

The Doge: A Recollection

One morning in January 1971, I went without an appointment to the Piazza della Scala in Milan to have my very first meeting with the banker Raffaele Mattioli, “the greatest banker since Lorenzo de’ Medici,” *Le Monde* wrote upon his passing. After speaking about our mutual friends, the poets Eugenio Montale¹ and Umberto Saba,² I asked him if he knew an “incorruptible” attorney who could help me resolve certain questions concerning my family.³ Don Raffaele, as he was known to his intimate acquaintances, picked up the telephone and without hesitation called Professor Ariberto Mignoli. My meeting with him took place immediately, over lunch on that same day. Here I wish to evoke the singular figure of this gentleman, an aristocrat from another era, a distinguished jurist, courageous to the point of recklessness, discreet and reserved, a loyal friend, and, finally, a man. He passed away in 2004 and this was a great loss for me.

That day, dressed in my motorcycle gear, I found myself in front of a kind of reincarnation of Francesco Guicciardini,⁴ which was an impression that was due to his nature, his character, his experience with men and his vast humanist culture. With perfection, he knew the dead languages and the principal living languages of Europe, as well as all the literature that these languages have produced. He was 50 years old then, and I was 22. He told me straight away: “I am not incorruptible, but I would be corruptible only if you found a way to elect me the Doge of Venice.”⁵ From the on, I informally referred to him as “the Doge.”

We quickly became friends. I was certainly the least important of his clients, but surely the closest to him spiritually. He wasn’t a conformist, but

¹ *Translator*: A resident of Milan, Montale (1896-1981) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1975.

² *Translator*: born Umberto Poli, “Saba” (1883-1957) was a lifelong resident of Trieste. Though he died when Sanguinetti was still quite young, he knew “Saba” because the poet had been a great friend of Gianfranco’s father, Bruno Sanguinetti.

³ *Translator*: it appears that these questions concerned quite complex matters involving inheritance.

⁴ *Translator*: an Italian historian and statesman (1483-1540). A friend of Niccolò Machiavelli, he is considered one of the major political writers of the Italian Renaissance.

⁵ *Translator*: in the Most Serene Republic of Venice (circa Eighth Century C.E. to 1797), the Doge was the elected chief magistrate and leader. Since this Republic has disappeared, Mignoli was saying that he was “condemned” to remain incorruptible.

he certainly wasn't a subversive. We understood each other perfectly. He was, in a certain way, my Montaigne and I was his Etienne de la Boétie.⁶

Shortly after meeting him, I had to escape to Switzerland because, one night in March 1971, there was a very strange break-in at my house in Milan. [Guy] Debord wrote to me in Switzerland and said that, at the same time, the cops were looking for me in Paris. Mignoli regarded all this with curiosity. He was what one called a "universal" man in the Renaissance: a great lord at his ease with all the subjects and in all the situations in which a man must be interested. Though his clients were the banks and the largest industrial firms, with which he maintained professional and formal relations, he sometimes loved, as Machiavelli would say, "to slum" all night with me in Milan's *osterie*⁷ and working-class taverns, where, divested of the "curial" clothes of the day, we fraternized with the simple people and the scoundrels who frequented such places. He would hire a taxi for the night, and we made the rounds. In the early morning, we sang songs with the locals in Milanese dialect, which, naturally, he knew how to speak. He knew the Spanish anarchist songs of the Civil War better than I did. He was too aristocratic to not scorn politicians and all the public figures; thus, we agreed on this, as well. Thus, to his friend Professor Giampaolo de Ferra,⁸ Mignoli was "substantially an extremist."

During the Second World War, he was an officer in the Marines, which was an anti-fascist corps and the aristocracy of the Italian armed forces. In 1943, when the Nazis occupied Italy, the fleet deserted en masse and the Doge went to Switzerland, where he became part of Luigi Einaudi's circle.⁹ He was a professor at the University and an indefatigable worker, a great jurist, and the best business attorney. But he was also many other things, as well. I do not have the pretention to make herein a complete portrait of him, which would require the addition of the brushstrokes of his friends, such as Guido Rossi¹⁰ and Giampaolo de Ferra.

It is certain that Mignoli was the most refined bibliophile among all those whom I have met. He showed me, among other treasures, the copy of

⁶ *Translator*: these two men, Michel de Montaigne (a philosopher) and Etienne de la Boétie (an anarchist), lived during the 16th century and were close friends.

⁷ *Translator*: Italian for "pubs."

⁸ *Translator*: Professor at the University of Trieste between 1972 and 1981 and a member of the General Council of the Bank of Italy.

⁹ *Translator*: an economist and politician (1874-1961) who served as the President of the Republic of Italy between 1948 and 1955.

¹⁰ *Translator*: a Milanese attorney and author (born 1931) who has also served in the Italian Senate.

Spinoza's *Tractatus* (a first edition) that its author dedicated, signed and offered to Leibniz, and a first-edition copy of Casanova's *Escape from the Prisons*, which he found in Prague. One day I gave him a copy of an old edition of *Werther*: it was the only one that he lacked. He had, among many other things, an eminently singular collection of hand-written menus from 14th century European taverns. He was a friend of the greatest printer of the 20th century, Giovanni Mardersteig, about whom he wrote an admirable *Recollection*, published by his son in an edition of 200 copies. He gave me a series of polemical pamphlets concerning hereditary quarrels between my ancestors, Sanguinetti and Padoa, printed by Bodoni¹¹ in the 18th century. Of course I caught my own bibliophilic illness from him.

In 1971, in Lisbon, where he frequented the best restaurants and hidden places (the most elegant or the most popular, but always well-chosen), he introduced me to an old friend of his, the Galician anarchist José de la Viuva, who had fled after the Civil War and kept a small café (dirty and beautiful) where – after having closed the shutters as a precaution – they sang all the songs banned under Franco, Salazar and Caetano. The Doge scorned dictatorship as well as democracy, but he used to say that dictatorship arouses an intense desire for liberty, while democracy puts it to sleep.

He knew works by Greek, Latin, Italian, French, German and English authors by heart, and he often quoted from them, either in the original language or in Italian. He had an astonishing memory: he said that it wasn't an innate talent, but only a question of practice, and that everyone could have it, if they applied themselves to it. He was an Epicurean in the manner of Montaigne, and his motto was that of Epicure: "Live hidden."

He was a distinguished gourmet. At the end of dinner, he never ordered cognac, because he said that, if came from a bottle that had already been opened, it had lost its bouquet. Thus he preferred to uncork a bottle of the best Spanish brandy, the Gran Duque d'Alba, or Lepanto, and he said that it was best to finish it off slowly. Once, in Brazil in 1984, he had me meet him in a small village two hundred kilometers from Sao Paulo, where he'd gone to savor the best *feijoada*¹² in the country.

I seem to recall that it was there that, speaking of the then-recent war in the Falkland Islands, he, amused, quoted to me passages from Junius¹³

¹¹ *Translator*: Giambattista Bodoni (1740-1813), the most important printer of the 18th century.

¹² *Translator*: a stew of black beans, beef and pork.

¹³ *Translator*: the pseudonym of an anonymous writer who contributed a series of political letters to the *Public Advertiser* between 1769 and 1772.

and Dr Johnson,¹⁴ recently republished, and this anecdote in particular: when Lord Sandwich threatened the ultra-democratic deputy Wilkes, who had ridiculed King George III and who was part of Junius' band, by telling Wilkes that he would die on the gallows or of the pox [a shameful disease], Wilkes replied, "That would depend, my Lord, on whether I embrace your principles or your mistress."¹⁵

Shortly after our first meeting, I began to be seriously bothered by the French authorities, which finally arrested and expelled me, without any charges being brought against me, without any right to *habeas corpus*, through a simple *lettre de cachet*¹⁶ from the Minister [of the Interior] Raymond Marcellin in July 1971. The Doge was outraged, as if this injustice had been done to him personally. He guided me to a business lawyer, Mr. Marty-Lavauzelle, who sent me to a young criminal-defense attorney. This attorney, working with the Minister of the Interior, prepared a trap for me, in order to compromise me.¹⁷ The Minister especially feared that a "Strasbourg Scandal"¹⁸ was going to be perpetrated in the factories of France, and that I was financing international subversion. Thanks to Guy Debord and the Doge, the trap was detected [and avoided]. Mignoli was inflexible, and he drafted, on my behalf, a memorable complaint that sought to have the

¹⁴ *Translator*: Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), a poet, biographer and lexicographer.

¹⁵ *Translator*: I have quoted from the original English and have not retranslated it from Sanguinetti's French.

¹⁶ *Translator*: an unappealable executive decree. The reader might be amused to learn that, according to Wikipedia, such letters "were letters signed by the king of France (...) The wealthy sometimes bought such *lettres* to dispose of unwanted individuals (...) The *lettres de cachet* were a prominent symbol of the abuses of the *ancien régime* monarchy, and as such were suppressed during the French Revolution." These illegal practices, under the name extraordinary renditions, were reintroduced by the CIA after 11 September 2001.

¹⁷ *Translator*: cf. Guy Debord's letter to Sanguinetti dated 20 March 1972: "[Daniel] Vaconsin isn't your attorney but the attorney of the police. He has considerably aggravated everything (so as to ameliorate his own affairs with the Minister of the Interior). He dares to *openly* ask you to become an *informer* in the SI and the revolutionary movement. His phrases leave no doubt: they would love "to have unpublished information"! It is necessary for you "to merit the recognition" of the police (whereas it is the Minister who is guilty of an arbitrary gesture towards you), as if you are a *captured* gangster, to whom one proposes that he should give up his accomplices so as to avoid the penitentiary. The simple fact that Vaconsin has written to you such an outrageous letter is already *compromised*. [...] You must immediately write to Vaconsin: 1) that you refuse this outrageous proposition; 2) that he *is no longer* your attorney."

¹⁸ Here I refer to the situationist scandal at the University of Strasbourg that was organized by Mustapha Khayati in 1966.

unfaithful attorney brought before the President of the Bar Association; Debord translated it into proper French, and the attorney in question was disciplined. This affair took on important dimensions, in such a way that Marty wrote that it risked becoming a new Dreyfus Affair.¹⁹ Mignoli and Debord met each other for the first time in Paris, and they obviously liked each other. They met again in 1973, or 1974, over dinner at my place in Florence, and the meal continued until the next day.

One day in Milan, seeing that I was sad due to worries about love, he asked me, “Don’t you have another girl to think about?” I responded, “Yes, a girl named Mary: a Scottish violinist who is in Marburg, north of Frankfurt.” He said to me, “Listen to me: there is a plane bound for Frankfurt leaving at 4 pm. If you’d like, I will send my secretary to buy you a ticket, and meanwhile we will have the time to have lunch together. If you’d like, you can bring her the two bottles of *Nozzole* Chianti 1964 that Mattioli has offered me.” That evening, I was at a concert in Marburg, where we celebrated with the Chianti. Mignoli was indeed “substantially an extremist.”

In 1975, the Doge and Debord were the only ones who knew about and helped me with the Censor scandal, which I prepared for amidst a thousand dangers and unexpected events.²⁰ In March of that year, I was imprisoned in Florence and charged by the principal Italian anti-terrorist prosecutor, Pier Luigi Vigna, on the very day that I was transporting the Censor manuscript to the printer in Milan. I was intercepted because the police had to know that I was preparing something and because Mignoli’s phone was tapped because of the bankruptcy of a bank for which he was momentarily the attorney²¹ (at the time, I had no telephone as a precaution against taps). To arrest me, the police planted and “found” bullets from a machinegun in the car in which I was traveling. The manuscript was saved because it had been placed in the violin case of my companion, Katherine Scott, who – along with my friend Mario Masanzanica – were also arrested. The manuscript thus had the singular luck of entering and leaving, unperceived, the women’s prison at Santa Verdiana in Florence. The Doge

¹⁹ *Translator*: Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was falsely accused of passing secrets to the German government in 1894. It wasn’t until 1906 that he was exonerated.

²⁰ Censor (Gianfranco Sanguinetti), *Rapporto verdico sulle ultime opportunità di salvare Capitalismo in Italia*, Scotti-Camuzzi, Milan, 1975.

²¹ The *Banca Privata Italiana*, whose owner was the financier Michele Sindona, later assassinated while in prison.

furnished me with the best criminal-defense attorney in Florence, Terenzio Ducci, who, despite all expectations, got me out of prison in eight days.

I went to Milan. Mignoli gave me the following brilliant idea: “If you want the scandal to be momentous,” he said, “make a monotype, luxury edition of very few, numbered copies, printed on special paper, and sent to the addresses that I will provide you with.” The project lacked a “publisher” who could serve as a screen. Mignoli recommended his cousin, Sergio Scotti-Camuzzi, a young and very conservative attorney, a professor at the Catholic University of Milan, to whom he warmly recommended my text and all the discretion that the operation required. Scotti, who had already helped me with several real-estate deals, and who wanted to become a publisher, knew the owner of high-quality print shop, a man named Dario Memo. The realization of the project was begun. After my release from the prison in Florence, I hid myself by dividing my time, hidden, between Bergamo and Milan. The Doge adored this operation; he was quite invaluable to me, one might even say indispensable, for the success of the scandal. Better than anyone, he saw the importance and the stakes of the operation, as well as the damage that the scandalous truths that Censor uttered could provoke. The more he saw the police bother me, the more the operation impassioned him, because he believed in it, it amused him, and we spent many afternoons and evenings perfecting the typographical details and the list of the private addresses of the important people (plus a few selected journalists) to whom the *Truthful Report* would be sent. He always provided exemplary courage, discretion and loyalty. The operation was a radiant success. In the final analysis, the portrait of Censor that I came to paint was more or less his portrait. He recognized himself in it.²² I found myself in the position of James Boswell with respect to Dr Johnson.²³

It is difficult to describe his joy at seeing the entire ruling class of Italy fall into the trap: he scorned it as much as he knew it up-close. We laughed heartily when we received [via Sergio Scotti-Camuzzi] the letters of thanks from government ministers and high-level civil servants, that is to say, all those who believed that Censor was real and sincere: Giulio

²² Here one can see the extent to which rich reality differs from the impoverished, malevolent and sycophantic ineptitudes spread about Debord by the repugnant Jean-Marie Apostolidès in the chapter titled “Le Révolutionnaire et son double,” which appears in his *Les Tombeaux de Guy Debord* (Paris, 1999), pp. 99-104. The same goes for the counter-truths that another adulator (who as “official” as he is mean-spirited), Vincent Kaufmann, writes in *Guy Debord: La Révolution au service de la Poésie*, Paris, 2001.

²³ Boswell (1740-1795) was the author of *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Andreotti, Aldo Moro, Guido Carli (the governor of the Bank of Italy), Giorgio Amendola, Pietro Nenni, the Prefect of Milan, the High Council of the Magistracy, etc. To their credit, one could say that the trap had been well prepared, but also that chance had helped me in an unexpected manner. In Chapter IV of the *Truthful Report*, I'd written: "Thus, isn't it permitted to conclude that the Italian secret service has become the *gladium ancipitem in manu stulti* of which the Latins spoke?"²⁴ Here one must remark that the existence of the secret organization called "Gladio" would only be publicly revealed by Andreotti *fifteen years after* the publication of my book, and that, at the time, this little phrase in Latin must have been understood as a veiled threat that surely came from someone who was very well-informed of the most-secret things. I believe that at least a part of the judicial troubles that Mignoli subsequently had were retributions from the people in power for his collaboration with me, which was difficult to forget and pardon.²⁵

Once the scandal exploded, and when I revealed myself by publishing *Proofs of the Inexistence of Censor* at the beginning of 1976, the *Corriere d'Informazione* appeared with a third tabloid page that contained an eight-column long, completely fake and ignoble interview with me.²⁶ By chance I was in Milan. I saw the newspaper that morning and immediately called the Doge and told him that I was going directly to the offices of the *Corriere* to beat up the journalist who had invented the false interview, someone named Dario Fertilio.²⁷ He told me, "If you do that immediately, *you will have the extenuating circumstances of immediacy*. Afterwards, come to my office to prepare a press release." I complied. He was pleased with the success. We

²⁴ The only one, to my knowledge, who noted this phrase and placed it into the context of the "Gladio" organization was Bill Brown, on www.notbored.org, in 2012. [Translator: the note in question reads: "The Latin expression employed here, *gladium ancipitem in manu stulti* (a two-edged sword in the hands of a fool), seems to include an allusion to 'Operation Gladio,' which was the Italian code name for the secret NATO plan in which armed groups prepared to either overthrow Communist governments after they'd been formed or before they had seized power."]

²⁵ In 1984, he was sentenced to four years in prison for the sudden bank collapse of April 1974, supposedly engineered by Sindona [*le crack de Sindona*]. The attorney for one of the banks involved, the Doge was subsequently absolved in a second trial.

²⁶ *Corriere d'Informazione*, 23 January 1976. The press release I go on to mention was published that same day.

²⁷ *Translator*: the reader might find it amusing that, according to Wikipedia, *Ha pubblicato diversi saggi e monografie su temi politici e sull'informazione, nei quali afferma la necessità di ricercare e difendere le libertà individuali* ("He has published diverse essays and monographs about politics and information in which he affirms the necessity for studying and defending individual liberty").

drafted a funny press release, very violent, which was printed the next day by all the newspapers, even those in Sicily and Sardinia. The press release ended with the following phrase (dictated by the Doge), which made a great impression: “with respect to these dirty tricks, it is urgent to return to the manly custom of the duel.” No one, or almost no one, defended the *Corriere*: the falsification was too crude, and my reaction was too immediate and effective. The *Corriere* was alone in crying about “the attack on freedom of information.” The other newspapers laughed about it. But to avoid an embarrassing trial, the *Corriere* didn’t dare to denounce me for the slaps that its shameless journalist received in the presence of his director. In any case, as a precaution, Mignoli presented to me the great criminal defense attorney Alberto Crespi, a collector of primitive paintings, Botticelli’s and other treasures, who declared himself happy to defend me if need be.

After the *kidnapping*²⁸ and killing of Aldo Moro in 1978, when the repression became crushing, he advised me to hasten my denunciation of *false flag*²⁹ terrorism, and he was the first person in Italy to read the manuscript of my pamphlet *On Terrorism and the State*.³⁰

In 1981, when Debord circulated his insinuations about the Doge and I, I reported them to him. I recall that he simply said this: “It is truly a shame, because in some sense this renders *useless* all that there had been between us.” The *understatement*³¹ “useless” was strong and sufficient.

Several years later, when Mignoli was in mourning (he’d lost his wife and one of his daughters for different reasons in the same week), I was constantly with him that summer, as well as towards the end of his life, when we passed entire days together. Of his declining health he never said a word, except for a single, stoic phrase: “it is not superb [*brillante*].”

He rarely published, other than his remarks on legal subjects, but he wrote superbly. In 1990, he wrote a text titled *Wealth and Wisdom*. Here I permit myself to translate [from the Italian] several passages from it.³²

²⁸ *Translator*: English in original.

²⁹ *Translator*: English in original.

³⁰ This fact completely contradicts the suspicions spread among the French pro-situationists. To read about this matter, see my letter addressed to Mustapha Khayati dated 10 December 2012 and now published on www.notbored.org.

³¹ *Translator*: English in original.

³² Ariberto Mignoli, *Ricchezza e Sapienza*, Milan, 5 May 1990 (manuscript). Certainly the archives of such a discreet man contain many other important texts, unpublished or privately circulated, that would be worthy of discovery and publication.

With respect to such a tragic framework (...) it poses anew Ecclesiastes' problem of the supremacy of the spirit over wealth: in a moment such as the present, in which the society in which we move has taken on a decidedly economic character [*empreinte*], producing a satisfied era. . . . Our lives have become a business, whereas they had once been a presence. What one considers moral progress is only the complete subjection of the individual to the power of the State, which can lead to a complete abdication of personality, especially if the preoccupation to earn money threatens any initiative. This pretention that our times are morally superior has, at its origin, a syllogism, because one earns money more easily and more surely than in current times than in the past. It has thus created a new sense of security of an economic nature, and all the securities have a devastating effect on our spirits. Satisfied eras are desperate eras. . . . On the one hand, man enjoys himself and conquers riches as a recompense for his desperate situation; on the other hand, despair is the end point of a satisfied age, which pleases itself with its economic conquests, which lack powerful emotions that lead and keep our souls above themselves by hurling variety into the midst of the uniformity of our conditions and of the monotony of our days. Therefore it is a question of substituting more energetic and elevated passions for the love of well being. . . . An essential quality for our happiness, Schopenhauer would say, is courage. For the world in which one plays with 'iron dice,' one must have a firm spirit, armored against destiny and armed against men. . . . The one who has understood is not resigned; the one who has ceased to fight is resigned.”³³

³³ *Translator*: “Vis à vis d’un cadre si tragique (...) il se pose à nouveau le problème de Qoelet de la suprématie de l’esprit sur la richesse: dans un moment comme l’actuel, dans lequel la société où nous nous mouvons a pris une empreinte décidément économique donnant lieu à une époque satisfaite... Notre vie est devenue une affaire, alors qu’elle était une présence. Ce qu’on considère un progrès moral n’est que la sujétion entière de l’individu à la puissance de l’Etat, qui peut conduire à une abdication complète de la personnalité, surtout si la préoccupation de gagner de l’argent menace toute initiative. Cette prétention d’une supériorité morale de notre temps a à son origine un syllogisme, parce qu’on gagne de l’argent plus aisément, et plus sûrement dans le temps présent que dans le passé. Il s’est ainsi créé un sens nouveau de sécurité de nature économique et toutes les sécurités ont un effet dévastant sur notre esprit. Les époques satisfaites sont des époques désespérées... D’un côté l’homme se divertit et conquiert des richesses comme

In this text, one finds Leopardian³⁴ but also situationist reminiscences. Neither of us was impermeable to the other. He often repeated this phrase, so true, from Sallust: *Idem velle ac idem nolle, ac tandem vera amicitia est* (To want the same things, and to not want the same things, this in fact is true friendship).³⁵

Such a man was the Doge. Such was he who had been the object of abject insinuations. Such was the one whose memory I want to avenge today.

Gianfranco Sanguinetti
17 December 2012³⁶

récompense à sa situation désespérée, d'autre part le désespoir est le point d'arrivée d'un âge satisfait, qui se plaît de ses conquêtes économiques, auquel font défaut ces émotions puissantes qui conduisent et soutiennent les âmes au dessus d'elles-mêmes en jetant de la variété au milieu de l'uniformité de nos conditions et à la monotonie de nos jours. Or il s'agit de substituer à l'amour du bien-être des passions plus énergiques et plus élevées... Une qualité essentielle, pour notre bonheur, disait Schopenhauer, une qualité essentielle est le courage. Pour ce monde dans lequel on joue avec des 'dés en fer,' il faut un esprit ferme, cuirassé contre la destinée et armé contre les hommes... Résigné n'est pas celui qui a compris: c'est celui qui a cessé de combattre."

³⁴ *Translator*: Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1937) was one of the greatest philosophers and poets of the 19th century. Cf. Gianfranco Sanguinetti, "To the Church with Manzoni . . . With Leopardi to War!" (1993).

³⁵ The first part of this phrase later became the editorial slogan of the Parisian publishing house ALLIA.

³⁶ *Translator*: translated from the French by Bill Brown and approved by Gianfranco Sanguinetti on 20 February 2013.