is made or given in such a manner that it can neither oblige.. nor disoblige another, or through fear of an enemy, or bashfulness towards a friend, impair a man's liberty.” (ibid.). So, vital to Harrington's entire political structure is the thought that power should rotate, and that it should rotate through the use of a secret ballot. And he is clear that Venice is the best exemplar of these two requirements, with its model of secret balloting being “of all others the most perfect” (ibid.: 181), explaining why “the commonwealth of Venice, being that which of all others is the most equal in the constitution, is that wherein there never happened any strife between the senate of the people.” (ibid.: 180).

However, as important as such superstructures are to Venice's (and indeed, any commonwealth's) stability, they are not the whole story. Harrington identifies another aspect of the Venetian model which is perhaps even more significant, this being the principle that the

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<sup>8</sup> “Now for our imitation in this part, there is nothing in experience like that of the council of ten in Venice; the benefit whereof would be too long to be shown in the whole piece”. (Harrington, 1977c: 255).

great council does not debate matters. Indeed, Harrington goes as far as to suggest that Venice “owes a great if not the greatest part of her steadiness unto (this) principle” (ibid.: 268), concluding that no “commonwealth where the people in their political capacity is talkative (will) ever see half the days of one of these (commonwealths like Venice)”, “but being carried away by vainglorious men.. swim down the sink.” (ibid.). The way in which this Venetian lesson is applied to Oceana is stark, with the fictionalised commonwealth’s nineteenth order decreeing that “if any person or persons shall go about to introduce debate into any popular assembly.. or otherwise to alter the present government, or strike at the root of it, they shall apprehend, or cause to be apprehended, seized, imprisoned, and examine, arraign, acquit or condemn and cause to be executed any such person or persons, of their proper power and authority and without appeal.” (ibid.: 251). Again then, this is a measure borne out of Harrington's acknowledgement of the weakness of man, but it is one that if properly applied, can result in political stability. If the institutions are right – and in the case of rotation by secret ballot and silence in the grand council, the institutions are Venetian – then this weakness in man need not lead to weakness in the commonwealth itself.

### **Conclusion**

Having said all of this, Harrington's engagement with Venice is not without some reservations, most notably in that Venice is not a commonwealth for increase, as Oceana is. But the point remains that in Harrington, we have perhaps the first instance of an English writer approaching Venice with an entirely blank intellectual slate. England's ancient political institutions were fundamentally broken, and so Harrington felt no need to present his arguments as in accordance with, or in defence of them. This came in particular contrast to the writers we looked at from the 1640s, who very much did need to do this. And as the other part of this chapter highlighted, years later in the 1650s, even though monarchy had been abolished, the

desire for some sort of monarch-like figure to provide familiarity could not be quite so easily eradicated. In this context, we noted how the figure of the Venetian duke could be turned to as some sort of acceptable middle-ground: not quite a kng, but something a bit like one.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has made an attempt at surveying what were termed “Venetian moments” in early modern English political thought. It ended by looking at James Harrington, who was found to be the first English writer to approach Venice with an entirely blank intellectual slate, i.e. the first English writer who was prepared to turn to the Venetian model without needing to make it fit with England's own political set-up (although the first writer who was looked at – Thomas Starkey – was not far off doing something similar). In each of the other cases, however, we found that when Venice was turned to, it was turned to in a more nuanced and subtle way. Lewis Lewkenor, for example, drew on Venice's reputation for longevity and stability as a way of expressing concerns about the Elizabethan succession in the late 1590s. In the early 1640s, when the question of the proper scope of the executive power was vital, Henry Parker and William Prynne both used the example of the Venetian duke to illustrate their arguments in favour of a reduction of Charles's authority. That their use of Venice was merely illustrative was thought to be due to the general requirement to keep their arguments as conventional looking as possible.

Indeed, this early 1640s tactic of justifying one's actions as being coherent with England's ancient constitution was evidenced by two interventions on the royalist side of the argument, in the shape of John Bramhall's *The serpent salve* and Charles I's own *Answer to the six propositions*. Both of these texts also made a comparison between Charles's own powers and those of a Venetian duke, but did so in order to accuse their opponents of trying to import a foreign model into England. Nonetheless, even once the king's head had rolled and his office had been abolished, we still found that English writers' use of Venice was hemmed in by the memory of England's ancient constitution, even if it had legally been done away with. That is to say, men who were in fact writing in support of the new republic, such as John Cook and Francis Osborne, still found themselves unwilling to argue in favour of entirely acephalous

government, and in such circumstances the limited figure of the Venetian duke proved attractive. James Howell's *Survey of the signorie of Venice* also appeared in this context, and again found the republic to provide a comforting familiarity to what England had historically known. In assessing the republic's governmental structure, Howell identified a straightforward mixed state featuring monarchic, aristocratic and democratic elements: just as Charles's own *Answer* had sought to portray England in 1642.

This piece of work began by registering a certain dissatisfaction with the comparative lack of attention that the historiography had paid Venice. It was suggested that this was particularly well exemplified – and indeed influenced by – the work of Quentin Skinner. As was briefly explained, Skinner's work has focused on Machiavelli and the Roman strain of republicanism that he advocated. In so doing, he has claimed to have uncovered an explicitly 'neo-Roman' theory of freedom which was systematically asserted by a number of different thinkers. By contrast, the thing that these Venetian moments have in common – with the exception of James Harrington, and to a lesser extent Thomas Starkey – is that they occur when thinkers are faced by specific instances of particular constitutional uncertainty. Venice is turned to in an ad-hoc fashion, as these men fumbled around for answers to the questions posed by these aforementioned moments of political difficulty. The story of Venice in early modern English political thought is about how it could be called upon to help concerned men muddle through, or “respond resourcefully” in Collinson's terminology. There is nothing quite so noble as the assertion of a theory of liberty (neo-Roman or otherwise) going on here. But that does not mean that it is not worthy of our attention.

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