Essays on Machiavelli's Conventional Piety, Literary Inspirations, and Pre-Christian Preoccupation

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For my Family and Friends

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CHAPTER ONE

FROM LIVY TO AUGUSTINE: MACHIAVELLI'S *MANDRAGOLA* (WITH A POSTSCRIPT ON SHAKESPEARE)

1. Introductory Remarks

As is well known, L. Strauss thought of Machiavelli in terms of blasphemy concerning a citation from the Bible in the *Discorsi*,[1] and he judged that Livy's *Ab urbe condita* qualified as Machiavelli's bible.[2] Since then, Machiavelli's relation to religion has been proposed to be less tense. For example, S. de Grazia commented on L. Strauss and proposed a more nuanced interpretation,[3] and J. P. McCormick suggested a set of possible allusions to the Bible concerning the Duke Valentino.[4] Also, other religious aspects have been studied which may encourage the continuation of the contemplation of Machiavelli's (im-)piety. For example, W. J. Connell examined Machiavelli's "Franciscan family" (among other things),[5] O. Zorzi Pugliese turned attention to Machiavelli being a confraternity member in the context of his *Capitoli*,[6] and M. Guglielminetti

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[1] L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle and London: Washington University Press, 1969), 49 ff.
[2] Ibid., 93.
[3] S. De Grazia, "Machiavelli's Biblical Accuracy: A Note of Rectification," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 5, no. 3 (1981): 141–145. Also compare *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
[4] J. P. McCormick, "Prophetic statebuilding: Machiavelli and the passion of the Duke," *Representations* 115, no. 1 (2011): 1–19.
[5] W. J. Connell, "On Machiavelli, St Francis and the Pursuit of Happiness," in *Regimes of Happiness: Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Yuri Contreras-Vejar et al. (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2019), 51–62.
[6] O. Zorzi Pugliese, "Machiavelli and Confraternities: A Sermon to the Brethren and a Parody of Their Statutes," *Confraternitas* 19, no. 2 (2008): 3–10.

pointed to a framing device in *Belfagor* which recalls penitential literature.[7]

This text argues that Machiavelli employs biblical images in the *Mandragola*,[8] though in a rather conventionally Christian way as well as without unduly simplifying things. To begin with, the motif of Lucrezian chastity is discussed with reference to Augustine, then an allusion to the apocryphal Book of Tobit is proposed, before the context of Cain and Abel is suggested to be pertinent. The text concludes with a summary and a postscript on a possible allusion to the *Mandragola* in (pseudo-)Shakespeare's *Edward III*.

2. From Livy to Augustine

It has long been seen that Machiavelli introduces his *Mandragola* (I.1) with reference to the episode concerning Lucretia which is associated with Roman mythography.[9] Given Livy's importance for Machiavelli, it is not unlikely that his description from *Ab urbe condita*, Book I (57 ff.), was his source.

However, Machiavelli chose to change at least two rather decisive elements; firstly, while in Machiavelli there is no doubt that Camillo Calfucci's mere praise excites Callimaco's desire for the yet unseen Lucretia, the way chastity looks (as it were) plays a crucial role in Livy.[10] Again, in Livy the competition has been won, and Collatinus himself invites his princely comrades to his home, at which point Livy mentions

[7] M. Guglielminetti, "'La leggenda di 'Belfagor,'" in *Lingua e le lingue di Machiavelli: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Torino, 2–4 dicembre 1999*, ed. A. Pontremoli (Firenze: Olschki, 2001), 145–154, esp. 146.

[8] Compare the filmed realisation by the director R. Guicciardini, "La mandragola," *Radiotelevisione Italiana*, RAI 13.10.78, 71 min.

[9] R. L. Martinez, "The Pharmacy of Machiavelli: Roman Lucretia in 'Mandragola,'" *Renaissance Drama* 14 (1983): 1–43.

[10] Notice what decides the competition in Livy is that which the husbands see first when they visit and look for their respective wives ("id cuique spectatissimum sit quod necopinato uiri aduentu occurerit oculis," I.57.7). Then, in contrast with the princes' wives, who are seen feasting, Lucretia is seen weaving. Cited after *Livy. Books I and II*, trans. B. O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1967).

that Tarquin's desire is excited[11]; no invitation figures in the *Mandragola* where Tarquin's supposedly parallel figure, Callimaco, is seeking Lucretia as he desires to do so. All other changes, there being no rape or suicide in the *Mandragola*, I attribute to the specific way in which Machiavelli reworks and reinterprets the pre-Christian episode.

2.1 Chastity, "Transgression," and Posterity

In what follows I suggest that Machiavelli may also have drawn from Augustine's reasoning on Lucretia's suicide, in which he views the act critically. In *City of God* (see Book I.16 ff.), Augustine argues that pious chastity is no question of abstinence from copulation but of the heart (*coniunctione membrorum, sed quid animorum diuersitate*). Accordingly, he defends the possible truth that two "do the deed" and only one commits adultery (*duo fuerunt et adulterium unus admisit*) against the notion that necessarily both are adulterate (*ambo adulterium commiserunt*). Thus, Augustine can say that "if it ['purity'] is a quality of the mind, it is not lost when the body is violated"[12] (*Si [pudicitia] autem animi bonum est, etiam oppresso corpore non amittitur*).

In the *Mandragola*, the argument which Timoteo proposes in order to allay Lucrezia's fears of committing the transgressive act is rather similar. Like Boccacchio's abbot in *Decamerone* (III.8),[13] he says that "[t]he will

[11] Livy writes in I.57.9–10 that, the husbands having visited and looked for each of their wives, "Lucretia won the price and thereby the competition; then the husband of the winner is politely inviting the kingly princes to his home. There, vicious lust gripped Sextus Tarquinius to force Lucretia with force to his will; together with beauty the chastity witnessed was exciting him." ["Muliebris certaminis laus penes Lucretiam fuit. Adueniens uir Tarquiniique excepti benigne; uictor maritus comiter inuitat regios iuuenes. Ibi Sex. Tarquinium mala libido Lucretiae per uim stuprandae capit; cum forma tum spectata castitas incitat."]

[12] Translation after *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London et al.: Penguin, 1984).

[13] There we read: "Anima mia bella, non vi maravigliate, ché per questo la santità non diventa minore, per ciò che ella dimora nell'anima e quello che io vi domando è peccato del corpo." ["'Marvel not, fair my soul,' returned the abbot; 'hereby is my holiness in no wise diminished, for holiness resides in the soul, and this which I ask of you is but a sin of the flesh.'"] Cited after *Decameron*, ed. V. Branca (Letteratura italiana Einaudi 2000). Translation after *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. J. M. Rigg (London 1903).

is what commits sin, not the body" (III.11).[14] If it holds true, as will be briefly suggested below, that Augustine's problem is less with "sinful pleasure" as such than with the task of "controlling" it, then even Timoteo's ensuing assessment that the daughters of Lot from Gen. 19 have not sinned at all (*non peccorno*) may be inferred.

For example, one may recall the well-known passage from Augustine's *Confessions* which speaks of the will (*voluntas*) in terms of *monstrum*, being able to command the body but unable to command itself (see VIII.9.21/2). It coheres well that, concerning the Fall, he maintains in the *City of God* (XIV.12) that what made Adam and Eve "fall" was not the fruit as such, "a food not evil or harmful except in that it was forbidden. For God would not have created or planted anything evil in such a place of felicity [to wit, Eden]."[15] At the end of the passage, the state of "desire resisting the will" (*uoluntati cupiditas resistebat*) is mentioned,[16] and identified as (post-lapsarian) man's condition. Again, and important for the *Mandragola*, this, too, is where shame (*infamia*) is said to enter the game (see XIV.17).

However that may be, in the case of the *Mandragola*, the "transgressive act" is even doctrinally redeemed, as that which is at stake is Lucrezia's and Nicia's common wish to have children (e.g. III.1).[17] This

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[14] "la volonta é quella che pecca, non el corpo." Citations and translations after *The Comedies of Machiavelli*, ed. and trans. D. Sices and J. B. Atkinson (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005).

[15] "[Q]uia in esca factum est, non quidem mala nec noxia, nisi quia prohibita; neque enim quicquam mali Deus in illo tantae felicitatis loco crearet atque plantaret."

[16] The passage from *Confessions* is echoed in *City of God* (XIV.16) as the lack of control associating "lust" is deplored. We read about one *amicus sapientiae sanctorumque gaudiorum coniugalem agens uitam*, which may perhaps even be intended as "friend of wisdom who is leading a married life endowed with holy joys," that "surely such a man would prefer, if possible, to beget children without lust of this kind. For then the parts created for this task would be servants of his mind, even in their function of procreation, just as the other members are its servants in the various tasks to which they are assigned. They would begin their activity at the bidding of the will, instead of being stirred up by the ferment of lust." If the phrase above is correctly translated, then an investigation into Augustine's use of *gaudium* could be of interest.

[17] The following statement by Lucrezia need not be narrowly translated as speaking in terms of Nicia's desire: "Io ho sempremai dubitato che la voglia, che

point is made by Augustine expressly in *De bono coniugali* with reference to the injunction of Deus (not Dominus) from Gen. 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply (*Crescite et multiplicamini*),[18] a blessing easily mistaken for a precept. Accordingly, the Gospel states that "who can should receive" (*qui potest capere, capiat*; Mat 19:12), and Augustine cites this verse in *De bono coniugale* and the *Confessions*. In the *Mandragola*, this line may even have inspired Timoteo's more inclusive line that "you will have a man-child, and who does not, should not" (my translation; III.12).[19]

In any case, Nicia's desire for offspring (*figliuoli*) has a conspicuous aspect, the emphasis being on a little boy (*mastio/maschio*; III.8, III.11, V.6). In fact, this may well not be biblically inspired; instead, Ovid's story of Iphis from Book IX of the *Metamorphoses* may be recalled in which Ligdus[20] insists on having a baby boy (and no girl), with unfortunate consequences. But while Nicia's image of his offspring may thus seem idealised, not the least with inheritance in mind,[21] Nicia also tells Ligurio, and to the contrary effect: "I have no children and I want to get some, and in order to have this trouble, I've come to make a nuisance for you"[22] (II.2).

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messer Nicia ha d'avere figliuoli, non ci facci fare qualche errore …" (III.10). Rather that which is referred to is the wish that Nicia may have offspring, but the wish (*la voglia*) is not ascribed. Recall also Lucretia's following the superstitious practice of "vowing to hear the first Mass at Santa Annunziata forty mornings in a row" in order to get pregnant (III.2). L. Haas records this as a historically interesting reference in *The Renaissance Man and His Children* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1998), 31–32.

[18] Compare also Book 14.21 ff. from *De civitate dei* on fecundity and marriage.

[19] "Voi vi beccherete un fanciul mastio; e chi non ha non abbia." Alternatively, he may be referencing a proverb which perhaps, ironically but fittingly, runs as follows: "Chi non ha soldi non abbia voglie."

[20] Notice Ovid's characterisation of Ligdus as follows: he is "from the royal town of Gnosus, a man named Ligdus, otherwise unknown, of free-born but humble parentage; nor was his property any greater than his birth. But he was of blameless life and trustworthy." After *Ovid Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (London et al. William Heinemann Ltd, 1958), 51.

[21] R. L. Martinez is making the point referencing a passage in I.1. (*Dua cose …*), See "The Pharmacy," 32–33.

[22] "Io non ho figliuoli, e vorre'ne, e, per avere questa briga, vengo a dare impaccio a voi."

Returning to Lucrezia, the topic has so far been the thread of *infamia*[23] against the background of chastity viewed (roughly speaking) in terms spiritual versus non-spiritual terms. In what follows, I argue that Lucretian virtue in the *Mandragola* may also be more specifically aimed at in terms of "treasured virginity."

2.2 The Monastery Episode

In the *Mandragola*, it appears that Lucrezia's fear is bound up with parental desire, an aspect which can be retrieved in Livy's version too.[24] And it is in this very context that the topic of treasured virginity seems to be introduced into the play.

Consider the episode of Ligurio seemingly testing Timoteo concerning another business than theirs in III.4. (I'm not giving translations here, as it is the chosen words and their potential ambiguity which matter.) More concretely, Ligurio asks Timoteo to help persuade an abbess (*badessa*) regarding a *fanciulla* in her care to *farla sconciare* (*[p]ersuadere alla badessa che dia una pozione alla fanciulla per farla sconciare*), the honour of the family Calfucci (and of the monastery) being at stake.

Now, notice first that this precisely mirrors the play's structure at large—at least if the *badessa* being persuaded to do the act of *sconciare* for honour's sake is viewed in parallel with chaste Lucrezia being persuaded to engage in the "transgressive act" for posterity's sake; again, in both cases a potion (*pozione*) is involved as a means. Moreover, regarding the former and the latter, virginity is at stake: in the monastery episode a nun's pregnancy must be obscured in order to maintain the impression of virginity for the sake of the honour of the Calfucci family; honour should in my view be seen as linked with the *danari* involved.

[23] Granted though, Lucrezia worries not only about her own shame (*vituperato*), but also the "death" of a man that it may entail (III.10), on which see below.

[24] When Tarquin has gone, Lucretia is calling not only for her husband but also for her father Lucretius Tricipitinus. Notice also that the idea discussed above in the context of Augustine occurs also in Livy; he says that "it is the mind and not the body, which sins" ("mentem peccare, non corpus") (I.58.9). However, while in Machiavelli it is Father Timoteo, who utters these words, Livy attributes them to Lucretia directly. Moreover, contrary to Augustine, who argues in favour of Lucretia surviving the fault, Livy's Lucretia employs them to justify her death as necessary.

Again, though, in a contrary way, Lucrezia's virginity poses an obstacle: her scruple of conscience is bound up with an identical "virtue" to that in the monastery episode.

Second, the monastery episode appears to be put in quite ambiguous terms. When the abbess (*badessa*) must be convinced that the *fanciulla* in her care should be *sconcia*, then clearly on first look this is about an accidental pregnancy such that *pezzo di carne* references an unborn child. *Sconciare* then signifies abortion in the given context of pressure exerted for honour's sake. But, quite to the contrary, one may conceive of *pezzo di carne* also in terms of virginity and "being intact," I think, especially when Ligurio announces happily that the *fanciulla si è sconcia per se stessa* (III.6). One may say that this is one of the *mille modi* in which the *pezzo di carne* (not signifying an unborn child) *si può sperdere*. Thus conceived, the episode is not about forced abortion, but about the fortuitous removal of a potential obstacle to siring posterity, namely "treasured virginity."

Moreover, if the suggested ambiguity of *pezzo di carne* is accepted,[25] then this may well echo Augustine's lines from *City of God*, Book I.18, which read:

> Neque enim eo corpus sanctum est, quod eius membra sunt integra, aut eo, quod nullo contrectantur adtactu, cum possint diuersis casibus etiam uulnerata uim perpeti, et medici aliquando saluti opitulantes haec ibi faciant, quae horret aspectus. Obstetrix uirginis cuiusdam integritatem manu uelut explorans siue maleuolentia siue inscitia siue casu, dum inspicit, perdidit. Non opinor quemquam tam stulte sapere, ut huic perisse aliquid existimet etiam de ipsius corporis sanctitate, quamuis membri illius integritate iam perdita. Quocirca proposito animi permanente, per quod etiam corpus sanctificari meruit, nec ipsi corpori aufert sanctitatem uiolentia libidinis alienae, quam seruat perseuerantia continentiae suae.
>
> [The body is not holy just because its parts are intact, or because they have not undergone any handling. Those parts may suffer violent injury by accidents of various kinds, and sometimes doctors seeking to effect a cure

[25] The verb *sconciare* poses no obstacle to such a reading. Florio translates it more generally as "to disorder, to bring out of frame, to make unhandsome, to marre," as well as "to miscarry as a woman when she is brought to bed before her time." See J. Florio, *Qveen Anna's New World of Words* (London, 1611), http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio/search/495l.html.

> may employ treatment with distressing visible effect. During a manual examination of a virgin a midwife destroyed her maidenhead, whether by malice, or clumsiness, or accident. I do not suppose that anyone would be stupid enough to image that the virgin lost anything of bodily chastity, even though the integrity of that part had been destroyed. Therefore while the mind's resolve endures, which gives the body its claim to chastity, the violence of another's lust cannot take away the chastity which is preserved by unwavering self-control.]

Third, in the monastery episode, honour is bound up with the family and Father Calfucci. Ligurio says:

> voi mantenete l'onore al munisterio, all fanciulla, a' parenti; rendete al padre una figliuola; satisfate qui a messere, a tanti sua parenti …
>
> [you uphold the honour of the convent, the girl, and the relatives; you restore a daughter to her father, you satisfy Messer Nicia here, and all his family …]

Notice the intermediates involved: Ligurio, on behest of Father Calfucci and the family, speaks to Timoteo, who is to intervene with the abbess concerning the *fanciulla.* This is not unlike Ligurio, acting on behalf of Nicia (Calfucci), and speaking to *padre* Timoteo to intervene with Lucrezia, though he has the benefit of knowing her mother Sostrata very much on his side. In both cases, Timoteo has a key role to play; in any case, I think it matters that the monastery episode is not restricted to interpretation in terms of the unfortunate outcome, involving forced abortion, perhaps the suggestion of a dire reality.

Maybe the notion of "treasured virginity" should also be viewed in context with the pressure of having to endow daughters with as large a dowry as possible in order to "marry them off" (as it were). In the *Mandragola*, the link is established by means of the name Calfucci, an extinct family which, as R. L. Martinez has argued, points to Dante's Cacciaguida and his lamenting rich Florence's decay in *Paradiso*.[26] Machiavelli's awareness of and even familiarity with the problem may be

[26] See Martinez, "The Pharmacy," 22, 23.

gleaned from, for example, his counsel given to Guicciardini on the matter in his letters.[27]

It is this context, I think, which suggests the monastery episode to be comprehensible, interpreted if not in terms of forced abortion, then in terms of a father's fear of losing his daughter, though symbolised through the losing of treasured virginity – hence an ambiguity of *fanciulla*. But in the *Mandragola*, the fulfilment of Nicia's and Lucrezia's wish for children necessitates her becoming *femmina* (II.6) and thereby the mentioned "loss" is to be incurred. To be sure, Timoteo's way of dealing with the loss, his constructive role in helping to fulfil this wish, should, I think, be viewed as very much counterpoising Father Calfucci's anxiety concerning the loss (of the honour) of his daughter.

The fact that the "issue," which is Lucretia's very own, is to be termed a "loss" in the context of honour and so much bound up with the desire of others seems to reflect a certain contemporary state of things, which today appears to be conceptually overcome.

2.3 Chastity Redeemed

Let me conclude the discussion of that which is at stake concerning Lucrezia by discussing her clearly redemptive fate. So far, Lucretia has been discussed in terms of treasured virginity's possibly irreparable loss. Along Augustinian lines, from that, however, must be distinguished the idea of chastity as a "state of mind" (as it were).

Now, given the expression of the conflictual ideas of chastity and virginity, it is understandable that Lucretia should express the fear of "dying" after having given way to her mother Sostrata, with whom she shares her desire for children, and to Timoteo: "All right, I'll do it. But I don't think I will live to see tomorrow morning," she says.[28] But, with the night having been spent, consider the re-emergence of Lucrezia in a decidedly ceremonial context and as expressed in an exchange between Lucrezia, Nicia, and Sostrata:

[27] See R. Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. C. Grayson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 221–222.
[28] "Io sono contenta: ma io non credo mai essere viva domattina."

NICIA: Guarda come la risponde! La pare un gallo!
SOSTRATA: Non ve ne maravigliate: ella è un poco alterata.
LUCREZIA: Che volete voi dire?
NICIA: Dico che gli è bene che io vadia innanzi a parlare al frage, 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.
LUCREZIA: Che non andate?
NICIA: Tu se' stamani molto ardita! Ella pareva iersera mezza morta. (V.5)

[NICIA: Listen to how she talks back! She acts like the cock of the walk.
SOSTRATA: Don't be surprised, she has undergone quite a change.
LUCREZIA: What is it you want?
NICIA: I mean it would be better if I went on ahead to speak with the friar. I'll tell him to meet you at the portal of the church, so he can lead you in for the blessing of your womb. It is fitting this morning, since it's as if you have been reborn.
LUCREZIA: Then why don't you go ahead?
NICIA: See how bold you are this morning! Last night she seemed half dead.]

While we may recall that ritual is involved in resolving not only the *Mandragola* but also the *favola* [fable] *Belfagor*, D. Donadi Perocco has shown that the text of the play alludes to the rite of Purification (Churching),[29] even if the resemblance suffices not for identification; note the further suggestion by G. Baldissone that the rite of marriage, even the "mystic" marriage, may be suggested.[30] Adding to this, let me merely propose that both rites may be fittingly viewed as symbols of how to ban the thread of *infamia* which has been troubling Lucrecia especially. Instead of dying for her salvation like her pre-Christian model,

[29] See D. Donadi Perocco, "Il rito finale della 'Mandragola,'" *Lettere Italiane* 25, no. 4 (1973): 531–536.
[30] See. G. Baldissone, "Un nome contaminato: Lucrezia nella 'Mandragola,'" *Rivista internatzionale di onomastica letteraria* 10 (2008): 27–38. This is rather appropriate given the idea of lasting companionship as expressed, for example, in Ligurio's advice to Callimaco on how to win Lucrezia (IV.2), or in Lucrezia's interpretation of the night (as reported by Callimaco in V.4). Regarding the mystic marriage, see G. Lettieri, "Lucretia as a Figure of Mary in Machiavelli's Mandragola," *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2023): 526, 1–9.

Machiavelli's Lucrezia is "reborn," and her rebirth is properly expressed by Timoteo's changing "a veil on a miraculous statue of the Virgin" (*mutai un velo ad una Nostra Donna, che fa miracoli*).[31]

Finally, right before this, Timoteo uses another image which I cannot but assume to be charged with similarly considerable symbolic content, when he says that he relit a candle that had gone out (*andai in chiesa ed accesi una lampana che era spenta*). Drawing from B. Underwood DuRette's discussion of a detail from the central *Annunciation* panel of the Mérode Altarpiece[32] (a smoking candle), notice first that the (date of the) annunciation has been conventionally identified with the (date of the) crucifixion and death of Christ.[33] While the death of Christ recalls the respective thread on the life of Lucrezia's very first lover, the relit candle fittingly completes the annunciation imagery which involves the creation of new life via Mary's pregnancy thanks to the Holy Spirit; while I feel that the image of the candle (lit or blown out) as a symbol of life (or death) has retained its intuitive expressivity, a specific tradition, according to which Mary has been symbolised by a candlestick and the Christ-child by its flame,[34] has been traced back to the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (fourteenth century).[35] Similarly, compare the role which candles play in the *Death of the Virgin* as realised by Albrecht Dürer, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Hugo van der Goes, respectively. (The parallel between Mary and Lucretia has been drawn by G. Lettieri, including Nicia's relation to Joseph.[36])

To be sure, Lucrezia should not be viewed exclusively in "moral" terms of chastity or virginity doctrinally understood; recall that her name

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[31] The veil may well recall Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe by contrast; Pyramus kills himself on seeing Thisbe's spotted veil (*vestis*, *velamen*). Similarly, consider Callimaco's considering plunging "a dagger into my breast [right on her doorstep]" like Pyramus (*o io mi darò d'un coltello [in sull'uscio suo]*) if the plot fails (IV.4)

[32] Recall the allusion to the annunciation in the *Mandragola* in III.2 in the guise of a superstition.

[33] See B. Underwood DuRette, "The Smoking Candle of the Mérode Altarpiece," *Athanor* 6 (1987): 10.

[34] The candle is closely linked with the Purification, too, via the Candlemas procession. See I. Motsianos, "The Role of Candelae and Lampadae in the Processions of Hypapantē and Candlemas," *Revista Transilvania* 10 (2015): 47–51.

[35] Underwood DuRette, "The Smoking Candle," 10.

[36] See Lettieri, "Lucretia," passim.

is invoked by Calfucci concerning the topic of beauty (*bellezza*, I.1) which is also suggested to be maintained. What she finds beautiful is suggested to be Nicia at first (I.3), before Callimaco is accepted (V.4) and their loves are ultimately reconciled, abolishing rivalry.

3. Tobit and Biblical Sources

As mentioned already, besides fearing incurring *infamia* and her own death (as it were), Lucrezia also worries that the "transgressive act" might cost a man's life (III.10). Angst concerning the dangers of copulation appears to have been common, and Machiavelli's reference to the courtly milieu may be suggestive of this (II.6), if perhaps merely coincidentally so. A similar unease can be gleaned, for example, from G. Parker's discussion of the advice to his successor, the future Philip II, by Charles V,[37] but also in, or perhaps based on, humanist works by Erasmus.[38]

In any case, as a literary predecessor of this notion, the apocryphal Book of Tobit with its lovers doomed to die after their wedding night may be pertinent.[39] That this book is playing at least some role in the *Mandragola* may be implied by Timoteo's allusion to the archangel Raphael (III.11), who plays a major role in Tobit.

Also, at the very core of Tobit is Sara's possession by a demon as the cause of the problem. Granted, this demon to be exorcised rather recalls Machiavelli's *Belfagor*—which, by the way, is explicitly called a *favola*, as are *Mandragola* and *Clizia*.[40] In any case, like in *Mandragola*, life is in danger in *Belfagor*, as Gianmatteo is doomed if he cannot "exorcise" the French King's daughter.[41]

Having already deviated, let me briefly point to what may amount to another biblical reference. In Machiavelli's *Vita di Castruccio*, Antonio, a

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[37] G. Parker, *Emperor: A New Life of Charles V* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), chapter xiv.
[38] See A. W. Reese, "Learning Virginity: Erasmus' Ideal of Christian Marriage," *Blibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 57, no. 3 (1995): 551–567, esp. 555.
[39] On the Book of Tobit, see the texts in *Studies in the Book of Tobit*, edited by M. Bredin (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006).
[40] "La favola *Mandragola* si chiama" is said in the prologue. The *Clizia* has: "Questa favola si chiama *Clizia*."
[41] "Al quale il Re turbato disse, che se non la guariva, che lo appenderebbe."

pious and godly man, and Dianora, a widow, stumble (as it were) upon the child Castruccio. In German one might say, *wie die Jungfrau zum Kind gekommen*, and indeed the constellation recalls the wonderous births from the Old and the New Testaments. More precisely, while Antonio recalls Boccaccio's Gianni (VII.1), he and Dianora may also echo Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist according to the Gospel of Luke.[42]

But this matters as well for our purpose concerning the *Mandragola* because, as is well known, in the *Clizia*, Timoteo's role from the earlier play is recalled by Nicomaco as follows (II.3):

> Don't you know that through his prayers the wife of Messer Nicia, Madonna Lucrezia, who was sterile, became pregnant?
>
> [Non sai tu che, per le sue orazioni, mona Lucrezia di messer Nicia Calfucci, che era sterile, ingravidò?]

Not to mention Timoteo's own speaking of what is at stake in the *Mandragola* as in terms of a *misterio* (III.11) and his evoking the "the miraculous Virgin" (*una Nostra Donna, che fa miracoli*; V.1).

Moreover, speaking of the Old Testament, I should also mention A. Achtman's suggestion that Machiavelli's use of the mandrake may echo Reuben's mandrakes from the Old Testament (Gen. 30:14–16).[43] Indeed, the least that may be said is that the mandrake functions there, too, as a means of conception because Lea is impregnated as a result of Reuben's mandrakes, which is not too far from the *Mandragola*'s revolving around the desire for offspring.

Finally, the mandrake also occurs via its seductive fragrance (*odorem*) in the Song of Songs (Cant 7:13). There, it epitomises the loved one's (*sponsa*) attraction to the lover (*sponsus*) who reveres her as "without

[42] They are not only depicted as old (Luke 1:18) and their relation as sterile (Luke 1:7), but also as truly virtuous: "Both were just before God, and walked in all the commandements and ordinances of the Lord, without reproofe" (Luke 1:6).

[43] See A. Achtman, "Is There Anything New? Biblical Allusion in Machiavelli's 'Mandragola,'" 2019, https://www.academia.edu/3130731/Is_There_Anything_New_Biblical_Allusion_in_Machiavellis_Mandragola_.

blemish" (*sine macula*, Cant 4.7, 5.2), an epithet which would suit virtuous Lucretia too. Again, taking up the hint from G. Lettieri, who has suggested that the *Mandragola* contains references to the Song of Songs,[44] let me point especially to the relation of the sponsa with her mother's name: we learn that the sponsus is taken by the sponsa into her "mother's house."[45] While this appears to recall the important role Lucretia's mother Sostrata plays in the *Mandragola*, the motif is variated; in the Song of Songs the sponsa herself is depicted as the agent, with her mother being merely present as a name, while it is the mother Sostrata who is depicted as acting in the *Mandragola*.[46] Also, the action takes place at Nicia's house, not at Sostrata's.[47]

Given these references, notice that in the *Mandragola*, more concretely speaking, the mandrake is part of Ligurio's beneficial solution which resolves the play on the one hand,[48] but not unconditionally so on the other.[49] It has the additional quality of a "poison" which may kill the first one to sleep with Lucrezia, which recalls Tobit, and which necessitates Callimaco's substitution for Nica and his being made *becco* ("cuckold") in

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[44] G. Lettieri, "Il Cantico dei cantici chiave della Mandragola," in *Niccolò Machiavelli. Dai 'castellucci' di San Casciano alla comunicazione politica contemporanea*, ed. A. Guidi (Manziana: Vecchiarelli Editore, 2019), 43–4 and 99–100, esp., 99.

[45] "introducam illum in domum matris meae, et in cubiculum genetrices meae" (Cant 3.4). The sponsus himself speaks of the sponsa in similar words as her mother's child: "Una est columba mea, perfecta mea, una est matris suae, electa genetrici suae" (Cant 6.9). See again the sponsa's lines 8.2 and 8.5.

[46] Compare, for example, scene III.11; at the end of Lucretia's interview with Timoteo, Sostrata promises: "Ella farà ciò che voi volete. Io la voglio mettere stasera al letto io" ["She will do as you say. I will put her to bed this evening myself"].

[47] Sostrata's house as distinct from Nicia's occurs only twice; it is the place where Liguiro and Nicia go to find Lucretia's mother in III.1, and it is mentioned as one of the two places to which Lucretia has sent the household (to have Nicia's place deserted, by implication; *ella ha mandato le fante a casa la madre, e 'l famiglio in villa*; IV.8).

[48] Callimaco says (II.6): "Voi avete ad intender questo, che non è cosa più certa ad ingravidare una donna che dargli bere una pozione fatta di mandragola" ["You must understand this: there is nothing more certain to make a woman conceive than to give her a potion made with mandrake root"].

[49] The ambiguous positive and negative properties of the mandrake have a long literary history. See S. Gaylard, "Machiavelli's Medical *Mandragola*: Knowledge, Food, and Feces," *Renaissance Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2021): 64 ff.

the first place. This way, the "poison" is said to be "drawn of after the first night" (II.6):

> Fare dormire subito con lei un altro che tiri, standosi seco una notte, a sè tutta quella infezione della mandragola: dipoi iacerete voi sanza periculo.
>
> [You just have someone else sleep with her right away, and he will draw off all the poison of the mandrake after one night. Then you can have her without any risk.]

4. Cain and Abel

Moving on, let me point to Callimaco, whose surname is Guadagno. Very much recalling Boccaccio, that which the name signifies[50] seems to matter for interpretation in Machiavelli too; he even appears to suggest as much when he has Ligurio, the marriage broker (*sensale di matrimoni*; I.1), counsel him in respective works how to counter the thread of *infamia*:

> Che tu te la guadagni in questa notte, e che, innanzi che tu ti parta, te le dia a conoscere, scuoprale lo 'nganno, mostrile l'amore li porti, dicale el bene le vuoi, e come sanza sua infamia la può esser tua amica, e con sua grande infamia tua nimica. È impossibile che la non convenga teco, e che la voglia che questa notte sia sola. (IV.2)
>
> [You will have to win (*guadagni*) her over tonight. Then, before you leave her, you will have to let her know who you are, reveal the trick, tell her how much you love her and how much you have wanted her. Mention, too, how easy it will be for her to be your friend, without any scandal, and how much scandal she risks if she wants to be your enemy. I can't imagine that she won't come to terms with you, or that she would really want this night to be the only one.]

But again, this may point us back to Augustine. As A. Y. Kim notes, he, among others, not only interpreted the strife between Cain and Abel in

[50] Florio's dictionary has "to gaine, to winne, to profit, to get, to acquire. Also to deserve." See Florio, *Qveen Anna's New World of Words*, http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio/search/236c.html.

terms of envy,[51] which may well be revisited in Callimaco's own (envious) love of the wife of his de facto rival Nicia. Fitting this context, he also notes in the *City of God* (see XV.17/18) that Cain is etymologically linked with "possession" (*possessio*).

Abel is said to signify sadness (*luctus*),[52] which in turn may well call to mind the man who had supposedly been dying, invoked in an exchange between Ligurio and Nicia:

> LIGURIO: La cosa è ita bene.
> NICIA: Che dirai tu, che me ne incresce?
> LIGURIO: Di che?
> NICIA: Di quel povero giovane, ch' egli abbia a morire sì presto, e che questa notte gli abbia a costar sì cara.
> LIGURIO: Oh! voi avete e pochi pensieri! Lasciàtene la cura a lui.
> NICIA: Tu di' el vero. (V.2)
>
> [LIGURIO: Everything seems to have gone right.
> NICIA: Would you believe me, there is something that bothers me?
> LIGURIO: What is that?
> NICIA: That poor fellow is going to die so soon, and will have to pay such a high price for this one night.
> LIGURIO: Oh, that's nothing for you to worry about! Leave that to him.
> NICIA: You're right.]

Notice that we need not be confused if Cainian and Abelian aspects appear to be mixed up in the *Mandragola*. For example, both the Cainian lover Callimaco (IV.1) and the more properly Abelian Nicia (II.6) fear their deaths, which (the latter) necessitates playing the trick of substitution in the first place. Of course, after all, though separate aspects, ultimately they signify allegorically one complex desire, I think.

In any case, it is striking how the *Mandragola* appears to attempt to resolve the problem of how to murder Abel without actually killing him (as it were). Attempting to allay Lucrezia's fear of losing her lover,

[51] A. Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1–16," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 12, no. 1 (2001): 65–84, esp.70.
[52] On the etymologies in connection with envy, see A. Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel," 77/8.

Timoteo states part of the problem and its possible solution which the play proposes:

> Qui è un bene certo, che voi ingraviderete, acquisterete una anima a messer Domenedio; el male incerto è che colui che iacerà, dopo la pozione, con voi, si muoia; ma e` si truova anche die quelli che non muoiono. (III.10)
>
> [Here we have a certain good: you will get pregnant, you will provide another soul for the good Lord up there. The uncertain evil is that the man who sleeps with you after the potion may die; but there are always those who don't die.]

However it may be, the suggested relation of Callimaco with Cain supports R. J. Quinones's thesis that Cain mattered much to Machiavelli,[53] though his interpretation views him in opposition to Augustine, which, having cited *City of God* and *Confessions* as possible sources of inspiration above, is not implied by the argument of this text. In fact, recall how Timoteo says that he passed the night reading *una vita de' Santi Padri*. This may (or may not) refer to Augustine and his own well-known *vita*, namely the *Confessions*.

If Machiavelli's *Mandragola* ought to be viewed with Augustine in mind,[54] then this may also imply that Callimaco's vain hopes of winning Lucrezia in the context of *el bagno* (I.2) echo Augustine's *balnea* (II.3.6, but also IX.12.32),[55] especially because Nicia's youthful sins as a *giovane* are alluded to, though perhaps metaphorically speaking, in terms of

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[53] See R. J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel literature* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[54] A more general indication that Machiavelli has studied Augustine's *Confessions* may (or may not) consist in his transcription of Terence's *Eunuchus*, the Danae episode of which play is precisely that which Augustine has taken up not only in Augustine's *Confessions* but also in a letter and in *City of God* according to D. Shanzer. See "Augustin and the Latin Classics," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey with assistance by Shelley Reid (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 162–174, esp. 172.

[55] Or it may simply represent a contemporary superstition that "baths in particular had special powers to increase fertility," as L. Haas puts it. See *The Renaissance Man and his Children*, 33.

randagio.[56] Finally, note in this context that it is implied that the baths are Callimaco's idea, while Ligurio, the marriage broker (*sensale di matrimoni*), helps him on condition that things are done his way (*tu faccia a mia modo*, I.3).

5. Conclusion and Afterthoughts

This text hopes to have rendered plausible that Machiavelli has in his *Mandragola* carefully drawn on notions which are not only conventionally Christian but also apparently Augustinian. One might go so far as to say that by framing his play around the impeded desire to sire, Machiavelli is in line with what L. Steinberg and J. O'Malley have referred to as a certain preoccupation with incarnation in painting and preaching during the Renaissance.[57] But also notice the answer in terms of doctrine which Steinberg gives to explain why the so-called *ostentia genitalium* existed as a motif not in the Eastern church, but that Augustine, who is said to have differentiated between procreation and sexual craving, has played a minor role in the Orthodox church,[58] the former being commended in spite of the latter.

But while the positive connotation of procreation in the context of Christianism appears straightforward, let me note again that the critique of sexual craving, based on Augustine, need not mean the defamation of pleasure. As mentioned above, one may argue that Augustine deplores a certain loss of control associated with pleasure more than pleasure itself. In addition to the evidence proposed above, consider another passage from *City of God* where Augustine once again imagines pre-lapsarian unity of will in relation to procreation,[59] which reads as neither indifferent nor

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[56] Florio explains: "a hard-harted, cruell, couetous and scraping man. Also one gadding wandering or roaming [?] about, one that hath no home or resting place. Also a Haggard-hawke." See Florio, *Qveen Anna's New World of Words*, http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio/search/436l.html.

[57] L. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). He refers to J. W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979).

[58] Steinberg, *Sexuality*, 230 ff.

[59] We read in Book XIV, Caput XXVI: "When mankind was in such a state [in paradise, before the Fall], blest with such felicity, let us never imagine that it was

averse to pleasure. To be sure, Augustine's castigation of post as well as pre-lapsarian man as proud (see *City of God* XIV.13) and his apparently close binding of pleasure with (chaste and fruitful) marriage may sound strange to modern ears.

In the *Mandragola*, pleasure certainly figures; consider, for instance, the song concluding act IV (*Oh dolce notte* ...) regarding the lovers' delights, but perhaps also the chatting with which, according to Nicia, he and Sostrata are spending the same night (V.2). Granted, from a feminist point of view (naively taken, based on intuition), it seems true nevertheless that in the *Mandragola* pleasure is much more prominently represented in man's terms than in woman's.

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impossible for the seed of children to be sown without the morbid condition of lust. Instead, the sexual organs would have been brought into activity by the same bidding of the will as controlled the other organs. Then, without feeling the allurement of passion goading him on, the husband would have relaxed on his wife's bosom in tranquillity of mind and with no impairment of his body's integrity. Moreover, although we cannot prove this in experience, it does not therefore follow that we should not believe that when those parts of the body were not activated by the turbulent heat of passion but brought into service by deliberate use of power when the need arose, the male seed could have been dispatched into the womb, with no loss of the wife's integrity, just as the menstrual flux can now be produced from the womb of a virgin without loss of maidenhead. Now as the female womb might have been opened for parturition by a natural impulse when the time was ripe, instead of by the groans of travail, so the two sexes might have been united for impregnation and conception by an act of will, instead of by a lustful craving." ["In tanta facilitate rerum et felicitate hominum absit ut suspicemur non potuisse prolem seri sine libidinis morbo, sed eo uoluntatis nutu mouerentur membra illa quo cetera, et sine ardoris inlecebroso stimulo cum tranquillitate animi et corporis nulla corruptione integritatis infunderetur gremio maritus uxoris. Neque enim quia experientia probari non potest, ideo credendum non est, quando illas corporis partes non ageret turbidus calor, sed spontanea potesta, sicut opus esset, adhiberet, it tunc potuisse utero conugis salua integritate feminei genitalis uirile semen inmitti, sicut nunc potest eadem integritate salua ex utero uirginis fluxus menstrui cruoris emitti. Eadem quippe uia posset illud inici, qua hoc potest eici. Vt enim ad pariendum non doloris gemitus, sed maturitatis inpulsus feminea uiscera relaxaret, sic ad fetandum et concipiendum non libidinis appetitus, sed uoluntarius usus naturam utramque coniungeret."]

6. Postscript on (pseudo-)Shakespeare's *Edward III*

Having mentioned elsewhere the likely debt of Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen* to Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, this is a good occasion to point to a possible allusion to the play in *Edward III*.[60] At the end of the first episode of the play, right before the action turns from romance to martial matters (as it were), the King praises the Countesse by comparing her to Lucretia.

> I neuer meane to part my lips againe,/ In any words that tends to such a sute./ Arise true *E*nglish Ladie, whom our Ile/ May better boast of then euer Romaine might,/ Of her whose ransackt treasurie hath taskt,/ The vaine indeuor of so many pens:/ Arise and be my fault, thy honours fame etc. (1019–1024)

As such, this may simply qualify as a reference to the well-known Pagan ideal of female chastity. However, I think that Warwicke's wooing of the Countesse, his daughter, in the King's stead (700 ff.) may recall Timoteo's wooing of Lucrezia (for Callimaco, as it were) in the *Mandragola* based on the assumption that it represents parental intervention.[61]

But, significantly, Warwicke fails, as the Countesse refuses (771 ff.), where Timoteo succeeds, happily in terms of the *Mandragola*'s resolution. In *Edward III*, the Countesse herself instead conditions her giving way to the wooing King as follows: "Prouided that your selfe remoue those lets,/ That stand between your highness loue and mine" (963/4), which amounts to getting rid of "Your Queene, and Salisbury my wedded husband" (970), and which seems not unlike pre-Christian Lucretia's radical solution. By contrast, Warwicke had merely asked that she "must forget her husband Salisbury,/ If she remember to embrace the king" (715/6), which in turn quite corresponds to the Machiavellian (or Boccaccian) idea that Nicia survives and is merely being made *becco* (II.6, to wit, cuckold). However,

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[60] Citations after "Edward III," Quarto 1, 1596 (Old-spelling transcription), edited by A. Lidster and S. Massai, *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (University of Victoria), https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/Edw.

[61] Warwicke's wooing, in turn, recalls Richard's wooing of Elizabeth towards the end of *Richard III*; also, both plays have passages recalling the *Sonnets*, as editors have pointed out.