

interpretation

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The *Virtù* of Women: Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and *Clizia*

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When Machiavelli concludes Chapter 25 of *The Prince* with the judgment that it is better for a prince to be impetuous because fortune is a woman and to keep her down one must beat her and struggle with her, he seems to be saying something about women as well as about fortune.¹ We are told that fortune favors younger men, preferring those more fierce and audacious in the way they command to those who proceed more coldly. Luigi Russo, in a note on the verbs *battarla e urtarla*, warns against what he calls the senile and rather unclean fantasies of interpreters who read the collision in this passage as a special kind of sexual trampling.² Indeed, too literal a translation may destroy the undercurrent of naughtiness in the image, but for the purposes of this study the analogy between the public manliness of a prince confronting fortune and the private manliness of a lover must be considered explicitly.

The analogy suggests that women are capricious, strong in resisting control, that they respect force, heat and youthfulness, and that they might even enjoy being mastered. This famous passage fits the definition of *virtù* as that manly ability to act and to impose one's will on the sometimes passive, sometimes recalcitrant substance (or *materia*) of experience.³ Because experience must be shaped, it provides the occasion, the needed challenge, for a man who seeks to command. In political terms, the founder, lawgiver, or prince must overcome the disorder in nature represented by fortune. The feminine is cyclical, always revolving from order to disorder, but also productive, the source of new modes and orders when mastered by *virtù*. From the union of fortune and active virtue the state is born. Mastery regularly reasserted leads to the glory of lasting orders.

There is, however, a distinction to be drawn between mastery and rape. Satisfaction of narrow self-interest, or lust, produces tyranny rather than that fruition of desire embodied in lasting orders. The distinction is drawn in the *Discourses* I,

1. *Il Principe e Discorsi*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960), p. 101: *Io iudico bene questo, che sia meglio essere impetuoso che rispettivo, perché la fortuna è donna; et è necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla et urtarla*. On fortune see Joseph Macek, "'La fortuna' chez Machiavel," *Le Moyen Age*, 2 (1971), 320–21 & 515–16.

2. *Il Principe*, ed. Luigi Russo (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), p. 194, n. 91.

3. For a survey of criticism on *virtù* see John Geerken, "Machiavelli Studies since 1969," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37 (1976), 360, and John Plamenatz, "In Search of Machiavellian *Virtù*," in *The Political Calculus*, ed. Anthony Parel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 157–78; also I. Hannaford, "Machiavelli's Concept of *Virtù* in *The Prince* and *Discourses* Reconsidered," *Political Studies*, 20 (1972), 185–89, and Jack D'Amico, "Three Forms of Character: *Virtù*, *Ordini* and *Materia* in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*," *Italian Quarterly*, 22 (Summer 1981), 5–13.

10 & 16 (pp. 157 & 174). Praiseworthy rulers are said to live under law and provide a *vivere libero* for subjects who need not fear for the honor of their wives or the security of their goods, while tyrants dishonor women, expropriate goods and leave behind eternal infamy. Given this distinction, one must correct the overly simplistic equation of fortune and woman, control and manly virtue. I intend to examine the *virtù* of women in Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and, more briefly, in *Clizia* in order to complete the paradigm introduced in Chapter 25 of *The Prince*.

To properly understand womanly *virtù* as dramatized in the plays, one must guard against confusing nature and custom. In other works, Machiavelli criticizes the tendency to attribute to nature modes of behavior that are the result of custom and are, therefore, subject to human will. For example, at the end of Book I of his *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli denigrates contemporary Italian heads of state for lacking military prowess and for being dependent on mercenaries (*di proprie armi disarmati*, I, 39, p. 134).⁴ He says that they are unarmed by choice, while the Pope, Giovanna of Naples and the Florentines are unarmed of necessity. It is not proper for a religious leader to bear arms, it is not the nature of the Queen, a woman, to be militant, and in Florence the mercantile ruling class has destroyed the old aristocracy and with it military *virtù*. But we know that there were warrior Popes and that Machiavelli respects the religion of ancient Rome for its manliness and is critical of Christian passivity; at the end of the *Florentine Histories* we are given two striking instances of women acting with aggressive *virtù*; and we know that Machiavelli wants Florentines to alter the situation that is a product of their city's history.⁵ In each case custom rather than nature is to blame; he is making ironic reference to conditions and modes of behavior that seem fixed by nature only because of the weakness of his contemporaries and their failure to understand what can be changed.

When Machiavelli entitles Chapter 26 of the *Discourses*, III, "How because of Women a State is Ruined," his subject is not feminine capriciousness but rather that the abuse of women can cause rulers to fall. If we compare this chapter with the *Discourses*, I, 16 (p. 176), or the picture of Galeazzo Visconti in the *Florentine Histories*, VII, 33, we can see what he has in mind: it is politically imprudent to take what men consider their own, to abuse women, goods, or laws, thereby destroying the sense of security citizens need.⁶ There is, for Machiavelli, nothing intrinsically good or bad about taking women; the act must be considered in the context of the political security of both rulers and subjects.⁷ Lucrezia's conversion of Callimaco from lover-tyrant to lover-prince must also be seen in the context of prudent self-interest raised to the level of the common good, of something judged to be good because it prevents rather than causes the ruin of family

4. *Istorie fiorentine*, ed. Franco Gaeta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), p. 135.

5. See *Il Principe*, II & 25, pp. 56 & 100; *Discorsi*, I, 11; *Istorie*, VIII, 34, p. 571, and 35, p. 572.

6. Cf. *Discorsi*, III, 26, p. 459; *Istorie*, VII, 33, p. 503; and *Discorsi*, I, 16, p. 174.

7. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 283.

or state. If a ruler is to live securely as a prince and avoid the ruin engendered by tyranny, there must be balance between the necessity to command fortune with manly virtue and the equally strong necessity to respect, or even be led by, womanly virtue. Put another way, the truly successful man must be able to vary his character because even youthful aggressiveness is not an absolute good in a world where conditions constantly change.⁸ Other virtues contribute to lasting order and they are centered in the substance, the *materia* of society.

We find an interesting example of this duality in the opening of *The Art of War*.⁹ The discussion of things ancient and modern begins with the setting of the dialogue, a shady part of the Rucellai gardens where the participants take refuge from the heat of the sun. Fabrizio Colonna's praise for the site and especially for the shade trees leads the host Cosimo Rucellai to describe the trees as more prized by the ancients than by moderns; Fabrizio responds that he is reminded of certain Neapolitan princes who delighted in such cultivation. Fabrizio criticizes this practice because men should imitate the ancients in things strong and harsh, not soft and delicate, under the sun rather than in the shade. Excessive concern for the soft arts led to the decay of Rome. Since Fabrizio is a military commander this introduction to the rough art of war is appropriate. But Cosimo demurs since he takes exposure to the sun to represent a rude, fierce state of nature unbecoming civilized men. Machiavelli provides contrast between the soft or delicate in nature, and the hard or savage (*fiera*). Fabrizio seeks a compromise (*via di mezzo*), arguing that stern but humane laws in fact create society, constraining love for fellow citizens and respect for the common good. Thus the shaded protection of civilized life is planted by a founder who can endure the heat of the sun. Fabrizio proposes a balance between the valiant and the good, between the arts of peace and war, with peace, or shade, the end achieved by men who know how to imitate the ancients in the hard ways of war; and it is war, the precondition for peace, that dominates the ensuing dialogue.¹⁰

The nymphs and shepherds whose song begins *Mandragola* come from a pastoral existence exempt from the worldly cares that oppress mortals. The hero Callimaco has come from Paris, a place of shaded, pastoral retirement where his time was divided between the soft arts of pleasure, study and business.¹¹ He

8. See *Discorsi*, III, 8 & 9, 417–19.

9. *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), pp. 330–31.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 337 & 342; cf. *Discorsi*, I, 11.

11. *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, ed. Franco Gaeta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965), p. 55. See the translation and introduction by Mera J. Flaumenhaft, *Mandragola* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1981), and her essay "The Comic Remedy: Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7 (May 1978), 33–74. Also of note are Theodore E. Sumberg, "La *Mandragola*: An Interpretation," *Journal of Politics*, 23 (1961), 320–40, Martin Fleisher, "Trust and Deceit in Machiavelli's Comedies," *JHI*, 27 (July 1966), 365–80, and Timothy J. Lukes, "Fortune Comes of Age in Machiavelli's Literary Works," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 11, no. 4 (1980), 33–50.

grew up in this retreat while his native Italy was caught up in the harshness of war and political turmoil precipitated by the invasion of Charles VIII. Callimaco has just reached the age (30) at which he would be eligible to participate in political affairs in Florence. He has not, however, been drawn back by any sense of public spiritedness but rather by his desire to see for himself the beauty of Lucrezia and to possess her.

Callimaco gives up his retired, unpolitical life to satisfy his sexual desire. He rapes Lucrezia, using fraud and guile in a comic conspiracy that gives him possession of a woman who may be said to represent the city. There is no question about his initial objective—his desire to triumph or rule, to enjoy pleasure “divorced from its natural end,”¹² strongly suggests a parallel between lover (rapist) and tyrant. He finds a way to subdue a good woman and to deceive her foolish husband, but if his objectives are transformed into something softer and more permanent by Lucrezia, do we have a paradigm for the conversion of the lover-tyrant to lover-prince? If Callimaco’s *virtù* takes the woman, he himself is ultimately taken, not only by her beauty but by her womanly *virtù*. He plants the seed that will shadow Lucrezia, the son who will protect her and complete her family; in a political sense his lust has been tempered or made to serve her interests, the interests of the family and by extension the city.

To accept this thesis we must see Lucrezia as something other than a passive victim, the *materia* subdued and used by the aggressive Callimaco. What basis is there for looking at Lucrezia in this way? Before examining evidence from the play, we should reflect on the relationship between the Florentine ruling class and all of those groups, including women, excluded from government. Richard C. Trexler points out that “In the fifteenth century, a beleaguered gerontocracy of judicious fathers condemned, as had their ancestors, the common faults of all those groups that were excluded from government.” Boys (*fanciulli*), young men (*giovani*), plebs and women were all thought to lack “the gravity, the dispassionate reason, and the controlled sexuality that were the necessary moral qualities of governors.”¹³ In *Mandragola* we witness the conspiracy of the young man, a parasite-counselor, a mother and a priest, all outside the ruling class, working together to satisfy their own interests and to deceive Nicia.

To perpetuate itself the gerontocracy needs the young. It needs fertile women who produce sons, the future *giovani*, and young men who offer their special arts and youthful vitality to the ruling class, as Callimaco does when playing the doctor or the sacrificial inseminator. Nicia, rich and in possession of a beautiful wife, is a fortunate fool, a man frustrated by his failure to produce a son and by his lack of status in the city (II,iii, p. 72). He represents the inherent impotence of the Florentine gerontocracy. Nicia can be easily manipulated because he desires a son and because he follows opinion or fashion; he naively trusts the medi-

12. Strauss, p. 285.

13. *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 367.

cal art Callimaco pretends to bring from France, and will deliver his wife into the arms of another man because French kings and gentlemen are said to do the same.¹⁴ In Nicia we recognize the corrupt *materia* of a city being exploited rather than reformed by an aggressive young man; fortune, or the opportunity to master circumstance, is identified not with a woman but with a foolish representative of the ruling class.

To understand the difference between the *virtù-fortuna* analogy given in *The Prince* and the relationship between Callimaco and Lucrezia we need to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the impetuous young man. Callimaco's desire has drawn him back to Florence to engage in conquest, but left to himself Callimaco appears suicidal, or capable of some equally desperate aggression.¹⁵ He needs a counselor, an outsider who is wise enough to temper the heat of Callimaco's passion. An effective, lasting seduction requires more than youthful ardor. Ligurio, the counselor, is one of the many characters in the play who acts out of self-interest, but his motivation goes beyond acquiring a free meal, or money. Whether moved by his love of manipulation itself, or by his desire to join a spirited young man and an astute young woman, to succeed he must restrain the impetuosity and cure the desperation of Callimaco. In the conspiracy devised by Ligurio, Lucrezia is treated as though she were in need of a cure, the *bagni* or *mandragola*, while in fact her fertility and beauty will be used to cure the physical, psychological and social ills of the men, both Callimaco and Nicia.¹⁶

Callimaco needs help not against Nicia, or fortune, but against Lucrezia, or nature, for her goodness represents the major obstacle to the satisfaction of his intense desire. Ligurio marvels that so foolish a man as Nicia should be so fortunate as to have a wife who is not only beautiful but is wise, mannerly and fit to govern a kingdom. Similarly, in the prologue she is described as *accorta*, sharp, clever, or aware.¹⁷ Her nature and the internal state of war her honesty triggers within Callimaco create greater difficulties for him than the assault on Nicia. We detect something of her character when Nicia tells Ligurio how wary his wife has become after being pestered by a priest while fulfilling her vow to hear forty morning masses, something she was counseled to try by a neighbor as an assist to fertility. The pattern is typical of Lucrezia; she participates in the customs of the city but is neither a fool nor about to be abused. Her natural astuteness and honesty distance her from the superstitious vulnerability of other women who de-

14. Callimaco calls Nicia neither young nor old (*se non è giovane non è al tutto vecchio*: I, i, p. 62) and, after his triumph, an old husband (*marito vecchio*: V, iv, p. 109). On Nicia's lack of status see II, iii, p. 72, and II, vi, p. 77 for his gullible imitation of *re e principi e signori*.

15. I, iii, p. 67: *qualche partito bestiale, crudo, nefando*.

16. See Ezio Raimondi, "Il veleno della *Mandragola*," in *Politica e commedia* (Bologna: Mulino, 1972), pp. 253–64, and "Il Segretario a teatro," pp. 211–12, on Ligurio's name and a precious stone with the power to placate stomach ills.

17. Cf. Ligurio's remarks I, iii, p. 66: *bella donna, savia, costumata e atta a governare un regno*, and Prologue, p. 57.

pend too much on the church and its disreputable priests (*fratacchioni*). The fact that she resists going to the baths or giving Nicia a urine sample betokens something other than foolish modesty—Lucrezia is on guard in a word of fools and knaves.¹⁸ In considering the use she makes of baptism at the end of the play, we might detect her ability to keep up appearances when need be, and to manipulate them when a pleasing knave, or devil, replaces the bothersome priest and offers both secret pleasure and public benefit. In Florence an astute woman must know how to protect her reputation, how to be aloof or proper in church, and how to transform good fortune into the appearance of predestination.

Her entrance in Act III, scene x, confirms Ligurio's characterization, for Lucrezia astutely analyzes the situation—excessive desire for a son has brought her husband to the error (*errore*) of the proposed use of a potion and a sacrificial lover. She strongly resists the further outrage (*vituperio*) of causing the death of a man who will dishonor her. Anticipating Frate Timoteo's argument, she rejects her mother's persuasions, asserting that even were she the last woman on earth, responsible for the resurgence of mankind, she would not submit her body to this shame.¹⁹ The words *vituperio* and *errore* show moral outrage nicely balanced by astute awareness of the foolish, mistaken method her husband has chosen.

Act IV, scene i, opens with Callimaco agonizing over the conflict between fortune, the good fortune of having the simplicity of Nicia at his disposal, and nature, the natural wisdom of Lucrezia that resists temptation. He is like a ship driven by contrary winds, unable to reconcile his good fortune with his perception of her good nature, caught between conscience reproving the planned seduction-rape and desire telling him to be a man and risk even damnation.²⁰ Clearly Lucrezia is not identified with passive *materia*, nor with capricious fortune.

The one character who is confident that Lucrezia's wisdom and goodness can be overcome is Timoteo, the churchman who controls women and their opinions, the counselor who subordinates morality to a worldly sense of the common good, as he shows in his response to the abortion test. Timoteo considers Lucrezia smart for a woman, like a one-eyed man among the blind; he is confident that her very goodness can be turned against her.²¹

Lucrezia is prepared for Timoteo's counsel because of her previous experience with a priest and because, as we have seen, she anticipates his use of the Biblical example of Lot's daughters as a precedent for her sacrifice. He argues that means may challenge conventional morality but be justified because they serve a noble end, in her case the perpetuation of her family, if not mankind. His promise to pray to the Angel Raphael to accompany her alludes ironically to the

18. Cf. Nicia III, i, p. 79, on the *fratacchioni*, and II, ii, p. 71, & II, v, p. 74, on her reluctance.

19. III, 10, p. 88: *ché io non crederrei, se io fussi sola rimasa nel mondo e da me avessi a resurgere l'umana natura, che mi fussi simile partito concesso.*

20. IV, i, p. 92: *e sono in inferno tanti uomini da bene.*

21. For the abortion test see III, iv, p. 83; his remarks on Lucrezia occur in III, ix, p. 87: *perché in terra di ciechi chi v'ha un occhio è signore.*

protection given Tobit against Asmodeus, the demon lover who killed Sarah's first seven husbands on their wedding nights. Callimaco is, in fact, the devil who will come to her bed assisted by Timoteo.²²

Lucrezia anticipates the sacrifice towards which she is being led by her confessor and by her mother, a woman she still trusts and who reminds her that to be left alone in this world is to live like a beast.²³ Lucrezia experiences a passion (*passione*) and calls on the Virgin Mary for assistance, but the passion too is ironic for she must submit her body to the planned outrage (*vituperio*) as a sacrifice designed to redeem the family.²⁴ In her passion she fulfills the comic mystery of Florentine womanhood in church and state, giving her body to produce the male child who can protect her and one day take the father's place in the home and the city, with, she hopes, more success than Nicia. Lucrezia is being persuaded to act as a woman should; as Timoteo puts it, she can be excused because her *vituperio* will please her husband and displease her.²⁵

If the victim lover is saved from death it is because of clever deception; there is no miracle of redemption in any Christian sense. But we should pay close attention to the changes Callimaco undergoes, the masks he puts on as doctor and victim, as well as the transformation he undergoes from demon to protector once in bed with Lucrezia. That final transformation shows Lucrezia stepping out of, or beyond, the role assigned to her by the conspirators, confirming Ligurio's observation that she is fit to rule.

When Callimaco describes his internal debate between good conscience and bad desire, the bad advises manliness; he should not be weak and prostrate himself like a woman but should rather take his chances and act like a man. But in that same monologue good conscience warns that he, like most men, will find less satisfaction in the accomplishment of his desire than he expected. Whether this is so because of Lucrezia's good nature and probable resistance (*providenzia e durezza*), because expectation always outruns performance, or because one night with her cannot equal the anticipation generated by the conspiracy, conscience does not say.²⁶ It is implied that for the better side of Callimaco to be satisfied he must find something more than the momentary pleasure his manly desire so fiercely pursues. For Callimaco to become more than the tyrant-lover

22. III, xi, p. 90; see Flaumenhaft, "The Comic Remedy," p. 53.

23. The worldly Sostrata shares certain values with Ligurio who refers to her as one of the boys (*è stata buona compagna*, I, i, p. 63); to Nicia he says that she is on their side (*è della opinione nostra*, II, vi, p. 77); she counsels worldly prudence to Nicia (*è uffizio d'un prudente pigliare de' cattivi partiti el migliore*, III, i, p. 79); Timoteo echoes the warning she gives her daughter when he calls Sostrata *bene una bestia* (III, ix, p. 87); Lucrezia does not, apparently, suspect her mother's complicity (*la semplicità di mia madre*, v, iv, p. 109).

24. III, x, p. 88: *Io sudo per la passione* and Timoteo's *preparatevi a questo misterio*, p. 90. Callimaco's song is in IV, IX, p. 103.

25. III, xi, p. 89: *e la cagione del peccato è dispiacere al marito, e voi li compiacete; pigliarne piacere, e voi ne avete dispiacere*.

26. IV, i, p. 92: *Non sai tu quanto poco bene si truova nelle cose che l'uomo desidera, rispetto a quelle che l'uomo ha presupposte trovarvi?*

whose lust is his own limitation he needs wise counsel, something that can reconcile the inner split between conscience and desire. Machiavelli is defining the genesis of tyranny, the compulsion to repeat rape, the act of manly control, in order to overcome the inevitable sense of dissatisfaction.

Ligurio suggests that Callimaco extend his pleasure and keep the woman within his control by warning her that if she sets herself up as his enemy she will suffer infamy, but that she can be safe as his friend or lover. When Callimaco finally reports what happened with Lucrezia we find he needed to make no such threat. Echoing the *poco bene* (iv, i, p. 72) conscience had warned would taint his satisfaction, Callimaco describes the mixture of great pleasure and discontent (*non mi parve buono*) he experienced in bed before he revealed his love to Lucrezia. We can assume the dissatisfaction derives from his previously stated interest in prolonging pleasure. If we recall Callimaco's life in Paris, we see a young man who enjoys secure pleasures and for whom the excitement of seduction is merely an interlude. Now, either desire prompts him to sacrifice his freedom, or the promise of marriage is used to sustain his pleasure. The future morality of marriage is founded on the adulterous pact sealed between the young lovers, but immoral desire has also been reconciled with public morality in a Machiavellian blend of self-interest and propriety. Like the rulers discussed in the *Discourses*, 1, 10 & 16, Callimaco must respect at least the forms, the institutions and customs of the city. The prince can indulge his passions in secret but he must refrain from anything openly bestial or offensive. Ligurio's threat of blackmail brings with it a danger for Callimaco—the danger of that very infamy he would use against Lucrezia. Reputation, like a citizen's belief that the honor of his wife is safe, may be no more than an illusion, and the fame of a law-abiding ruler a noble lie, like the good name of a lover. But Lucrezia seems to have faith in the efficacy of both desire and some form of conscience or enlightened self-interest in Callimaco. If her husband were to die and the young man fail to fulfill his promise, she would still be left alone like a beast, with the addition of a son to care for. There is, however, something in Callimaco's nature which heeds the warnings of conscience. Trusting this and other more tangible manifestations of his love (Callimaco proudly compares his performance in bed to old Nicia's), Lucrezia, with a smile, shows herself to be indeed a woman fit to rule.²⁷

In the private world she proves to be the most astute and, perhaps, Machiavellian character in the play. She converts momentary satisfaction into a new order. Unlike the Roman Lucrece she does not commit suicide out of a sense of shame; rather, she changes *vituperio* into lasting satisfaction and makes those who have forced that shame into instruments of divine providence. Her smile at this point would be truly beatific—her lover's cleverness, husband's silliness, mother's simplicity and confessor's wickedness are the providential means that have brought her to bed; the child and continued pleasure are the ends marked out by

27. Cf. Ligurio's advice iv, ii, p. 96, and v, iv, p. 109 for Callimaco's report of what Lucrezia said.

God. What her husband wanted for one night will, under her regime, last forever; limited ends and momentary desire are transformed by her passion and mystery into something eternal, or nearly so. Redefining the scheme that was designed to render her a victim as a new providential order, Lucrezia demonstrates her cleverness; it is a way to save appearances, as is making Callimaco the godfather and publicly baptizing the illegitimate child. Her astuteness, if not divine providence, serves the common good of the family.

The pleasure of one night can be made lasting only if Callimaco respects the essential honesty and the obvious cleverness of Lucrezia. The ceremonial baptism she orchestrates reconciles fierce youthfulness with the institutions of the city, joining what had been hidden or disguised with what is made public. We might say that Lucrezia has recognized in the young man something of fortune, the opportunity to use her virtue to shape experience in a way profitable to her family and to the city. His lust provides the occasion for a renewal of the old order. Though the balance is precarious (thus the passion and mystery of her experience), Lucrezia does find a way to uphold her integrity while using the ways of the world; pleasure redeems the good conscience within Callimaco, making him into an obedient master, ready for marriage.

Assigning Callimaco the role of lord, master, guide, father and defender is not, I would argue, an act of submission by Lucrezia, for she is anything but submissive in the last scene of the play. It is a way of playing on both the good nature of Callimaco, his respect for her, and his manly pride, thus holding him to her and to the city. In Machiavelli's world, when this balance is achieved there is no way to distinguish means from ends, appearance from reality. We need not ask whether Lucrezia really uses the more lasting orders merely as a means to serve her own pleasure. The two have become one; pleasure lasts longer when reconciled with virtue, command is more secure when it creates security. That is the lesson we should learn from the union of Callimaco and Lucrezia. Abuse of women and law is unpleasant because it leads to ruin. Callimaco finds more pleasure when he follows Lucrezia's lead and allows his interests to coincide with hers, Nicia's, and the city's. Lucrezia, who knows the deceptive ways of lovers in the bedroom and priests in the church, manages to use both flawed human nature and flawed human institutions to promote the continuity that is the essence of civic life.

Is there any essential difference between manly and womanly virtue as revealed in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*? We might see in Lucrezia a representative of those traditional virtues of piety and honesty needed by a state if its *materia*, or character, is to remain uncorrupted. But in order to survive, those virtues must be tempered by wisdom, and in this, Lucrezia is quite unlike the other women Timoteo manipulates. The priest is aware that a failure to attend to appearances has led to a decline in piety and in respect for the institutions of the church, and we recognize a more serious failing in the behavior of the priests themselves.²⁸

28. These remarks introduce Act V.

Blind faith does not maintain those virtues needed as an underpinning for law in the city. In Lucrezia respect is balanced by wariness, her willingness to listen and be led combined with the ability to act decisively when alone.

Ligurio is a Machiavellian counselor who takes a realistic view of human nature. He manipulates others by drawing on shared self-interest, as with Callimaco and Sostrata, or by employing fraud or force, as with Timoteo, Nicia and Lucrezia. There is more of the fox than the lion in the comedies. Callimaco considers attempting something violent and Ligurio counsels blackmail, but it is fraud that makes possible the demonstration of Callimaco's sexual prowess. The distinctive difference between the astuteness of a Ligurio and Lucrezia's womanly *virtù* is that she utilizes the power of good conscience within Callimaco to make their relationship more permanent. Machiavelli would seem to recognize as clearly as certain of his critics that Machiavellian counsel, here represented by Ligurio, is blind to, or often chooses not to concern itself with, traditional virtue. But love, the voice of conscience, the shame and seeming deference of Lucrezia, the instinct to serve, please and protect that emerges from Callimaco, are all shown to be strong forces in human nature and within the city. In the private world of the bedroom, a pastoral retreat we never see directly, womanly *virtù* rules these forces.

Lucrezia, unlike a young man, cannot escape the city and its customs, no matter how corrupt they become. She must stay on during warfare and turmoil, amidst fools and knaves, while Callimaco is in Paris. If she represents the uncorrupted virtue of the city, preserved because distant from the centers of power, it is virtue fully aware. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of womanly *virtù* is the ability to combine shame and respect for public forms of ceremony with restrained self-interest.

If Callimaco is the spirited youth who may return to take over the city—charismatic, attractive even to Nicia, a master of disguise who can enlist the right counselors and allies—he will have to do more than rape or abuse the city.²⁹ He will have to wed, or at least listen to, that which makes it beautiful and desirable. Only that virtue can, in turn, convert his limited interests into something more permanent, into a new order. That order preserves the forms of honor and providence while planting new vigor; the union generates not only pleasure but continuity and the security needed for family and city. Renewal may require quite unconventional means, but Machiavelli seems to identify with Lucrezia and Callimaco a kind of virtue capable of encompassing both those means and the more conventional respect for public, ceremonial forms. Only through this comic duality can the family or city be preserved and renewed, that is, renewed without having to undergo the painful passage through ruin or disorder.

29. For Nicia's misplaced admiration see v, ii, p. 107; a potential prince who respects the virtues of the city might promise to take over if or when the republic dies. Callimaco becomes the mirror image of Tarquin, the man whose open disrespect for law and a woman caused the fall of kingship and the institution of a republican form of government.

As a dramatist Machiavelli gives us new modes and orders, for his comedy ends with the secret adultery and public baptism, evoking the comic spirit of a society achieving continuity and order after a period of deception and potential discord.

In *Mandragola* a young man and woman join to create a new order and to prevent the decay of a family through an unconventional merging of the public and the private, of ceremony and desire. In *Clizia* we see a mother taking on the role of reformer and making use of pain to preserve a family. The object of reform is her husband, a foolish representative of the Florentine gerontocracy who is indulging in the sexual pursuits that were supposed to occupy the prepolitical *giovani*. When Sofronia describes what she considers the right order of Nicomaco's former life, we see his time divided between the centers of adult male responsibility: *piazza*, *mercato*, and *magistrati* outside and *scrittoio* inside the home.³⁰ He once exhibited the proper behavior of a Florentine merchant-citizen and, therefore, instructing by example, earned the respect of his son.

When that order breaks down and the old man begins frequenting youthful haunts, making a fool of himself by competing with his son for Clizia, traditional decorum is lost. The young lose respect for the old and everyone is out for himself (*ognuno fa a suo modo*). As a result the home (and by analogy the city) is in danger of collapse unless, as Sofronia says, God does something. What God does is to inspire Sofronia to oppose her husband's designs on Clizia, using his disgrace to effect a reformation. Both father and son are attempting to manipulate the public ceremony of marriage through a substitute husband-servant as a means of gaining private control over Clizia, for a night or more of pleasure.

Fortune opposes Sofronia and favors Nicomaco in the choice by lot of the would-be husband, but the *virtù* of the wife overcomes fortune and the foolish husband. Like Lucrezia, old Nicomaco suffers *vituperio*, in his case the appropriate punishment of sodomy for a man eager to imitate the vices of young Florentine *giovani*; unlike Lucrezia, however, the old man is unable to redeem what happens when he finds a devil in bed. Kicked and sexually attacked, he experiences the shameful suffering that prepares men for reform.³¹ Echoing the *Discourses*, III, I and 28, Sofronia invites her husband to return to that order from which he has departed; she is the *braccio regia* leading her mate back to responsible civic life, just as a reformer would lead the state back to its founding virtues after men have lost respect for the common good and have suffered because of their own corruption. Strength of character must inform the institutions and laws of the state; when that *materia* becomes deformed time is no longer properly divided between the political and ceremonial places of the city, and the right relationship between generations is lost. Those who have the legal right to rule (the gerontocracy) are least able to curb their own desires; they corrupt the young by imitating the slack ways of *giovani* while still pretending to authority. The cycle

30. *Il teatro*, ed Gaeta, II, 4, pp. 132–33.

31. Cf. Nicomaco v, ii, pp. 159–60, and Sofronia v, iii, p. 162: *Se tu vorrai ritornare al segno.*

of corruption and discontinuity eventually leads society to collapse into a state of anarchy. From that disorder a strong and virtuous founder can begin a new state, and from a taste of that disorder a wise reformer can prompt a return to civic good sense, respect for the common good and, in the private world, restraint. When Sofronia says that she had to use deception and Nicomaco's own shame to force a correction of his grave error, we are reminded that the suffering that prepares corrupt men for reform may be engineered by a wise and clever reformer.

The woman as reformer is someone who has an interest in a return to the old forms, an outsider who is fully aware of what makes the system work: like Lucrezia she combines astute observation and decisive action with the ability to draw the greatest common good from the self-interest of those around her. Sofronia has greater authority within the family than Lucrezia and she follows worldly conventions in every respect, as we can see when she opposes her son Cleandro's marriage to a girl who lacks a dowry; her opposition is only resolved by fortune when Clizia's noble parentage is finally revealed. Both women know how to benefit from the schemes of men. For Sofronia, bringing good out of seeming corruption means using the painful lesson visited upon her husband as a way of shocking him out of his second childhood back into the form of life she respects, the form that provides security and continuity for her family. No new order emerges; the husband returns to his movement between *piazza*, *mercato*, *magistrati* and *scrittoio*, while the son is given the acceptable young bride. The wife acts as much through self-interest as through any moral judgment. It is simply inappropriate for most men of Nicomaco's age and standing to spend their time trying to act like young men; in most cases they will end up getting hurt. It is the *virtù* of a woman to recognize that incongruity and to preserve her own interests. For Machiavelli it seems not so much a moral question as a question of what promotes security and continuity within the community. The difference between Sofronia and Nicomaco is that her self-interest harmonizes with social order; it does so, of course, because she is clever enough to make it prevail. In addition to being a fox she is also something of a lion, for her use of the private error committed by Nicomaco amounts to blackmail (like the threat of infamy Ligurio advised Callimaco to use against Lucrezia). She forces a return to the kind of behavior she considers proper.

We must recall that old Nicomaco tried force, prayers and then threats to overcome what he thought was Clizia's resistance to his manly advances when he substituted himself for the bridegroom-servant Pirro. Exhausted and unsuccessful, he lapsed into sleep and was, as he describes it, attacked from behind by what he first thought was the knife Clizia was reported to be wielding in desperation before the enforced marriage, while in fact he was being assaulted sexually by the substitute bride Siro. Nicomaco is not only out-substituted but made to experience the fear of a violent death and then the shame of being abused. The punishment fits the crime, for he had wanted to force Clizia. Comedy promotes harmony and productivity and, therefore, it is appropriate that Nicomaco be driven

from his senile imitation of Tarquin back to the more productive rhythm of his peregrinations within the city. Nothing but harm or shame, and least of all, pleasure, will come of his preposterous error. We know from *Mandragola* that new and procreative forms can be created within a city and made as much a part of the comic order as the more conventional reform we find in *Clizia*. *Mandragola* is the more original and daring play, yet both comedies show that we need to examine more carefully the assumptions about sex implicit in our reading of such key terms as *virtù* and *materia* in all of Machiavelli's works.