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PIRANDELLO, MACHIAVELLI AND THEIR *DONNE DI VIRTÚ*

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Among the papers of the late Frederick May is an exchange of correspondence with the Lord Chamberlain's office in 1957 concerning an imminent production of Pirandello's *Man, Beast and Virtue*. May, then a lecturer in Italian at the University of Leeds and later foundation professor of Italian at the University of Sydney, was a passionate exponent of Italian literature and drama, translating and performing not only Pirandello but also a vast range of texts from sixteenth-century comedy to twentieth-century *neoavanguardia*.[1] Pirandello had already been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature; the Lord Chamberlain's office, however, in no awe of his reputation, was unhappy with the performance text. British theatre was still subject to draconian censorship: until 1967 all play scripts had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for vetting, and the Lord Chamberlain had the power to order changes or limitations to the performance.[2]

In Pirandello's comedy, *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú*, Signora Perella, virtue personified and a woman of impeccable reputation, finds herself pregnant by the tutor of her son, Nonò. To protect her honour she must constrain her beastly sea-captain husband to sleep with her. His tastes, however, are for less virtuous women

1 Frederick May's papers are in the archives of the University of Sydney (hereafter AUS), labelled P179. May's views on censorship, which had a significant impact in Australia at the time, were published as 'Concupiscence of the Oppressor: Some Notes on the Absurdity of the Book Censorship', *Australian Library Journal*, 13 (1964), 73–84. On May as a producer of Pirandello see S. Taviano and J. Lorch, 'Producing Pirandello in England', *Pirandello Studies*, 20 (2000), 18–30 (p. 25); and on May as an actor and translator of Pirandello see F. Firth, 'English Actors and Pirandello: A Rag-bag of Gossip', in the same volume, pp. 32–47 (pp. 34–35). I am grateful to Jennifer Lorch, a former colleague of Frederick May at the University of Sydney, where they were both my teachers, for her comments on a very early version of this article. I must add that when this article was in the press a footnote in a student essay made me realize that Frederick May had already brought the Annunciation, Mrs Perella and *Mandragola* together, in passing (but of course, quite intentionally), in 'Three Major Symbols of Four Plays by Pirandello', *Modern Drama*, 6 (1964), 378–96 (especially p. 385). The seed for the present article certainly came from him, but my debt to him may be even greater than I remember.

2 J. Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1990); N. De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery and Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901–1968* (London, Methuen, 2000). The English translation of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* had repeatedly been refused a licence between 1922 and 1925 and was approved only in 1928 (Johnston, pp. 87–88; De Jongh, pp. 67–69).

in other ports, so the tutor, Signor Paolino, with the help of his friend the doctor, procures a cake, part chocolate laced with aphrodisiac, part vanilla and safe for the child Nonò to eat, and takes it when he is invited to the Perella home on the night of the captain's return. Paolino arranges with Signora Perella that next morning, if the captain has performed his conjugal duties, she will place a flowerpot on the balcony. Paolino despairs when he arrives next day and sees no pots at all, but when an exhausted and dishevelled Signora Perella emerges and enlists his aid to carry not one but five pots to the balcony, the comedy ends happily.[3]

The Lord Chamberlain's office read May's translation and took exception to four moments in Act II of Pirandello's play, which May had translated faithfully:

> I am desired by the Lord Chamberlain to write to you regarding the above Play and to ask for an understanding that the following alterations will be made:—
>
> 1 Page B22, the business of holding the pie on high 'just as if it were the Consecrated Host', to be omitted.
> 2 B24, there must be no indecent exposure of bosom by Mrs Perella.
> 3 B49, the Boy must not eat a piece of the pie.
> 4 B58–8 [*sic*], the poses adopted by Mrs Perella and Paolino as the Virgin Mary and the 'Angel of the Annunciation' must not done [*sic*] in any manner likely to cause offence.[4]

3 For *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* I have used *Mn* II (pp. 283–389) together with additional prefatory material in L. Pirandello, *L'innesto, La patente, L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú*, ed. R. Alonge (Milan, Mondadori, 1992). Translations throughout are my own unless otherwise indicated.

4 AUS, P179, Box 34, letter from Lord Chamberlain's Office, 12 April 1957. The passages are: the stage direction at the end of II. 4, '*tenendolo prima sollevato come un'ostia consacrata*' (*Mn* II, 351); the business of Signora Perella's *décolleté* in II. 5–6 (*Mn* II, 351–59); the stage direction late in II. 6, '*Durante questa scena, Nonò, rimasto a tavola, si sarà pian piano accostato alla tavola, si sarà messo ginocchioni sulla seggiola, e come un gattino con la zampetta avrà assaggiato il pasticcio, dalla parte del cioccolatto*' ['*During this scene, Nonò, who is still eating, will go over to the table very quietly and kneel on the chair, and, like a kitten licking its paw, taste the pie on the chocolate side*'] (*Mn* II, 366); and the last two stage directions of II. 8, '*[La signora Perella] [s]iede su un seggiolone a braccioli, antico, rivolta verso l'uscio della camera del marito, in modo che se questi aprisse, se la troverebbe davanti, in atteggiamento di "Ecce ancilla Domini" circonfusa nel raggio di luna*' and '*[Il signor Paolino] [r]esterà un momento nell'atteggiamento dell'Angelo annunziatore, col vaso in mano, nel quale sarà un giglio gigantesco. S'udrà friggere il riflettore che manda il raggio di luna*' ['*[Signora Perella] sits on an antique chair with armrests, turned towards the door of her husband's bedroom, so that if he opened it he would find her outside, in the pose of "Ecce ancilla Domini", bathed in moonlight*' and '*[Signor Paolino] will remain for a moment in the pose of the annunciating Angel, with the flowerpot in his hands, containing a huge lily. The hiss is heard of the spotlight projecting the moonlight*'] (*Mn* II, 371). Pirandello had his own doubts about the stage direction in II. 8. It appeared in the first edition (1919), was removed in the 1922 collected edition and restored, after the experience of the 1926 performance, in the 1935 edition of *Maschere nude*; see *Mn* II, 912–14.

I have not found May's reply, but five days later the Lord Chamberlain wrote to May rejecting his attempt to reinforce another Biblical reference in the last speech of Act II:

> In reply to your letter of April 13th, I write to inform you that the Lord Chamberlain is not prepared to sanction the words 'Be it unto thee according to his word' to be substituted for 'so be it', on page B58.
>
> His Lordship is of the opinion that many people would be shocked at the obvious reference to the Virgin Mary's words.[5]

The play was thus purged of any validation of a response which might draw a parallel between the plight of Signora Perella and the Virgin Mary. The Lord Chamberlain, however, had spies (or May had enemies), and one was in the audience on opening night. On 30 May, the following article appeared in *The Yorkshire Post*:

> A Pirandello play draws a threat
> CENSORED AT OXFORD
> *From our Oxford correspondent*
>
> An incident in a play being presented by the New College Oxford Dramatic Society has been deleted after a complaint by a representative of the Lord Chamberlain after Monday's performance.
>
> The play, *Man, Beast and Virtue*, a 40-year-old farce by Pirandello, was already cut heavily before production.
>
> Mr Dennis Potter, who plays the chief part, said last night that a complaint was made by 'a small man, who had been sitting through the play with a script and a torch'. The man said that if an incident involving a small boy who ate a piece of custard pie containing an aphrodisiac (love potion) was repeated in future performances the producer might be prosecuted.
>
> Mr Potter said that satire on religion and conventional morality had been cut beforehand. He said that the cast had found it difficult to explain the position to the small boy of 10 who took the part. The translation of the play, given for the first time in English, has been made by Mr Frederick May, head of the Department of Italian at the University of Leeds.[6]

On the same day May wrote, presumably to the office of the Lord Chamberlain,

5 AUS, P179, Box 34, letter from Lord Chamberlain's Office, 17 April 1957. The words in question are a translation of Paolino's 'Così sia!' that closes Act II (*Mn* II, 372).

6 *The Yorkshire Post*, 30 May 1957. On Dennis Potter's distinguished career, see biographies by W. S. Gilbert, *Fight and Kick and Bite: The Life and Work of Dennis Potter* (London, Sceptre, 1996), H. Carpenter, *Dennis Potter: A Biography* (London, Faber & Faber, 1998), and J. R. Cook, *Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998).

> Dear Sir,
>
> I have read in today's *Yorkshire Post* an account of your representative's intervention in the matter of the New College, Oxford, production of *Man, Beast and Virtue*. I regret that the incident should have occurred, and I would observe that I am sure that the producer is not to blame. I wrote to him, as I told you earlier, instructing him to abide by your decisions. He gave me his undertaking that he would. I myself was present on the opening night (Monday, May 27th) and it seemed to be a production very strictly in accordance with your wishes.
>
> I did not see the boy touch the pie, for the main action of the scene was concentrated elsewhere. One of the cast did, however, observe that he was sure 'the little blighter had gone suspiciously near the pie'—this was at the reception after the play.
>
> I have heard nothing from the producer, and I hope that all is now well.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Frederick May[7]

The blasphemous business must have been totally excised, but the child Nonò was seen to have tasted a stage cake which contained a fictional aphrodisiac, and the almost farcical wrath of the censor had fallen on the production. I have dwelt at length on this incident, which caught my attention while I was preparing a biographical entry on Frederick May for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, because it has led me to consider this extraordinary comedy in conjunction with Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, no less a parody of the Annunciation of the Virgin, and no less the subject of censorship—usually self-censorship—in those who talk about it. It leads me to question what is so scandalous or so prurient about the parody of the Annunciation that it cannot even be alluded to on stage, in the case of *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú*, and cannot be discussed by critics, in the case of *Mandragola*.[8]

From its earliest performances, *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* disconcerted its audience. It was generically transgressive: Pirandello classified it as an *apologo* or 'moral fable' but the 'moral' was less than edifying; and in the tradition of the fable some, but not all, of the *personaggi* were characterized as animals. In his review of the first performance, Marco Praga was trenchant:

> L'ha chiamata *apologo*, perché sotto l'apparenza della farsa egli ha voluto mettere qualcosa, una satira tragica e atroce, e ha sperato che il pubblico ce la

AUS, P179, Box 34, carbon copy of letter from Frederick May, Department of Italian [Leeds], to [the Lord Chamberlain's Office], 30 May 1957. No further correspondence concerning this production is contained in the archive, and only fragments of May's translation are held.

For the text of *Mandragola* I have used P. Stoppelli, *La 'Mandragola': storia e filologia, con l'edizione critica del testo secondo il Laurenziano Redi 129* (Rome, Bulzoni, 2005); for the *canzoni*, see Machiavelli's *Teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, ed. F. Gaeta (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1965).

> vedesse, potesse vedercela: una maschera da trivio imposta ai voleri astratti, morali e religiosi, dell'umanità: il pasticcio afrodisiaco consacrato come un'ostia sulla mensa, altare della Bestia; l'adorazione della Virtú, incinta di due mesi, e dipinta come una meretrice, in atteggiamento di *Ecce ancilla Domini,* davanti alla porta della Bestia... Il pubblico non ha visto tutto ciò. E non poteva vedercelo, vorrei che Luigi Pirandello se ne convincesse. Tutto ciò era, soltanto, nel cervello tormentato e nella tormentata fantasia dell'autore. Lí, sulla scena, non c'è che una farsa.[9]

Praga concluded his review claiming that he had then reread *Mandragola* and *Il candelaio,* 'per rifarmi la bocca' ['to cleanse my palate'].

Modern audiences are more amused. Within the parameters that Pirandello established throughout his works, they are happy to accept that nothing is as it seems. Man is manly only inasmuch as he has fathered a child; his behaviour in prostituting his mistress to her husband is bestial. The Beast, in his other home, is as meek as a lamb with his huge common-law wife, and father to six children; and his sexual prowess, attested by five flowerpots in the final act, confirms his manliness. Virtue is pregnant by a man who is not her husband, frail and lacking any individual strength to respond expediently, and compelled to present herself as a whore to her husband. The honour that is to be preserved is a sham, and the result is a malicious, profane farce that leaves us laughing but questioning the values of marriage, family and respectability, and attempting to understand these certainties in a world before genetic testing could transform suspicion into fact.

Marco Praga did not expand on his implicit comparison between *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* and the two classic comedies of the beginning and the end of the sixteenth century, but he must have assumed that his readers would be able to see the similarities, since both show the exploits of an energetic young man who seduces the wife of an old fool. Exposing the cuckolded husband to ridicule is one of the archetypal plots for the comic *novella* and for comedy as a dramatic form.[10]

9 'He has called it a "moral fable", because in the guise of farce he has tried to give us something else, a cruel and tragic satire, hoping that the audience would see it, could see it: a three-way mask, imposed on the abstract moral and political desires of humanity: the aphrodisiac cake consecrated like a host on the table, the altar of the Beast; the adoration of Virtue, two months pregnant and painted like a whore, in the pose of "Ecce ancilla Dei", outside the Beast's door... The audience did not see all this. And I wish Luigi Pirandello would realize that it could not see it. All this existed only in the tormented brain and the tormented fantasy of the author. There, on stage, it is simply a farce': M. Praga, review of the first performance, 2 May 1919, published 5 May 1919 and reprinted in his *Cronache teatrali 1919* (Milan, Treves, 1920), pp. 102–03. D'Amico provides a slightly different chronology: see *Mn* II, 293, note 1.

10 This is structurally different from the archetypal comic plots defined by Northrop Frye in 'The Argument of Comedy', in *English Institute Essays 1948*, ed. D. A. Robertson, Jr (New York, Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 58–73; or the arch-comic plot posited by Harry Levin (that

Kathleen Bishop, drawing on the work of Eric Bentley, points to 'two comic strains in the history of comedy: one, derived from Latin sources, is scornful, and full of ridicule, moving towards unresolved discord; the other, of non-Latin derivation, is sympathetic, moving towards concord and marriage.'[11] Even though comedies in the tradition of Greek 'New Comedy' end inevitably in marriage, the plots of Plautus, in contrast to those of Terence and of their common Greek model Menander, 'do not point towards responsible domestic love, but towards sexual promiscuity'.[12] Tracing the continuities from Plautine comedy through the medieval French *fabliau* to Chaucer, Bishop directs our attention to one of the most popular tales, the story of Geta and Birria, which in turn derives from Plautus's *Amphitruo*. She draws a series of comparisons between classical and medieval comedy that are no less relevant to Machiavelli and Pirandello. It is clear that Pirandello in *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú,* like Machiavelli in *Mandragola,* is drawing on the scornful Plautine and *fabliaux* tradition as well as the animal fable tradition, but both have another subtext: the 'divine' comedy of Gabriel's Annunciation of Mary. Both Pirandello and Machiavelli are rereading the story of the Annunciation, Pirandello quite explicitly and Machiavelli less so. In the second part of this paper, I shall trace the indebtedness of both authors to that narrative, which could be viewed as the archetypal comic *beffa* of the young bride against the foolish old husband, and I shall attempt to tread the fine line between critical discourse and blasphemous scandal by examining what is said and unsaid in the audience response to these two plays.

First I must expand on my reading of *Mandragola* as a comic reworking of the Annunciation. The play is a multi-layered parody. Lucrezia's marriage to Nicia is unfruitful, and possibly unconsummated. As her mother points out, she must have a child to protect her social position after the death of Nicia, her older husband. Callimaco comes to Florence: captivated by her wisdom and goodness, he uses her goodness to seduce her. He lies with her, she accepts the 'celeste disposizione' ('the will of heaven') that has brought him to her, and Nicia is overjoyed at the prospect of a son.

For Machiavelli's contemporaries the comedy rewrote the story of chaste Lucretia who, having been violated by Sextus Tarquinius, chose death before

of the triumph of 'playboys' over 'killjoys') in *Playboys and Killjoys: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Comedy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987), and applied to *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* by M. A. Frese Witt, 'Pirandello's Sicilian Comedies and the Comic Tradition', *PSA* (Publications of the Pirandello Society of America), 6 (1990), 12–20 (p. 13).

11 E. Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York, Atheneum, 1965), p. 311; cited in K. A. Bishop, 'The Influence of Plautus and Latin Elegiac Comedy on Chaucer's Fabliaux', *The Chaucer Review*, 35 (2001), 294–317 (p. 301).

12 W. S. Anderson, *Barbarian Play: Plautus' Roman Comedy* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 61; cited by Bishop, p. 301.

dishonour and galvanized her kinsmen into overthrowing the Tarquins and founding the republic.[13] Machiavelli and his contemporaries knew the story from the first book of Livy's *History of Rome*, and also through St Augustine's symmetrical treatment of the same legend in the first book of *The City of God*.[14] Machiavelli's contemporaries may also have recognized in Messer Nicia the characteristics of Florence's *gonfaloniere a vita*, Piero Soderini, childless though married to a younger woman. Even though he had been Machiavelli's mentor, Soderini is not mentioned in *Il principe*, and is implicitly to be identified with everything that the Prince is not.[15]

The history of ancient Greece is present as well: the names Callimaco and Nicia are Greek rather than Florentine, and contain echoes of military history.[16] Callimachus, 'beautiful warrior', was the commander of the right wing of the victorious Athenian army at the Battle of Marathon (491 BC), but was killed in the fighting. Nikias, from Nike or 'victory' (whom Machiavelli knew from Plutarch's *Life of Nikias*), was the pacific Athenian general who made peace with Sparta in 413 BC and later surrendered ingloriously to the Spartans at Syracuse before being stoned to death.[17] The defeat of Athens in 413 BC led indirectly to the restoration of democracy in 410 BC. There is no doubt that the virtuous Roman Lucretia *is* the prototype for Lucrezia; it is less clear that Callimachus and Nikias are to be identified in their namesakes in *Mandragola*, but they are certainly recalled in the battle formation drawn up in Act IV Scene 9, where Ligurio draws his 'troops' into battle formation in order to capture a passing lute-player: Callimaco (actually Fra Timoteo in disguise) again takes the right horn while Ligurio takes the left, and Nicia, the cuckold, is trapped between the two.

13 I. Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982), especially pp. 90–95; see also R. L. Martinez, 'The Pharmacy of Machiavelli: Roman Lucretia in *Mandragola*,' *Renaissance Drama*, new series, 14 (1983), 1–43.

14 Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, Liber I, §§LVII–LVIII. 'Titolivio' had been translated into the vernacular in the fourteenth century and was widely known: see F. Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, LXVII. The question of rape and suicide was taken up by Augustine in *De Civitate Dei*, Liber I, §19. Augustine's introduction of the example of Lucretia is not political but part of a discussion of rape and suicide, in which he argues that since it is the mind that sins, not the body, victims of rape, an instrument of oppression in the early Christian church, should not choose to take their own lives. Donaldson demonstrates that the legend of Lucretia has eastern origins and cannot be regarded as historical.

15 R. Ridolfi, *Studi sulle commedie di Machiavelli* (Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1968), p. 15, n. 6; on Machiavelli and Soderini, see R. Pesman, 'Machiavelli, Pier Soderini and *Il principe*', in *Altro Polo: A Volume of Italian Renaissance Studies*, edited by C. Condren and R. Pesman Cooper (Sydney, Frederick May Foundation, 1982), pp. 119–44.

16 On the names see Stoppelli, 'I nomi dei personaggi', in *La 'Mandragola'*, pp. 107–22.

17 Alessandro Parronchi draws a parallel between Nikias's surrender and Soderini's capitulation to the Medici in 1512: see his 'La prima rappresentazione della *Mandragola*, il modello per l'apparato, l'allegoria', *La bibliofilia*, 64 (1962), 37–86 (pp. 59–60).

The play is not by any means just historical parable; it is very consciously an experiment in the genre of comedy. The Roman dramatists provide one starting-point. Just as an enthusiast might dismantle a clock to see how it works, Machiavelli had copied [illegible] *Eunuchus* before embarking on *Mandragola*,[18] and would also translate Terence's far gentler *Andria*.[19] Both exercises survive, while two others, a satire of Florentine politics in imitation of Aristophanes's *Clouds* and an adaptation of Plautus's *Aulularia*,[20] are known only by report.[21] Plautus (far more than Terence), and Plautus's first major Italian epigone, Ariosto, provide the play's structural shell: the characters, the division into acts and scenes, the parameters of the plot.

The other comic model is Boccaccio, present at every turn, from the original prologue to the plot and language. The key words used to describe Lucrezia (*giovane, accorta, ingannata; savia e buona* ['young', 'smart', 'deceived'; 'wise and good']) are part of the Boccaccian comic paradigm that equates success in life with love;[22] the plot, as has often been observed, contains elements already present

18 Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Rossi 884, fols 134r–153v, described in 1960 by Sergio Bertelli and Francesco Gaeta (see their 'Noterelle machiavelliane: un codice di Lucrezio e di Terenzio', *Rivista storica italiana*, 73 [1961], 544–55), is a transcription, in Machiavelli's own hand, of Plautus's *Eunuchus*, in Latin. The style has been dated to somewhere between 1500 and 1510. The play was already in print and Machiavelli could easily have obtained a printed copy if he had needed it, so we must conclude that he copied it for a purpose: to learn it, to study it, to understand it.

19 Two manuscripts in Machiavelli's hand survive. Mario Martelli dates the earlier one (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Banco Rari 29, fols 173r–207v) to 1517 or early 1518, and the later one (BNCF, Banco Rari 240, fols 12v–56r), revised and extended after his experience with *Mandragola*, has been dated to about 1520. On the dating see also note 35 below. The translation reveals an unfaltering skill in reading the Latin, and a gift in adapting and recreating jokes. The 1520 redaction forms the basis of the modern critical edition. See M. Martelli, 'La versione machiavelliana dell'*Andria*', *Rinascimento*, 19 (1968), 203–74; B. Richardson, 'Evoluzione stilistica e fortuna della traduzione machiavelliana dell'*Andria*', *Lettere italiane*, 25 (1973), 319–38.

20 According to Machiavelli's nephew, who became his literary executor, Machiavelli composed an imitation of Aristophanes's *Clouds*, as a satire of current events, in 1504. From a set of barbed allusions by three mid-sixteenth-century satirists—the playwright-academicians Grazzini, Gelli and Varchi, operating in the context of the official Medici Accademia Fiorentina—, it seems that Machiavelli had done an *adaptation* of another play by Plautus, *Aulularia*, which Gelli was now accused of reworking without acknowledgement, and passing off as his own under the title *La sporta*. On these see G. Davico Bonino, 'Introduzione' to N. Machiavelli, *Teatro: Andria, Mandragola, Clizia* (Turin, Einaudi, 1979), p. VIII; I. Sanesi, *La commedia*, 2nd ed. (Milan, Vallardi, 1954), pp. 339–40, 797.

For details of Machiavelli's six comedies see Davico Bonino, pp. VII–XI.

See G. Ferroni, *"Mutazione" e "riscontro" nel teatro di Machiavelli e altri saggi sulla commedia del Cinquecento* (Rome, Bulzoni, 1972), pp. 19–137; E. Raimondi, 'Il teatro del Machiavelli', *Studi storici*, 10 (1969), 749–98 (pp. 753–56); L. Vanossi, 'Situazione e sviluppo nel teatro

dishonour and galvanized her kinsmen into overthrowing the Tarquins and founding the republic.[13] Machiavelli and his contemporaries knew the story from the first book of Livy's *History of Rome*, and also through St Augustine's symmetrical treatment of the same legend in the first book of *The City of God*.[14] Machiavelli's contemporaries may also have recognized in Messer Nicia the characteristics of Florence's *gonfaloniere a vita*, Piero Soderini, childless though married to a younger woman. Even though he had been Machiavelli's mentor, Soderini is not mentioned in *Il principe*, and is implicitly to be identified with everything that the Prince is not.[15]

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16 On the names see Stoppelli, 'I nomi dei personaggi', in *La 'Mandragola'*, pp. 107–22.

17 Alessandro Parronchi draws a parallel between Nikias's surrender and Soderini's capitulation to the Medici in 1512: see his 'La prima rappresentazione della *Mandragola*, il modello per l'apparato, l'allegoria', *La bibliofilia*, 64 (1962), 37–86 (pp. 59–60).

The play is not by any means just historical parable; it is very consciously an experiment in the genre of comedy. The Roman dramatists provide one starting-point. Just as an enthusiast might dismantle a clock to see how it works, Machiavelli had copied [illegible] *Eunuchus* before embarking on *Mandragola*,[18] and would also translate Terence's far gentler *Andria*.[19] Both exercises survive, while two others, a satire of Florentine politics in imitation of Aristophanes's *Clouds* and an adaptation of Plautus's *Aulularia*,[20] are known only by report.[21] Plautus (far more than Terence), and Plautus's first major Italian epigone, Ariosto, provide the play's structural shell: the characters, the division into acts and scenes, the parameters of the plot.

The other comic model is Boccaccio, present at every turn, from the original prologue to the plot and language. The key words used to describe Lucrezia (*giovane, accorta, ingannata; savia e buona* ['young', 'smart', 'deceived'; 'wise and good']) are part of the Boccaccian comic paradigm that equates success in life with love;[22] the plot, as has often been observed, contains elements already present

18 Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Rossi 884, fols 134r–153v, described in 1960 by Sergio Bertelli and Francesco Gaeta (see their 'Noterelle machiavelliane: un codice di Lucrezio e di Terenzio', *Rivista storica italiana*, 73 [1961], 544–55), is a transcription, in Machiavelli's own hand, of Plautus's *Eunuchus*, in Latin. The style has been dated to somewhere between 1500 and 1510. The play was already in print and Machiavelli could easily have obtained a printed copy if he had needed it, so we must conclude that he copied it for a purpose: to learn it, to study it, to understand it.

19 Two manuscripts in Machiavelli's hand survive. Mario Martelli dates the earlier one (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Banco Rari 29, fols 173r–207v) to 1517 or early 1518, and the later one (BNCF, Banco Rari 240, fols 12v–56r), revised and extended after his experience with *Mandragola*, has been dated to about 1520. On the dating see also note 35 below. The translation reveals an unfaltering skill in reading the Latin, and a gift in adapting and recreating jokes. The 1520 redaction forms the basis of the modern critical edition. See M. Martelli, 'La versione machiavelliana dell'*Andria*', *Rinascimento*, 19 (1968), 203–74; B. Richardson, 'Evoluzione stilistica e fortuna della traduzione machiavelliana dell'*Andria*', *Lettere italiane*, 25 (1973), 319–38.

20 According to Machiavelli's nephew, who became his literary executor, Machiavelli composed an imitation of Aristophanes's *Clouds*, as a satire of current events, in 1504. From a set of barbed allusions by three mid-sixteenth-century satirists—the playwright-academicians Grazzini, Gelli and Varchi, operating in the context of the official Medici Accademia Fiorentina—, it seems that Machiavelli had done an *adaptation* of another play by Plautus, *Aulularia*, which Gelli was now accused of reworking without acknowledgement, and passing off as his own under the title *La sporta*. On these see G. Davico Bonino, 'Introduzione' to N. Machiavelli, *Teatro: Andria, Mandragola, Clizia* (Turin, Einaudi, 1979), p. VIII; I. Sanesi, *La commedia*, 2nd ed. (Milan, Vallardi, 1954), pp. 339–40, 797.

For details of Machiavelli's six comedies see Davico Bonino, pp. VII–XI.

See G. Ferroni, *"Mutazione" e "riscontro" nel teatro di Machiavelli e altri saggi sulla commedia del Cinquecento* (Rome, Bulzoni, 1972), pp. 19–137; E. Raimondi, 'Il teatro del Machiavelli', *Studi storici*, 10 (1969), 749–98 (pp. 753–56); L. Vanossi, 'Situazione e sviluppo nel teatro

in the tale of Egano (*Decameron*, VII. 7), itself based on a well-known *fabliau*;[23] and the Florentine vernacular that Machiavelli moulds to fit each character so that inflections of age, gender and occupation are clearly audible is the language that Boccaccio had rendered malleable a century and a half earlier.

But there is another influence, that of the theatrical genre that had achieved spectacular success in Florence from the middle of the fifteenth century. Until the middle of that century, Florence had enjoyed two distinct kinds of theatrical performance: the representations for the midsummer festival of St John the Baptist (24 June), in which scenes from the history of man's salvation, from the Creation to the Last Judgement, were performed in Piazza della Signoria; and representations for liturgical feast days, in particular the Annunciation, Ascension and Pentecost, performed in the conventual churches of the Santo Spirito quarter. Around the middle of the century both forms were substantially modified when a significant textual element was added to the spectacle. The old *feste* were transformed into plays that we now term *sacre rappresentazioni*. In many cases, the barest Biblical scene was now fleshed out by an extensive textual element. Youth confraternities added plays to their celebration of their patron saints, and among these confraternities the Medicean Compagnia della Purificazione is one of the most studied because of its extensive surviving archive.[24]

In February 1450, within a year of the first performance of Feo Belcari's landmark *Abramo e Isaac*, the youth confraternity of the Purification in San Marco staged its *Rappresentazione della Purificazione*, complete with a *balena* or leviathan representing Limbo, a procession of prophets, the presentation of Christ to Simeon and Anna, the *Nunc dimittis* and a final *lauda*. The play was followed by a communal supper and the distribution of candles. The opening lines of the early versions of this play have a striking similarity to the Prologue of *Mandragola*. The angelic salutation that opens the *Purificazione*,

> Iddio vi salvi tutti, o frati miei
> e padri per età e per amore,
> e dievi grazia sí com' io vorrei [...], (ll. 1–3)[25]

machiavelliano', in L. Vanossi and others, *Lingua e strutture del teatro italiano del Rinascimento* (Padua, Liviana, 1970), pp. 1–108 (pp. 8–14).

23 For a synthesis of the tale's history, see Vittore Branca's notes to G. Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Turin, Einaudi, 1980), p. 839.

24 See L. Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise: The Confraternity of the Purification and the Socialization of Youths in Florence, 1427–1785* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004); on their Purification play, N. Newbigin, 'The Word Made Flesh: The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-century Florence', in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. T. Verdon and J. Henderson (Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1990), pp. 361–75.

is not far removed from the opening greeting of Machiavelli's Prologue: 'Idio vi salvi, benigni auditori' ['God save you, kind audience!']. Machiavelli desires not grace for a male audience, but rather, for his female audience, a happy ending like Lucrezia's: 'io vorrei/che voi fussi ingannate come lei' ['I wish that you would be deceived the way she was'].[26]

Daria Donadi Perocco was the first to point out that the action of *Mandragola* ends with a series of three unequivocal allusions to the Christian rite of Purification, or the Churching of Women.[27] Until the 1960s, Christian women who had given birth were required to be churched before being readmitted to the sacraments, just as Mary submitted to the Jewish rite of ritual cleansing forty days after Christ's birth (2 February, a midwinter festival of candles, also known as Candlemas, Candelora), in order to be readmitted to the temple and, at the same time, presented her son and an offering to the temple. At best, Nicia's son has only just been conceived, but Nicia is now eager to take his wife into the church that dominates the scene, in order to 'menarla in santo', that is, to have her churched.[28] Like Joseph, the aged husband of a much younger wife, Nicia ushers Lucrezia and his imagined child (part of the happy ending of deception, as the *canzone* later placed at the end of Act III tells us: 'suave [...] inganno/al fin condotto immaginato e caro' ['sweet [...] deceit/taken to its desired envisaged end']) into the church that has dominated

25 'God save you all, brothers, and fathers in age and in love, and may He give you the grace I would wish...' The manuscript version is edited in *Nuovo corpus di sacre rappresentazioni fiorentine del Quattrocento*, ed. N. Newbigin (Bologna, Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1983), pp. 29–55; a later and different printed version is in *Sacre rappresentazioni del XIV, XV e XVI secoli*, ed. A. D'Ancona, 3 vols (Florence, Le Monnier, 1872), I, 211–22; the performance is discussed in Newbigin, 'The Word Made Flesh'.

26 No other *rappresentazione* begins in a similar fashion, but Stoppelli draws attention to the similarity with the opening sentence of the anonymous and undated prose comedy, *Commedia d'Adulazione*, 'Salvivi Dio, benigni spectatori che siate alla presenza ragunati', which he links to the *sacra rappresentazione* tradition on account of the characters' names rather than of this opening line (Stoppelli, *La 'Mandragola'*, p. 114).

27 D. Donadi Perocco, 'Il rito finale della *Mandragola*', *Lettere italiane*, 25 (1973), 531–36. Pasquale Stoppelli returns to the subject in 'L'ultima scena', in *La 'Mandragola'*, pp. 91–105. On female blood and the rite of Purification, see U. Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* [1988], trans. J. Brownjohn (London, Deutsch, 1990), pp. 12–17.

28 'Farò levare e lavare la donna, farolla venire alla chiesa, ad entrare in santo' ['I'll get the wife up and washed, I'll get her to come to the church and be purified'] (V. 2 [36]); 'Dico che gli è bene che io vadia innanzi a parlare al frate, e dirli che ti si facci incontro in sull'uscio della chiesa, per menarti in santo, perché gli è proprio, stamani, come se tu rinascessi' ['I say it's best if I go ahead to talk to the friar and tell him to come to meet us at the door of the church, to take you in to be purified, because this morning it is just as if you were born again'] (V. 5 [49]); 'Tu, Lucrezia, quanti grossi hai a dare al frate, per entrare in santo?' ['Lucrezia, how many groats do you have to give the friar, to be purified?'] (V. 6 [76]).

the stage throughout the play.[29] Like Joseph he will be *pater* but not *genitor* of the child. Donadi Perocco comes close to drawing a parallel between Lucrezia and Mary but stops short; nor does she note the transformation of the Purification scene into a *Sponsalizio della Vergine*, as Nicia invites Callimaco to take Lucrezia's hand (V. 6 [11]).

The late Giovanni Aquilecchia, a scholar not shy of licentious material, stops similarly short of blasphemy in his 1971 article, '"La favola *Mandragola* si chiama"'.[30] He directs our attention to the moment in IV. 3 [74] when Callimaco tells Siro to bring him the lethal aphrodisiac potion he has prepared: 'Piglia quel bicchiere d'argento che è drento allo armario di camera e, coperto con un poco di drappo, portamelo: e guarda a non lo versare per la via' ['Get that silver goblet that is in the closet in my chamber, and cover it with a napkin and bring it to me and mind you don't spill it on the way']. The audience (but not Nicia or Lucrezia) knows that this is just sweet spiced wine ('ipocrasso', IV. 2 [29]), but Siro carries it across the stage as if it were the Host itself. Aquilecchia explores many aspects of the mandrake potion, and the over-arching *inganno* that all accept even when they know it is clearly nonsense, but except for noting Rachel's sterility and Leah's mandrakes in Genesis 30. 14–16, he does not accuse Machiavelli of any blasphemous intent.[31]

More recently Alfred Trioli has identified a 'Marian subtext' in *Mandragola*:

> There comes to mind the Annunciation story as told in Luke I:26ff., Mary's initial reaction to the Angel Gabriel's disconcerting declaration to her; the Evangelist notes her deep disturbance and Gabriel hastens to assure her that she will be covered by the Holy Spirit. What could be more familiar to Machiavelli's audience at any level? [...] Lucrezia's presumably complete acceptance of Callimaco as lord, master, guide, father and defender, whatever its sources and analogues, can only in the last analysis be subtended by Mary's acceptance of God's will.[32]

29 Prologue, lines 12–25. Nicia's house is on the Prologo's right, Callimaco's house on his left, and the church directly behind him: 'conoscer poi potrai/a l'abito d'un frate/qual priore o abate/abita el tempio che all'incontro è posto' ['then you'll be able to recognize from his friar's habit what prior or abbot inhabits that temple opposite'] (18–21). In humanistic prose a church is sometimes called a *tempio*, but here the word may be used deliberately to prepare us to associate the rite of purification, *menare in santo*, in Act V with the feast of the Purification and the Presentation of Christ at the Temple.

30 G. Aquilecchia, '"La favola *Mandragola* si chiama"', in *Collected Essays in Italian Language and Literature presented to Kathleen Speight*, ed. G. Aquilecchia, S. N. Cristea and S. Ralphs (Manchester, Maney, 1971), pp. 73–100 (p. 79).

31 Aquilecchia remarks on the phrase 'preparatevi a questo misterio, ché si fa sera' (pp. 91–93) but, in a discussion of time in the play, does not hint at any identification between Lucrezia and Mary.

Trioli observes these isolated echoes, but does not take the next step, of saying that *Mandragola* is an extended secularizing parody of an Annunciation play.

Machiavelli, born in 1469, was still a child when the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478 virtually brought to an end the great public *sacre rappresentazioni* for which Cosimo and Lorenzo's Florence had become famous, and certainly interrupted the Purification company's plays. We know nothing about Machiavelli's membership of a confraternity, although it is statistically probable that he was a member of a boy's confraternity in his youth, and that he did see or participate in their plays.[33] Of the old plays, only the Annunciation play continued to be performed from time to time, but a vast range of *sacre rappresentazioni* old and new were printed in the 1490s and remained in print in the first two decades of the sixteenth century.

Mandragola belongs to a new era, post-Savonarola and post-republic, when the Medici were re-established in Florence. It was composed probably in 1515, and certainly by 1519,[34] but the first documented performance was for that insatiable

32 A. A. Trioli, 'Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and the Sacred', *Arte lombarda*, 110/111 (1994), 3/4, pp. 173–79 (p. 174, col. 3; p. 176, col. 3). Trioli also draws analogies between *Mandragola* and the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century *rappresentazioni* of *Stella*, *Uliva* and *Rosana*.

33 In his *Istorie fiorentine*, VII. 12, he refers to Piero's flurry of *feste* in early 1466, but he does not otherwise make direct reference to the *rappresentazioni* that reached their greatest heights in the 1460s and 1470s. Both Lorenzo Polizzotto and I have sought the name of Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli among the matriculated members of the Purification company, but without success.

34 The date 1519 appears above the title of the apograph manuscript, Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Redi 129, fols. 110ʳ–131ʳ. The play's close links with the feast of the Purification may provide a further indication of the date of composition and first performance of *Mandragola*. As Theodore Sumberg noted, the play 'swims in numbers' ('*La mandragola:* An Interpretation', *The Journal of Politics*, 23 [1961], 320–40 [p. 340]; see also Aquilecchia, p. 91 and R. Ridolfi, 'Composizione, rappresentazione e prima edizione della *Mandragola*', *La bibliofilia*, 64 [1962], 285–300), and numerous clues are provided to allow us to date the action of the play very accurately. The action is set in winter (probably Carnival), 1505. Callimaco was ten when he was sent to Paris, and has been there for twenty years (I. 1), but ten years ago, because of the turmoil created by Charles VIII's descent through Italy, he decided to remain there. Charles invaded Florence in November 1494 and seized Naples the following February. Although the play is invariably said to be set in 1504, the ten years that have elapsed from Charles's invasion must clearly bring us to Carnival 1504/5 (remembering that the Florentine year did not begin until 25 March). The composition of the play, as distinct from its setting, dates from shortly after Machiavelli's definitive failure to gain employment with the Medici in August 1515 (and, I believe, after his experiments in translating Terence's *Andria*), and before the copying of the MS dated 1519. In 1515/16, the last Sunday of Carnival, already established as the night *par excellence* for theatrical performances, coincided with Candlemas, the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, as it had done in 1504/5, and may have provided the stimulus for the carnivalesque rewriting of this story of conception and purification. Florence was in still festive mode for the first visit (now almost at its end) of Giovanni de' Medici as Pope Leo X (see I. Ciseri, *L'ingresso trionfale di Leone X in Firenze nel 1515* [Florence, Olschki, 1990]). We know that in the morning he went to San Lorenzo for the distribution of candles, but there is no record of his celebration of the end of Carnival. Is it not possible that he also saw or

consumer of entertainments, the Medici pope Leo X, in 1520. From the diaries of Marin Sanudo we know that a performance in Venice in 1522 had to be discontinued in Act V because of the crush, and it was performed again before Clement VII in Rome in 1524. In the same year it was performed in Florence in the house of Bernardino di Giordano, with scenes painted by Andrea del Sarto and Bastiano da Sangallo, and actors from the festive brigade of the Compagnia della Cazzuola. During the 1526 Carnival it was staged in Faenza by Machiavelli's very important friend, Francesco Guicciardini, for whom Machiavelli agreed, much against his will, to write *intermezzi* in the form of *canzoni*.[35]

The play encountered problems only after the Council of Trent. The last sixteenth-century edition was published by Giunti in 1556, before all Machiavelli's works were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1559. Sixteenth-century copies of it are comparatively rare in Italian libraries, but Goldoni, for example, was famously enchanted by it, despite its lubricity.[36] Tiraboschi had problems with Machiavelli's comedies on both formal and moral grounds.[37] Between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, when nationalism of various kinds led to the creation of a clearly defined canon of Italian authors, Machiavelli was unequivocally present, but *Mandragola* proved awkward. We find, for example, Francesco De Sanctis lamenting the immorality of a play in which virtuous and chaste Lucrezia can be so wickedly corrupted by the people around her. Ligurio, the facilitator, 'è un essere destituto d'ogni senso morale, e che per un bon boccone tradirebbe Cristo' ['is a creature destitute of all sense of morality, who would betray Christ for a morsel']; and the play, all in all,

heard of Machiavelli's comedy for the first time? Leo was certainly responsible for a subsequent performance in Rome in April 1520.

35 On performances and reception of *Mandragola*, see M. Baratto, *La commedia del Cinquecento*, 2nd ed. (Venice, Neri Pozza, 1977), 'Introduzione (novecentesca)', pp. 9–34.

36 'Je la dévorai à la première lecture, et je l'ai relue dix fois. Ce n'était pas le style libre ni l'intrigue scandaleuse de la pièce qui me la faisaient trouver bonne; au contraire, sa lubricité me révoltait; mais c'était la première pièce de caractère qui m'etait tombée sous les yeux, et j'en étais enchanté' ['I devoured it at first reading, and I have read it ten times over. It is not the free style nor the scandalous plot of the play which made me find it good; on the contrary, its lubricity revolted me; but it was the first comedy of character that I had set eyes on, and I was enchanted']: C. Goldoni, *Mémoires de Goldoni pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie et à celle de son théâtre*, 2 vols (Paris, Ponthieu, 1822), I, 28–29.

37 'Le due commedie in prosa [...] non sono un troppo perfetto modello né di un modesto componimento, né di una ben ordinata commedia' ['His two prose comedies [...] are not such a perfect model, either of a respectable composition or of a well-ordered comedy']: G. Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, Tomo VII, Libro II, Capo II, §LXIX, 'Scrittori di politica' (Milan, Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 16 vols, 1823–26), XI, 858; 'nelle [commedie del Machiavelli] per altro è piú a lodarsi la purità della lingua che la felicità dell'intreccio' ['in (Machiavelli's comedies) the purity of the language deserves more praise than the success of the plot'], Lib. III, Capo III, §§LXIII–LXIV, 'La commedia' (vol. XII, p. 1908).

ha fatto il suo tempo. È troppo incorporata in quella società, in ciò ch'ella ha di piú reale e particolare. Quei sentimenti e quelle impressioni, che la ispirarono, non li trovi oggi piú. La depravazione del prete e la sua terribile influenza sulla donna e sulla famiglia appare a noi un argomento pieno di sangue: non possiamo farne una commedia.[38]

Modern attempts to bring the comedy back to the Italian stage were doomed to failure until the abolition of theatre censorship in 1962. *Mandragola* was read in schools, where, passing through 'il filtro ipnotizzante e la mediazione castratoria dei professori' ['the hypnotic filter and castrating mediation of the classroom'], it had become harmless, but it was regarded as too dangerous for the stage.[39] Modern critics are more likely to see *Mandragola* as being close to *Il principe* in its morality: every character—except Nicia—exercises *virtú*, the capacity to challenge *fortuna* (the presiding deity of comedy) and to create and maintain one's own world by the appropriate use of foxy guile and leonine strength.

I have no documentation of Pirandello's own reading of Machiavelli or of medieval and Renaissance theatre in general.[40] He makes no allusion to the comic theatre in his essay 'L'umorismo', the references there to Machiavelli and Ariosto being to works other than their comedies. There is, nevertheless, such a clear understanding of classic comic techniques that there can be no doubt that Pirandello's theatrical education included classical comedy (Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence), Renaissance comedy (Machiavelli above all) and Goldoni. He was certainly a highly competent Latinist: his departure from La Sapienza was the result of an ill-judged nudge to his front-row classmate when his professor, who was also the Rettore, made a monumental error in translating Plautus; and a wide reading of medieval drama is not implausible, since his mentor in the troubles that followed was the great Romance philologist Ernesto Monaci, who opened up the study of early drama in Italy.[41]

38 '[...] has had its time. It is too embodied in that society, in its real and particular qualities. Those feelings and those impressions that inspired it you don't find any more. The depravity of the priest and his terrible influence on the woman and on her family seems to us a bloody subject: we can't make comedy of it': F. De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana* [1912] (Milan, Treves, 1920), II, 79, 83.

39 Baratto, p. 18.

40 His reading of *Mandragola* by 1916 is convincingly posited by Anne Paolucci in 'Theatre of Illusion: Pirandello's *Liolà* and Machiavelli's *Mandragola*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 10 (1972), 44–58: 'Pirandello, we know, considered *Mandragola* one of the masterpieces of Italian literature and—although we cannot prove any direct intention on Pirandello's part to write a modern version of the old tale—it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that he was in fact inspired by Machiavelli's play to write *Liolà*' (p. 47). In both, an old man who wants an heir undertakes to work out a deception in which he is ultimately deceived.

41 G. Giudice, *Luigi Pirandello* (Turin, UTET, 1963), pp. 109–10.

L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú was written just after the chaotic period between the armistice and the peace treaty that ended the Great War, when Europe was still beset by chaos and those who exploited it. Theatre in Italy was largely escapist, and Pirandello was seen by contemporary critics as prolific and repetitive. He did not, however, engage with the political situation (he might have recognized the importance of Bolshevism, attempts at achieving female suffrage, the rise of the Fasci di Combattimento…), but chose instead to deal with the drama of personal relationships, such as gave rise to the daily diet of crimes of passion that filled the newspapers. On 22 February 1919, shortly after forwarding the script of *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú,* Pirandello wrote to his director/leading man Antonio Gandusio:

> L'avrei voluta anche, se non avessi temuto d'offender troppo il pubblico e gli attori che debbon recitare le parti, piú sguajata, per una superiore coerenza estetica. Deve avere per forza una faccia di buffoneria salace, spinta fin quasi alla sconcezza, vorrei dire una faccia di baldracca, questa commedia ove l'umanità è beffata cosí amaramente e ferocemente nei suoi valori morali.[42]

Pirandello is unequivocal here about the target of his satire: not individual angst but collective moral values, so pretentious and outrageous that they allow men and women to represent themselves as what they are not. All the characters in this comedy are actors, *upocritès,* and all are to be laughed at. The comic ending of both *Mandragola* and *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* relies, however, on maintaining the *inganno.* Other Pirandellian plays turn on the moment when the protagonist looks in the mirror and sees only the reflection of his life. Here, however, the masked characters are not required to come to any self-knowledge: it is only the audience that is aware of the multiple levels of deception and self-deception. Like Messer Nicia, Perella is allowed to remain in ignorance of his wife's long-term affair with Paolino; but Pirandello's twist to the situation is that so many facets of it are reversed. The wife is already pregnant, so it is necessary for the lover to prostitute the wife to her husband. His position as the cuckolded cuckold is exquisitely Pirandellian.

From its first performance on 2 May 1919, *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* encountered hostility but never fell so far from favour that it was not performed. It has remained in the repertoire of mainstream, student and fringe theatre, in Italy and abroad, even though critics have routinely been impatient with the play's trivial combination of bizarre stylization and farce and their own inability

42 'I should have liked it to be even more vulgar, so as to give it more aesthetic coherence, if I had not been afraid of giving too much offence to the audience and the actors who have to perform the roles. It has to give the appearance of salacious buffoonery, pushed almost to the limit of obscenity, I mean, it has to look like a slut, this comedy where humanity is mocked so bitterly and ferociously for its moral values' (*Mn* II, 289).

to identify its genre. Only in 1926 was Pirandello able to oversee a performance (in his new Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte, with a very youthful Marta Abba in the leading role) in which the actors wore masks, but even then, despite carefully placed promotional pieces, such as Ferdinando Paolieri's 'review' which was published the morning before the Florentine performance (and is included as an appendix to the present article), actors and audiences were unenthusiastic.[43] In moral fables, animals talk and behave like people to reveal to the foolishness of human behaviour. Here, however, people look and move like animals, their 'real nature' is portrayed by masks (in the manner of the *upocritès* or comic actors of ancient Greece that Paolino discusses in I. 3 [*Mn* II, 308–09]). The masks, however, are extraordinarily anti-naturalistic: the whole play moves into a surreal world, leaving the audience disoriented, sometimes watching a domestic farce that could, at any moment, become a tragedy, and sometimes watching a surreal world of hens, goats, monkeys, cats and bristly boars, where nothing is as it seems.

Modern readers of Pirandello's play and of *Mandragola* (and they have more readers than viewers) tend to be appalled at the treatment of women and the misogyny of both authors.[44] They are reluctant to accept Callimaco's 'conquest' of Lucrezia as anything but rape, but are prepared to read it within the parameters that Machiavelli defines in *Il principe* as an example of responding flexibly to circumstances, exercising the virtues of bold, pragmatic decisiveness to seize the opportunities fortune brings. On stage the arguments are more beguiling: where Callimaco saw her *bontà* as a chink in her armour, she uses her *saviezza* to turn his attack to her advantage. She is the personification of Machiavelli's *virtú,* and the next morning she is the more beautiful for it.

In contrast, Pirandello's Signora Perella is treated savagely: there is no moment when she is beautiful. In Act I she is red-eyed from weeping and constantly retching into a handkerchief; in Act II she is prostituted to her husband by her lover, to salvage her honour; in Act III she enters dishevelled and exhausted from her husband's repeated attentions, and absolutely without Machiavellian *virtú.* Nevertheless, Pirandello does allow her a transcendent moment. As Paolino hands her the pot plant, she is again identified with the immaculate Virgin: she ironically recovers the symbolic virtue that was hers in the title. Just as Lucrezia was cocky and reborn, so Signora Perella is filled with new life.[45]

43 D'Amico, *Mn* I, 295.

44 Both Machiavelli's short story 'Belfagor' and Pirandello's 1909 essay 'Femminismo' (*Spsv,* pp. 1068–72) are satirical, but both reflect an uncomfortable level of engagement with the prevailing discourse of misogyny. In the web-based publicity material and criticism for the current touring production (November 2007 onwards) of *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú,* directed by Fabio Grossi and starring Leo Gullotta, Carlo Valli, Antonella Attili e Gianni Giuliano, the satirical focus appears to go no further than petit bourgeois hypocrisy.

45 After the initial identification of Signora Perella with the scene of *Ecce ancilla Domini* (II. 8), compare Signora Perella's 'Ridanno la vita' (III. 4) ['They restore life'], and Messer Nicia's

It is not possible to demonstrate intertextuality, that Pirandello had read *Mandragola* as a parody of the Annunciation and deliberately worked it into his own 'moral fable', or even that *Mandragola,* rather than the Biblical account of the Annunciation, was a direct inspiration for the play. Nevertheless, I remain curious about the way in which critical response has been compromised or confused by a perception of blasphemy. Criticism, no less than the comedies themselves, holds up a mirror to society.

Was blasphemy the intention of either author? Is satire of religious belief possible without blasphemy? Pirandello is clearly one of the least conventionally religious writers of twentieth-century Italy, but he does have a mystic awareness of life forces, of pagan fertility rituals, of dance and song, birth and rebirth. He may not be mocking the gullible throng that will believe the implausible, so much as taking a recognizable gesture and using it to purify the birth of new life. Machiavelli, too, had little use for conventional religion. He saw a clergy that exploited the gullibility of the faithful and prelates with the ambitions of ordinary princes, and imagined no omnipotent god at the helm of worldly affairs.[46] But he lived in a society that was shaped and ordered by the practice of religion, and he exploits the comic irony of having Lucrezia recover her purity, undoing her night of pleasure by having her churched the next morning. Both Pirandello and Machiavelli were deliberately defying the conventions of organized religion to attempt new definitions of virtue; the aim of both is not blasphemy but a complex theatrical experience.

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APPENDIX

Pirandello's company arrived at the Politeama in Florence on 13 September 1926, and between 15 and 28 September performed twelve different plays (only *La vita che ti diedi* was repeated, as a matinee at the end). Ten of these were by Pirandello (including the first performance of *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca*), one by Crémieux (*Qui si balla*) and one by Ibsen (*La donna del mare,* an old war-horse of Eleonora Duse, staged as a gala performance for Marta Abba). The following piece by *La Nazione*'s editor and regular theatre critic, Ferdinando Paolieri, appeared on 17 September 1926, the morning before the performance of *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú.*

comment to Lucrezia, 'gli è proprio stamani come se tu rinascessi' (V. 5 [49]) ['this morning it's just as if you were reborn']. Lucrezia's cockiness ('La pare un gallo' [V. 5 [46] ['She's like a rooster']) may be a reference to the post-classical aphorism, 'Post coitum omne animal triste praeter gallum mulieremque' ['After coitus every animal is sad, except the woman and the cock'].

46 On Machiavelli's religion see J. S. Preus, 'Machiavelli's Functional Analysis of Religion: Context and Object', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 40 (1979), 172–90; T. J. Lukes, 'To Bamboozle with Goodness: The Political Advantages of Christianity in the Thought of Machiavelli', *Renaissance and Reformation,* 20 (1984), 266–77.

L'UOMO, LA BESTIA E LA VIRTÚ AL POLITEAMA NAZIONALE

La 'Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma', diretta da Luigi Pirandello, ha iniziato da due giorni le sue recite al Politeama Nazionale, e il pubblico, ancora memore della trionfale stagione del marzo scorso, ha affollato il teatro e ha rinnovato il successo.

La recitazione dei *Sei personaggi* è apparsa, se possibile, ancor piú fusa: ci è sembrato che Pirandello abbia portato alla esecuzione di questo suo capolavoro, gli ultimi ritocchi da grande maestro. *La vita che ti diedi* che ha seguito alla prima recita, ci ha rivelato le doti eccezionali della attrice tragica Marta Abba che già nel marzo scorso aveva commosso il pubblico fiorentino. (La recita di ieri sera è stata dedicata alla memoria di Cesare Levi, e prima che si alzasse il sipario, Luigi Pirandello ha pronunziato commosse parole sulla vita e l'arte del nostro indimenticabile collega.) Ma l'attenzione del pubblico è tutta attesa verso l'Apologo Pirandelliano, *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú*, che questa sera verrà rappresentato al Politeama, e che ha sapore di novità per l'originalità addiritura eccezionale con la quale Pirandello ne ha curato la messa in scena.

Udimmo piú volte *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtú* recitato da ottime Compagnie comiche, rilevammo lo schietto successo di ilarità e la struttura del lavoro originale, perfetta come tutta l'opera Pirandelliana, ma ci sembrò che qualche cosa non risultasse ben chiara; evidentemente fra l'autore e noi v'era un equivoco da chiarire. L'umorismo, che quando è vero e autentico, ha sempre un fondo di dolorosa umanità, appariva invece, in certo modo, farsesco, contrastante cioè con la forma d'arte di Pirandello, che rifugge e sdegna ogni effetto plateale. La vicenda appariva quanto mai licenziosa, a taluni sembrò anzi scandalosa, e ci meravigliammo che un puro spirito d'artista potesse trascendere a tanto. Il pubblico che accorrerà questa sera al Politeama, potrà accorgersi facilmente del suo errore.

Poche commedie racchiudono, come questa, lo strazio che deriva dal contrasto immanente fra l'uomo, e la bestia che ogni uomo ha in sé. Era mancato solo il modo di rappresentarlo e Pirandello, curando la esecuzione di questa sua commedia, che giustamente chiamò Apologo, con meticoloso amore, è riuscito mirabilmente nell'intento. Ha avuto a collaboratori, Giovanni De Rossi, che ha approntato le maschere e i trucchi, e Guido Salvini per le scene. Ma i suoi grandi collaboratori sono stati gli attori della sua magnifica Compagnia. Crediamo che il pubblico stenterà, stasera, a riconoscere Marta Abba, sotto le spoglie della virtuosa signora Perella, o, piú esattamente sotto le due maschere, della virtú e del vizio che nascondono la signora Perella. Marta Abba ha saputo trovare in questa parte, toni

sconosciuti fin' ora sui nostri palcoscenici: il contrasto fra la *voce della maschera* e la voce dell'umanità prorompente, è cosí vivo, cosí preciso, che la utilizzazione del personaggio anziché allontanarcelo, ce lo riconduce davanti, vicino, con una verità lacerante. Camillo Pilotto è un 'Capitano Perella' eccezionale. Tutti gli altri hanno saputo imbestialirsi con una cura davvero impressionante, sia nelle truccature come nella recitazione: il Santini che è la volpe, Rossi la scimmia, Maraffi il caprone, la Di Sangiorgio il gatto, la Graziosi la cavalla, la Boari la gallina, contrastano con i due soli uomini veri che appaiono nel lavoro, cioè il Dottore, sostenuto dal Riva, e il Professore Paolino cui il Ruffini sa dare veramente quel senso di trasparenza proprio di quegli uomini che scevri di apparenze bestiali, tentennano e tremano fra gli opposti sentimenti umani.

Abbiamo assistito, pochi giorni or sono, alla rappresentazione di questo lavoro, in altre città, e, ad ogni fine d'atto abbiamo notato il pubblico soffermarsi perplesso e incerto prima di abbandonarsi all'applauso scrosciante. Forse, in quell' attimo, gli spettatori attratti inconsciamente dal famoso principio Pirandelliano, *dello specchio*, erano riusciti a vedersi veramente, in quel terribile specchio dell'anima ed avevano avuto paura di loro stessi.

Ferdinando Paolieri
La Nazione, 17 September 1926, p. 5

[*MAN, BEAST AND VIRTUE* AT THE POLITEAMA NAZIONALE THEATRE
The Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma, directed by Luigi Pirandello, began its performances at the Politeama Nazionale two days ago, and audiences, remembering its triumphant season last March, have packed the theatre and repeated its success.

The performance of *Six Characters* seemed even more solid, if that is possible: it seemed that Pirandello has brought the finishing touches of a great master to the staging of this masterpiece. *The Life I Gave You*, which followed this first performance, revealed to us the exceptional gifts of the tragic actress Marta Abba, who had already moved Florentine audiences. (The performance yesterday evening was dedicated to the memory of Cesare Levi, and before the curtain went up Luigi Pirandello spoke some moving words about the life and art of our unforgettable colleague.) But public attention is all turned to Pirandello's Fable, *Man, Beast and Virtue*, which will be performed this evening at the Politeama, and which has an air of novelty on account of the quite exceptional originality with which Pirandello has designed the production.

We have seen *Man, Beast and Virtue* performed several times by excellent comic companies, we have noted the sheer success of mirth and the structure of the original work, perfect like all Pirandello's *œuvre*, but it seemed to us that something was not quite clear; there was obviously some misunderstanding between the author and ourselves that had to be rectified. Humour, which is always rooted in the sorrows of humanity when it is true and authentic, seemed rather, in some way, farcical, that is, quite the opposite of Pirandello's art form, which flees and avoids any attempt to play to the pit. The plot seemed very licentious indeed, to some it seemed even scandalous, and we were amazed that a pure artistic spirit could so overstep the mark. The audience that will flock tonight to the Politeama will easily recognize its error.

Few comedies contain as this does the torment that derives from the inherent conflict between man and the beast that every man has within him. All that was missing was the way of representing it, and Pirandello, responsible for the staging of this comedy, which he rightly called a Fable, with meticulous love, has succeeded marvellously in his efforts. He has had as collaborators Giovanni De Rossi, who prepared the masks and make-up, and Guido Salvini for the sets. But his great collaborators have been the actors of his magnificent Company. We think the audience will find it difficult, this evening, to recognize Marta Abba, as she appears as the virtuous Signora Perella, or more exactly, behind the two masks of virtue and vice that hide Signora Perella. Marta Abba has been able to achieve in this part tones that were unknown until now on our stage: the contrast between the *voice of the mask* and the voice of irrepressible humanity is so vivid and so precise that the character's use of it, rather than distancing it from us, brings it before us, up close, with lacerating truthfulness. Camillo Pilotto is an exceptional Capitano Perella. All the others have transformed themselves into beasts with amazing attention to detail, both in their make-up and their delivery: Santini is the fox, Rossi the monkey, Maraffi the goat, Miss Di Sangiorgio the cat, Miss Graziosi the horse, Miss Boari the hen, and all stand out in contrast to the only two men who appear in the play, that is, the Doctor, played by Riva, and Professor Paolino, to whom Ruffini really knows how to give that sense of transparency that is typical of those men who are free from bestial appearances but waver and tremble between opposing human sentiments.

In recent days we have been present at performances of this work in other cities, and at the end of every act we have seen the audience pause, perplexed and uncertain, before abandoning itself to deafening applause. Perhaps, in that moment, the spectators, attracted unconsciously by the famous Pirandellian principle *of the mirror*, managed to see themselves as they truly were, in that terrible mirror of the soul, and were afraid of themselves.]