

INTERPRETATION

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THE COMIC REMEDY: MACHIAVELLI'S "MANDRAGOLA"*

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In October, 1525, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote to his friend Francesco Guicciardini to explain some difficult passages in the *Mandragola*, passages which had brought Guicciardini great "distress of mind."¹ In this letter, Machiavelli playfully clarifies a colloquial expression by commenting on a mysterious sonnet by a modern writer, Burchiello. Machiavelli says he believes that a person who considers the sonnet well "may continue to stir up our times."² He also refers to an ancient authority: "as Titus Livius says in his second decade . . ."³—although he is aware that the second decade of Livy's Roman history is not extant. Perhaps his parody of a scholarly analysis of the "light material" (Prologue) of *Mandragola* should caution those who wish to read the play seriously as well as lightly: one must never forget that it is a staged comedy, "a thing to break one's jaws with laughter" (Prologue).

But since Machiavelli has the distinction of being both an eminent playwright and an outstanding thinker apart from his plays, seriously amused readers should ask how the comedies and the political books are related. The letter to Guicciardini, which seems to mock scholarly commentary, should stand as a check against the *distortions* of scholarship. Nevertheless, it should not discourage exploration of the sources, subject, and intent of Machiavelli's most famous and most original play. Indeed, the letter may even direct our attention to some of the central meanings of *Mandragola*.

Part I of this essay will examine Machiavellian *virtù* in the light of ancient virtue and of Christian virtue, through a discussion of Machiavelli's attitude towards chastity. Central to this discussion is Machiavelli's use of Livy here, as well as in the *Discourses*, in a new version of the rape of Lucretia. Part II will examine, partly in the light of Paul's Epistles to Timothy, Machiavelli's view of Christian

*I would like to thank The National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant which made possible some of the work on this essay, and on a literal translation of the play to be published elsewhere. Translations of passages from Machiavelli are my own unless otherwise indicated. References to *The Prince* and the *Discourses* appear as P. and D.

man, in his depiction of Frate Timoteo and his flock. Part III will make some suggestions about the relationship between morality and the comic theatre. But, first, Machiavelli's Prologue invites a Prologue.

PROLOGUE

The first stanza of the Prologue to *Mandragola* expresses hope that the audience will "come to understand a new case born in this city [*noi voglian che s'intenda/un nuovo caso in questa terra nato*]." The aim of this essay is, in part, to come to an understanding of what this means. In the comedy, as well as in the political writings, the claim to newness must always be understood in relation to something old. A reading of *Mandragola* should aim to clarify Machiavelli's attitudes towards old things—towards conventional morality, towards the conventions of drama, and towards the conventional purposes of drama.

Italian theatre at the time Machiavelli wrote was dominated by the influence of the Roman comic playwrights, Terence and Plautus, who modeled their plays on Greek "New Comedy." In cities throughout Italy much time and money were devoted to research on and productions, in Latin or in newly prepared translations, of the Roman plays. Machiavelli's letters are peppered with allusions to them, and, like many of his acquaintances, he translated one of these plays (Terence's *Andria*). In addition to the revivals of Plautus and Terence, the end of the fifteenth and start of the sixteenth centuries saw the growth of a new native genre, the *Commedia Erudita*, based on the old Roman plots and characters, but self-consciously refusing to be servile to antiquity, and emphasizing such new elements as Italian settings, some indigenous characters, and a modern vernacular language.⁴ The Prologue to Machiavelli's *Clizia* acknowledges its source as Roman comedy (Plautus' *Casina*) and implies what Machiavelli's political writings explicitly say: that one can benefit from accounts of ancient times because human nature does not change.

Mandragola begins with a conventional address to the audience, one which combines the techniques of both Plautus and Terence. It introduces what appears to be a new play in the style of the *Commedia Erudita*. The argument draws attention to the conven-

tional street setting, and to the houses of familiar Roman characters—the young lover, the chaste maiden he loves, a foolish old man—and to one familiar modern one, the priest. The heroine's mother bears a name found frequently in the plays of Terence. Early in the play, Machiavelli jokes about his stagey exposition. Later there are explicit, albeit humorous, references to unity of time, an ancient stage convention which Italian critics came to emphasize in the latter half of the century. The action of the play is more unified in the Roman manner, than that in most contemporary plays. Thus, here, as well as in *Andria* and *Clizia*, Machiavelli indicates his familiarity with the ancient comic models. But unlike the plots of *Andria* and *Clizia*, the plot of *Mandragola* is original. While it might at first resemble new versions of ancient comedy and another popular new form, the novella of Boccaccio and Cinthio, Machiavelli's "new case born in this city" will prove to be newer in a more serious way than these already conventional novelties.

The fifth and sixth stanzas of the Prologue continue to juxtapose old and new things. After the conventional Plautian presentation of the argument, the author begins, more in the defensive and threatening tone of a Terence prologue, to justify the "light material" of this work: no one appreciates and rewards his graver endeavors; this scorn for worthy actions is proof that "in all things, the present age has fallen off from ancient worth [*l'antica virtù*]." Readers of *The Prince* and *Discourses* will recognize a familiar theme from the introductory letters and prologues, and from passages dealing with the significance of the works and the importance of renovating and being reborn.⁵ Machiavelli's repeated claim is that he will teach his readers new things by presenting them with ancient as well as recent ones. Again and again he urges the imitation of antiquity,⁶ though, as we shall see, he often presents new versions of these examples for his own purposes. Machiavelli is fully aware of the danger of advocating the rejection of present practices and beliefs for older ones, and of revising old beliefs in order to set forth new ones. Thus, he says at the beginning of the *Discourses*, that "it has always been no less dangerous to find new modes and orders than it has been to look for unknown seas and lands" (D. I intro.).⁷

Might the danger of presenting a "new case" explain why the Prologue to *Mandragola* is so reticent about claiming a didactic purpose, one which might even make its author seem as "wise and

grave” as he says he wishes to appear? His contemporaries seem to have discussed widely the Ciceronian injunction that comedy should instruct as well as entertain the audience. Donatus’ commentaries on Terence, recently recovered in 1433, repeated this precept and, though it was disregarded and even mocked in many contemporary plays, Machiavelli himself seems to have thought about it. In *Clizia*, less original in plot than *Mandragola*, and perhaps less novel in thought as well, the Prologue speaks of the play’s effect on youth:

Comedies exist to help and to delight the spectators. It is truly very helpful to any man, and especially to young men, to recognize an old man’s avarice, a lover’s furor, a servant’s tricks, a parasite’s gluttony, a poor man’s misery, a rich man’s ambition, a prostitute’s flatteries, the little faith of all men.⁸

However un-Ciceronian the lesson of “*la poca fede di tutti li uomini*” may be,⁹ there is in *Clizia*, some explicit claim to teach. Similarly in his “Discourse about our Language,” Machiavelli says that, although the aim of a comedy is:

to hold up a mirror to private life, nevertheless, its way of doing it is with a certain urbanity and with terms which incite laughter, so that the men who run to that great delight, taste afterwards the useful example that is underneath.¹⁰

Again, the meaning of “useful” is unclear, but at least the claim is made. One wonders why it is so muted in *Mandragola*.

Perhaps Machiavelli’s reticence about this subject is due to his awareness that the lessons to be drawn from the “new case born in this city” are much more radically new than are those of a new version of a new version of “New Comedy”—that they differ greatly from the usual poetic attempts of older men to shape the young. If this were so, Machiavelli’s comic drama about the “remedy” *mandragola* would be as subversive of contemporary beliefs as the drastic “remedies” he discusses in the serious political works. To understand the relationship between these comic and serious remedies, we must see how Machiavelli rejects the older teachings—both ancient and contemporary (Christian)—by presenting his dramatic “new case.”

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

A. *Virtù: Public and Private*

In form, *Mandragola* resembles ancient Roman comedy. But its plot is to be found in ancient Roman history, the very history Machiavelli claims as his subject in *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, and which he jokingly connects with *Mandragola* in the letter to Guicciardini quoted above. To understand what is new and what is old in Machiavelli's play, and what he intends to teach, we must compare Livy's account of the rape of the Roman Lucretia and the events which followed, with Machiavelli's account of the possession of a Christian Lucrezia and the probable results.^{1 1}

Let us begin with the husbands. Livy depicts Collatine and his friends as warriors, in the "vigour of youth,"^{1 2} and their bragging and wager are described as a "boyish prank of the night."^{1 3} These are the men who are soon to rise and overthrow the tyrannical Tarquins, and to establish a republican regime in Rome. The husband in Machiavelli's play, Messer Nicia Calfucci, is an elderly and impotent bourgeois lawyer who is ruled by women and can weep tender tears. His earthy Tuscan speech and his occasional regret that he didn't marry a country girl, remind us that he is less sophisticated than the cosmopolitan city-slickers who trick him. Like most loyal citizens, he grumbles about his position in the city, but he is totally attached to Florence—by habit, by his timidity, and by his possessions. He is reluctant to leave, even for a short trip to the baths. He brags about his experience; but his foolishness, his lack of "spirit [*animo*]," and his professional concentration on books, render him unfamiliar with the "things of the world [*cose del mundo*]" (III, 2). The Prologue tells us he read much, especially in "Buezio." Machiavelli's strange spelling of Boethius might suggest that Nicia's decency is the sort of bovine mildness which is easily led by the nose. His name ironically suggests that he will be a loser. This essay will suggest that Machiavelli attributes the defeat of Nicia to the nature of his religion, to superstition and to piety.^{1 4}

Machiavelli's revised version of the man who would displace Lucretia's husband is more complex. In *Mandragola* the hereditary tyrant of Rome is replaced by Callimaco Guadagni, whose ancient Greek and modern Italian names indicate his noble struggle for gain(s). The first Song^{1 5} seems to associate Callimaco with the

unpolitical life. Like the nymphs and shepherds, he has lived for pleasure and comforts. An expatriate since his childhood, he has enjoyed a peaceful private life in Paris while the French king was ravishing his native country. Even in France, as he reminds his servant, Callimaco was unattached to any party or special interests, to any class, or even to any one pastime. When he decided to return home, he easily parted with all his goods. The arguments in which the would-be lovers first hear of the women they desire are also strikingly different. In Livy, strong warrior compatriots sit drinking around a campfire and argue about the virtue and honor of women. In Machiavelli, the "noble warrior" fled from war and heard of Lucrezia, the relative of an acquaintance, at a leisurely international gathering.

Sextus Tarquin returns to Rome alone and steals into Lucretia's home. He threatens to kill and defame her if she doesn't yield, and then rapes her. Lucretia submits in order to live and denounce her assailant, and then kills herself. In *The Prince* Machiavelli argues that fraud is preferable to force in achieving the Prince's aims. (P. XVIII). Later, he asserts that the man of ability controls Fortune as if she were a woman (P. XXV): she must be beaten until she is submissive to the strong man's will. In *Mandragola* even a woman is best won not by force, but by fraud. In the new version of the siege of Lucretia, nothing is accomplished by coercion. As Nicia says, his faith in his deceiver is stronger than that of the Hungarians in their swords (II, 2). His own little sword is only a comic prop^{1 6} and he is swiftly conquered by a bold and risky plot in which the lover wins the cooperation of the husband and his mother-in-law, and finally, of the woman he desires. In place of the death of the dishonored Lucretia and the subsequent banishment and death of her violator, Machiavelli shows the continued life and honor of Lucrezia and her lover, and promises another life as the fruit of their liaison. Instead of the overthrow of a tyranny and its replacement by a republic, we see a thoroughly private man secure the pleasures that even a successful tyrant must usually forego. Machiavelli's Florence is unaware of and unshaken by the acquisition of a new domain by the usurper, Callimaco Guadagni. Both lust and tyranny desire without limit, but, as Machiavelli suggests elsewhere, the private man can better afford to risk satisfying unlimited sexual desires. In this respect, the "regime" of the potent lover is less limited than that of the greatest

potentate. The man in whom love plays the tyrant is the most tyrannical man. We must further explore Callimaco's relation to Machiavelli's great princes.

Although Callimaco is energetic and intelligent, he is unable to achieve by himself what he wants for himself. As a result of his desperate passion, he is moody, frenzied, and even foolish. At one point he contemplates suicide as an alternative to risky plots. His reason is dedicated to serving an irresistible desire which sometimes reduces him to confusion. This confusion is uncharacteristic of Machiavelli's greatest rulers. Callimaco is perhaps more like those second-level intelligences in *The Prince* who can discern and make use of what others understand. (P. XXV). Thus, he acquires an advisor who exercises *virtù* analogous to that exhibited by the most outstanding men. It is Ligurio (the "gloater" or the "tyer-up") who pulls the strings of the intrigue. He calls himself "*capitano*" and arranges his "*army*" (IV, 9) to carry out this conspiracy. When Callimaco's "*animo*" fails, it is Ligurio who always thinks of a "remedy." Machiavelli plays down the gluttony of the Roman and Italian parasites on whom Ligurio is superficially modeled,¹⁷ and emphasizes his sheer delight in imposing his will on others: "Your blood is in accord with mine and I desire for you to satisfy this desire of yours almost as much as you do yourself" (I, 3). Machiavelli never allows him a soliloquy. This enhances his independence and authority, while depriving his companions and the audience of any clear knowledge of his motives. He feels a vague kinship with Callimaco, but his "desire" clearly has nothing to do with sex. As a former marriage broker, he knows the natures of men and women. Playing on the beliefs and desires of greedy, gullible, and fearful people, he plots with prudence, courage, and secrecy. He acts swiftly, spending the money of others, and, in Lucrezia's case, changes the nature of the conquered in order to secure his aims. By the end of the play, he has won, not only the previously denied privilege of dining with Nicia, but also the keys to his house. If Callimaco is the new "ruler" in that house, Ligurio has ruled the ruler. Thus, he is closely akin to another advisor of princes, to Machiavelli himself.

Like the projects of Machiavelli's able princes and unlike Tarquin's, Callimaco's plot succeeds because the conspirators provide that their "good" or "advantage" (*bene*) benefits others. Thus, the remedy for Callimaco's unbearable discomfort coincides with the

remedy for Nicia's and Lucrezia's childlessness. Nicia is not so simply a loser as his name might at first suggest. The same remedy relieves the pecuniary difficulties of Frate Timoteo and Ligurio. The remedy, of course, is not the medicinal *mandragola*, but, as the Song after Act Three says: "The trick [*inganno*]. . . . Oh remedy high and rare."

At first, Callimaco, like many tyrants, cares only for pleasure and the satisfaction of present selfish desires. But, like Machiavelli's prudent princes, and unlike ordinary tyrants—a word never used in *The Prince*—Callimaco exercises restraint and thinks ahead. Although he doesn't hesitate to take another man's wife, he is not a conventional Don Juan. He is an adulterer but not a libertine. Unlike the Don, Callimaco proves his superiority by secretly succeeding in one conquest, not by flaunting a series of violations and, thus, courting his own fall. Thus, before the play is over, Callimaco has promised to be the godfather of his natural child, and to marry that child's mother when her husband dies. The marriage proposal is his own addition to Ligurio's plan. The conquest, which must be enjoyed secretly at first, finally will be legitimate and Callimaco publicly will acknowledge himself the master of Messer Nicia's household.

Although Callimaco plans for the continuing satisfaction of his present desires, his success is limited by the limits of the field of action he has chosen. He himself recognizes the temporary character of his success:

. . . and if this happiness couldn't fail either through death or through time, I would be more blessed than the blessed, more saintly than the saints (V, 4).

Though he can manipulate men and women and even Fortune, he cannot conquer death or time. This, above all, distinguishes Callimaco from the new princes whom Machiavelli discusses elsewhere. The language of love in Machiavelli's plays is derived from the language of war, and love itself is a battle to prevail.¹⁸ But, because the conspirators invest all their talents and spirit in an undercover struggle for acquisition, there is no immortal glory for the victors. In Machiavelli's political works the greatest prince eventually organizes everything anew in order to insure that the regime he founds will outlive him. The *Discourses* indicate that this is most possible in a glorious and long-lived republic. This end of princely *virtù*—glory—is

never tasted in the "light material" of the comedy. Love can be only a second-best activity for men like Callimaco (and Ligurio) who have forsworn politics. Where the end is a woman there can be only an approximation of the struggles and successes of noble captains of men. Marital affairs are only a pale parody of martial ones.

Although Callimaco cannot be simply equated with the political men of *virtù* whom Machiavelli describes in other works, his "new case" does clarify some of the most difficult questions raised by those books. First, the play vividly presents individuals who embody the view of human nature on which Machiavelli's political teaching is based. Even though this presentation of human nature seems less harsh than the general statements in *The Prince*, the "low" desires of Timoteo, Nicia, Sostrata, and the anonymous Donna are the same as those of the subjects the prince might rule. According to a notorious remark of Machiavelli, men forget more quickly the death of their fathers than the loss of what they inherit from their fathers (P. XVII). The play clearly indicates that Nicia's tender anticipation of fatherhood grows out of his concern for his estate: he wants an heir. Nicia and all of Machiavelli's people are characterized by an overriding concern for themselves. The play demonstrates this structurally. Many scenes begin or end with one of the conspirators spying on or doubting the loyalty of one of his fellows.

Concern for oneself seems to increase with *virtù*. The most striking thing about Callimaco is his detachment. Having lost his father as a child, and having no attachment to his fatherland, he is willing to father a child whose true connection to him will never be revealed. In addition to lacking country, parents, and brothers, Callimaco is a man without friends. In this he differs from the young lovers in the Roman plays. Ligurio is a recent acquaintance and an inferior. The former Paris companions are never mentioned in connection with Callimaco after the first scene. The goal for which Callimaco temporarily unites with others aptly indicates Machiavelli's view of human existence as an isolated struggle to prevail: success in the winning of a woman is unshareable. Love is often thought to be ennobling because it makes the lover less self-regarding. But sexual fulfillment for Callimaco is not characterized by affectionate union with the partner. Although he is called a "lover," and although the Song after Act Two speaks conventionally of "loving another more than oneself," Callimaco's love for Lucrezia, like hers for him, is

severely limited. They share their victory over a third party. She is attracted by his ingenuity and virility, which so contrast with the frustrating incapacity of her husband. He is attracted by the challenge of her resistance. In his plotting *and success*, his attention is always fixed upon himself. *Mandragola* presents the people among whom one lives primarily as the means and objects of one's desires. Love, friendship, and family affection are all contracted into self-interest.

The dominating principle of self-interest is seen even more starkly in the comedy than in the works with public subjects. In the latter, the common good of patriotism sometimes seems to mitigate Machiavelli's harsh view of selfish human nature and his advocacy of the extreme self-assertion of the prince. If Machiavelli plays down the force of fatherly feelings and filial affections, he certainly advocates the exaltation of the fatherland. The higher "common" good of patriotism thus seems to justify the harsh and questionable means said to be necessary for political ends. In the political writings Machiavelli does not deny the distinction between good and evil acts. Rather, he emphasizes the need to weigh alternatives and make choices. *Mandragola* also articulates this utilitarian principle, but the play's effect is to collapse the distinction. Conventionally evil behavior is presented as good.¹⁹ The principles of *The Prince* are equally successful in high public and in low private affairs. Machiavelli goes out of his way to emphasize that the protagonist of his play is an *unpatriotic* man. The common good of the play is nothing more than the sum of the private goods and desires of the conspiring individuals. Finally, in the political realm the true and lasting success of the leader(s) requires that they improve the subjects whose desires they must satisfy. Callimaco and Ligurio show no such concern.

B. *Virtue: Public and Private*

Let us now examine more closely Machiavelli's attitude towards the traditional virtue whose value is obscured in the course of the play. Machiavelli's treatment of sexual transgression and its corresponding opposite, chastity, can be taken as a measure of his attitude towards vice and virtue in general.²⁰ An examination of relevant passages in the political works will show how the play also rejects traditional ancient (Aristotelian and Roman) and Christian notions of moral virtue.

In *The Prince* and in the *Discourses* Machiavelli warns against violating the honor of the wives and daughters of one's subjects.²¹ He approves of Scipio's behavior in Spain, where he returned a daughter to her father, and a young wife to her husband (D. III, 20). Machiavelli says that Scipio imitated the "chastity, affability, humanity, liberality" of Xenophon's Cyrus (P. XIV). But one can see from the references to Scipio that a leader's concern with the virtue of women is merely political, a means by which the *virtù* of men can prevail. Scipio's "chastity" is an example of the calculated exhibition of a moral virtue which the people wish to see in great men. The people are so attached to such virtues that Scipio's return of the women, the most jealously guarded of men's possessions, was more effective than force would have been. Thus, as Castiglione's conversants in *The Book of the Courtier* agree, Scipio's "continence" was only a kind of "military strategem."²² For Machiavelli, as for Cyrus, chastity is not valued for its own sake. *The Prince* makes clear that it is the *appearance* of virtue which insures support for a leader. Furthermore, Machiavelli even argues openly elsewhere that Scipio's "virtues" were not always as effective as Hannibal's "rapine" (D. III, 21).

These remarks about Scipio should be kept in mind when evaluating Machiavelli's strange unique reference to Aristotle—as the authority for the view that "among the first causes of the ruins of tyrants [is] their having injured others with respect to their women, either by raping them or by violating them or by breaking marriages. . ." (D. III, 26).²³ At this point he attributes the falls of Tarquin and the Decemvir Appius Claudius to their misconduct in this respect. However, other passages about Tarquin and Appius, whose experiences are closer than Scipio's or Hannibal's to the one dramatized in *Mandragola*, comment differently on the falls of these unchaste men.

Machiavelli discusses the fall of Appius Claudius, but he minimizes the outrage of his attempts to violate Virginia. Livy parallels the expulsions of the Tarquins and the Decemvirs and deals with the Virginia episode at great length. He reports the moral indignation of Virginia's friends and betrothed, and describes Appius' "crime" and "lust" and his attraction, like that of Tarquin for Lucretia, to the girl's "modesty" and beauty.²⁴ The Roman historian seems to agree with Virginia's father that chaste death is preferable to sullied life. The Roman people believe that Appius' ruin is due, in part, to the

anger of the gods. In contrast, Machiavelli mentions Virginia only in passing, as another cause of disturbances when the insatiable Appius attempted to exercise his tyranny. Appius' greater, though perhaps related, defect was one of military strategem: "being cruel and rough in commanding, he was badly obeyed by his troops" (D. III, 19). There is no suggestion of divine punishment for tyrannical lust.

Machiavelli tacitly comments on Livy's version of Lucretia—both in his play and in his account of the episode in the *Discourses*. In the latter, he omits all of the passionate outrage found in Livy, and also present in Ovid's account and in Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*. There is no anger about the violation of a grave Roman matron's honor. Contrary to Machiavelli's later statement, the rape of Lucretia was not even the major cause of the fall of the Roman tyrant. It simply provided the first occasion for Romans to react decisively to continued deprivation of their liberties:

Tarquin was not driven from Rome because his son Sextus had raped Lucretia, but because he had broken the laws of the kingdom and governed it tyrannically. (D. III, 5)

In shifting the emphasis, Machiavelli says seriously in the political treatise what the play depicts comically: chastity like the other moral virtues, is a matter of political prudence, to be judged according to the situation.

Machiavelli's teachings thus differ greatly from those of the authority he cites on the subject of women. Whatever Aristotle's conclusions may be about the ultimate status of moral virtue, his rhetoric is conservative of such virtue. The passage to which Machiavelli refers is found in Book Five of the *Politics*, in the discussion of how the various regimes can preserve themselves. Aristotle's "advice" to tyrants—much of which Machiavelli transmits to his own prince—is stated in such a way as to make tyranny less bad, to move it toward the more virtuous monarchical regime. Perhaps his warnings against violating the women of subjects should be read in conjunction with an earlier passage from the *Ethics*. In his earliest definition of virtue as a mean, he emphatically states the opinion that some actions and passions do not admit of means, that they are bad in themselves:

nor is [acting] well or not well about such things a matter of [for example] with

whom, and when, and how one commits adultery, but simply doing any of these whatever is to go astray.²⁵

Although he repeatedly cautions against absolute rules in moral and political matters, he does seem to approve of the opinion that there are some deeds which are base, even if justifiable in extreme circumstances. He discusses such circumstances with great delicacy.

Machiavelli's writings openly teach the use of virtue and vice in clever alternation; no deed is ruled out. His play celebrates adultery, and the *Discourses* approve of worse crimes in some circumstances. The founding of Rome, made possible by fratricide, also required the rapes of Rhea and the Sabine women. Machiavelli does not mention these rapes but one can assume he could justify them if necessary. Interestingly, Callimaco's description of his talk with Lucrezia sounds something like Livy's Romulus wooing the Sabines after they have been taken by force.²⁶ Callimaco's tricky seduction is, of course, a more efficient way to get and keep *one* woman.

It is interesting that Machiavelli does not mention the famous adultery of King David, whom he holds up for imitation in the political books.²⁷ For David, as for Callimaco, there is no common or national good which could justify his treatment of Uriah and Bathsheba. Nathan faults the Biblical David, not for impurity, but for injustice, and the king admits his lack of pity. But Machiavelli ignores the personal and political troubles which the Biblical narrative seems to connect with this incident. Perhaps Machiavelli's edited account of David means to suggest that the very greatest princes might ignore Aristotle's and his own warning about women.

Leaving Machiavelli's views of chastity, as seen through his version of the Lucretia story, we turn to a famous Christian commentary on the incident. In *The City of God*, Saint Augustine, upholding the value of chastity, exonerates Lucretia from any blame for having been overcome by Tarquin. Like the authors of the many medieval exempla based on her story, Augustine asserts that a woman's most precious possession is her sexual purity. He recognizes that Lucretia was chaste in intention and was violated against her will. But he does fault her for her characteristic pagan attachment to worldly honor. Christian women, similarly violated, would suffer patiently and would neither postpone nor pursue death to preserve their reputations:

They have the glory of chastity within them, the testimony of their conscience. They have this in the sight of God, and they ask for nothing more.²⁸

Machiavelli's Lucrezia begins as a Christian version of Livy's idealized Roman matron. She abandons the chastity of her forbear, but shares her pagan concern for honor. She lives to enjoy continued sexual infidelities with an untroubled conscience, but is careful to preserve her reputation, that is, the *appearance* of honor, as well. While both imitating and revising the Roman example, Machiavelli thoroughly rejects the Christian view.

Paul and Augustine preach the moral virtue of chastity because powerful sexual attractions, and even marriage, distract the Christian's attention from his primary concern with God and the eternal afterlife. If, to avoid worse distractions, one must marry, the marriage must be chaste. In a theology whose central notion is Love, deviation and failure are aptly described as fornication and adultery. The great Christian poets whom Machiavelli's contemporaries revered depict love for a woman as an image of the divine love to which man's soul aspires. Dante's Beatrice is unattainable except in the life hereafter, and even there she is a temporary stop on the way to a Love which no longer desires. This Christian view, reinforced with Renaissance Platonism, emerges as the ideal courtly love in *The Book of the Courtier*. The formulation is given after strict injunctions to faithfulness of wives to husbands, no matter how badly matched two partners are,²⁹ and after rejections of deceit in courtship:³⁰

Therefore let us direct all the thoughts and powers of our souls to this most holy light, that shows us the path leading to heaven; and, following after it and divesting ourselves of those passions wherewith we were clothed when we fell, by the ladder that bears the image of sensual beauty at its lowest rung, let us ascend to the lofty mansion where heavenly, lovely, and true beauty dwells, which lies hidden in the inmost secret recesses of God, so that profane eyes cannot behold it. Here we shall find a most happy end to our desires, true rest from our labors, the sure remedy for our miseries, most wholesome medicine for our illnesses, safest refuge from the dark storms of life's tempestuous sea.³¹

Machiavelli's remedy is a direct attack on the views which come together in *The Courtier*. Boldly, he introduces Callimaco as an outstanding example of "courtesy [*gentilezza*]." But the object of Callimaco's love is only a beautiful and virtuous woman. There is no indication that she represents anything more than that; he never

speaks of her as the embodiment of a perfect ideal. Concentrating on the "things of the world," Machiavelli abandons the quest for the City of God to speak about cities of men as they are, not as they ought to be. He follows Boccaccio's example in another "new" genre, and exalts the natural and present pleasures of sex.³² He recognizes that most men must abide by sexual regulations as a means to avoid the related evils of striving and strife. Thus, the Romans were wise to forbid mere mortals to indulge in the philanderings of Jupiter, and Moses' Decalogue prudently included a prohibition against adultery. But Machiavelli's play shows that, if one can indulge one's sexual desires secretly and with impunity, and even satisfy the desires of others in doing so, there is nothing inherently wrong with lust: purity is not a prime value for men or women. Part II of this essay will continue to explore the relationship between Machiavelli's rejection of Christianity and his teachings about politics and sex.

II. A PREACHER FOR FLORENCE

One of the most interesting members of the conspiracy to invade and conquer Messer Nicia's domain is Frate Timoteo, who makes possible Callimaco's first evening with Lucrezia. Since Machiavelli's discussions of ancient Rome often include or imply radical critiques of modern Rome, of the principles and effects of Christianity, it is important to understand how a modern Christian priest figures in this new version of the ancient story of Lucretia.

On May 17, 1521, when he was ambassador to the Friars Minor in Capri, Machiavelli wrote to Guicciardini how—sitting on a privy—he had contemplated the preacher he would like for Florence. Just as he has never lacked a republic, at least in thought, so he can now imagine a preacher—but, as in his other opinions, he will be "obstinate," and his view will differ from that of the other citizens:

They would like a preacher who would show them the road to Paradise, and I should like to find one who would teach them the way to go to the house of the Devil; they would like, besides, that he should be a man prudent, blameless and true; and I should like to find one crazier than Ponzo, more crafty than Fra Girolamo, more of a hypocrite than Frate Alberto . . . because I believe the true way of going to Paradise would be to learn the road to Hell in order to avoid it.³³

The *stage* friar Machiavelli creates for Florence is indeed crafty and hypocritical. Under the guise of Christian piety he teaches the road to hell. But in Machiavelli's play neither the Frate's flock nor the Florentine audience to whom this road is shown is counselled to avoid it.³⁴ In fact, like many of Machiavelli's other works, the play does not seriously dwell on the existence of hell—or of sin, conscience, or immortal souls. Timoteo's traditional Christian authority is depicted as serving private and profane aims contrary to traditional Christian beliefs. He is initially described as an "ill-living friar [*frate mal vissuto*]"; an audience would expect him to resemble the hypocritical friars so often condemned in Renaissance literature. But as the play progresses, the "ends" of his participation in the conspiracy are repeatedly referred to as "*beni*." The good is now synonymous with the advantageous. By redefining "the good," Machiavelli's play rejects the Christian notion that "an evil man out of his evil treasure" will always bring forth evil.³⁵ A closer look at his Christians will show why.

Frate Timoteo's greatest influence seems to be with women. We first see him in a crowd of women speaking with one widow (III, 3). As we soon realize, this widow's religious belief is really belief in the priest's authority, or belief in his beliefs. Thus she asks in the same tone whether the priest believes ("*credete voi?*") her husband is in purgatory and, shortly after, whether he believes ("*credete voi?*") the Turks will pass through Italy this year. The latter question, which also reveals her frightened belief in rumors about Turkish torture, is one which amused Machiavelli when the womanish Friars Minor discussed it with him.³⁶ But Frate Timoteo is no ordinary weak Friar. Believing that "all women have few brains" (III, 9), he manipulates Sostrata, who believes everything he says, and finally even Lucrezia, who doubts him. The only *man* who trusts Timoteo is Messer Nicia. Although he, too, thinks women are stupid, he is soft and credulous like them. As he gains "faith" in the false doctor Callimaco, Nicia says he trusts him as much as his confessor (II, 6). Although Nicia is not a devout practicing Christian, he has been brought up in the Church and maintains an attachment to it. Machiavelli seems to suggest that Italian Christianity, along with Nicia's indolent bourgeois life, has made him impotent in more than one way and, therefore, subject to the deceits of more vigorous men.

Here, as elsewhere, Machiavelli indicates that the virtues, as taught

by Christianity, appeal to and cultivate the feminine in human nature.³⁷ To Machiavelli, those like the friars, who might be said to have "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,"³⁸ are no different from women. Christian virtue thrives on peace and indoors activities, and teaches brotherhood and submissive obedience to authority. The strife that arises in modern times, like that mentioned in the play between Christians and Turks, or between Florence and France over Papal alliances, is between conflicting religious parties. It may be especially fierce and bloody, but it is carried out in the name at least of future peace and love. Machiavelli sees these aims as unattainable and regards attempts to achieve them as likely to produce even worse disorders than the pre-Christian world endured. In place of this effeminate, even impotent, humane notion of human virtue and the evils it gives rise to, Machiavelli would substitute the vigorous "*antica virtù*" that he admires in the Romans. He would like to see this *virtù*—with all the implications of virility in its Latin root—born anew in his city.³⁹ This renaissance would be accompanied by an ardent love of liberty and independence, and by the ability to defend oneself and one's domain. In this renewal, the virtues taught by religion and treasured by the common people, especially women, would or would not be employed by strong men, according to their aims and circumstances.

Timoteo's first association with the conspirators is the abortion ruse. After this first test, he virtually contracts himself to cooperate with Callimaco and Ligurio. It is soon clear that Timoteo uses popular religious beliefs and fears to further his own ends. He pretends to the women that he learns how to act by studying books, but unlike Nicia and ordinary friars, he is familiar with the "things of the world." This is underlined by his allusions to time, which are surprisingly frequent for a man whose traditional focus might be expected to be on eternity.⁴⁰ Like Savonarola, Timoteo is crafty. Although he ceaselessly inveighed against the worldly-wise, the great Florentine preacher may—according to Machiavelli—have availed himself of their methods. Unlike the Roman augurs, Savonarola was a Christian and preached in an enlightened city. But like them, he gained the confidence of the people through references to supernatural powers. Numa claims he spoke with a nymph, whereas "The people of Florence . . . were persuaded by Frate Girolamo Savonarola that he spoke with God" (D. I, 11). Machiavelli does not

comment further on the *truth* of the belief Savonarola inspired.

Timoteo, too, combines worldly *virtù* with Christianity. We know that his miracles are man-made. Like *mandragola*, they are contrived by astute men to manipulate beliefs, and thus events, as they desire. Just as Callimaco's "remedy" works only because Nicia has "faith" in him, the Frate's miracles work because of his ability to inspire belief, faith, and trust. The connection between the success of "miracles" and the ability of the people involved is nicely presented in *Clizia*. At one point, Sofronia's credulous husband refers to the characters of *Mandragola* and to Timoteo's success when he prayed that Lucrezia might have a child. Sofronia, who prays for a miracle on her own behalf and then manipulates her husband's beliefs to insure that it occurs, knows how the Frate works miracles. Like other prudent and competent people in Machiavelli's works, he relies only on himself.⁴¹ Like the Romans, Timoteo knows the value of religion which is "used well" (D. I, 13, 14, 15). Thus, he recognizes that the reputation of a miracle-working Madonna depends on the friars, and that they have been lax. Repeating the words he uses about women, he remarks that his friars have "few brains" (V, 1). For Machiavelli, the only miracle in *Mandragola* might be one like that referred to in his chapter on conspiracies in the *Discourses*: "When one [a conspiracy] has been kept secret among many men for a long time it is held to be a miraculous thing" (D. III, 6).

The debunking of miracles is accompanied by the parody or distorted use of religious language throughout the play. In the hymn-like Song to trickery, "*inganno*" is not only the "remedy high and rare" which Nicia supposes is *mandragola*; it is also the means of true salvation:

you show the straight path to wandering souls; you with your great valor, in making someone blessed you make Love rich. You conquer, with your holy counsels alone, stones, venoms, and enchantments.

Similarly, the Song after Act Four asserts that "holy" Night is the only cause that makes souls blessed." The only "*passione*" in the play is the one which makes Lucrezia sweat (III, 11), and the adulterous "mystery" is watched over by Saint Cuckoo and the Angel Raphael. Perhaps Machiavelli is playing upon the angel's name, which means "*God* has healed" (*italics added*).⁴² The "match"

between Lucrezia and Callimaco, which is arranged by the marriage broker Ligurio, is solemnized in church by Frate Timoteo. This solemn blessing and Callimaco's consent to be the baby's godfather are further blasphemies Machiavelli suggests in connection with his new preacher.

Timoteo must accomplish several "seductions" of his own to earn the alms he desires. Like Machiavelli's men of *virtù*, he makes no attempt to raise his parishioners to unattainable standards. He never exhorts them to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."^{4 3} Rather he descends to the level of Sostrata and uses her to attain his purpose. Lucrezia's mother speaks often of her "conscience," which is eased as soon as the priest assures her that the proposed act is not sinful. Like Callimaco and the "good companions [*buon compagni*]" of the Prologue, she is a "*buona compagna*" (I, i) at heart. She herself expresses the principle of choosing "the best among bad courses [*de cattivi partiti il migliore*]" (III, 1), and advises her daughter to relax and enjoy her evening. Lucrezia, however, whose nature is alien to love ("*le cose d'amore*") and amusements, requires a discussion about sin and conscience. Timoteo's arguments are based on the Machiavellian premise of no absolute good or evil, or as the Frate says, "It is the truth that there is no honey without flies." (III, 4).^{4 4} Early in the play he accepts Ligurio's argument for abortion because the "good [*bene*] is what does good for the most people" (III, 4). Ligurio begins "I believe" and articulates a utilitarian definition of good which replaces the moral virtues traditionally taught by religion. This new "credo" is blessed by Timoteo and developed in subsequent discussions with Lucrezia.

The Frate's rhetoric is calculated to lead her "to my wishes" (III, 9). He begins with the argument that strange and fearful things seem normal and acceptable when we are used to them (III, 11). "As to the conscience," he generalizes that a "certain good [*bene*] is always preferable to an uncertain evil" (III, 11). Despite his willingness to condone an abortion earlier, he now emphasizes the good deed of creating another soul for the Lord. Later, in private, he too seems uneasy about his actions, but again he rationalizes them by the "great good [*bene*]" (IV, 6) that will come from the evils of deceit, adultery, and his own desire for money.

With Lucrezia, however, he denies that the act is a sin. This belief, he declares, is a "fable [*favola*]." We might think here of the stories

teaching that chastity is inviolable, like those in Livy, Ovid, or the medieval exemplary fables. At this point, Timoteo repeats some of the pleas of the original Lucretia's husband and friends, who beg her not to despair. Timoteo's argument that "the will is what sins, not the body" is almost a parody of the extended discussion of Lucretia's chastity in *The City of God*:

"A paradox! There were two persons involved and only one committed adultery." Finely and truly said. The speaker observed in the union of two bodies the disgusting lechery of the one, the chaste intention of the other, and he saw in that act not the conjunction of their bodies but the diversity of their minds. There were two persons involved, but only one committed adultery.⁴⁵

The Frate advises the Christian Lucrezia that, since her will does not approve, she should willingly sleep with the stranger.

Timoteo does not differ from the other conspirators with respect to the conscience. Siro seems to have none: he'd enjoy seeing Nicia cuckolded as long as the dupers are not caught (II, 4). Nicia never mentions his conscience. He regrets having to harm the young man but is mainly concerned with discovery by The Eight, the Florentine criminal tribunal. Ligurio has no regrets before or after his trick. And Callimaco, though he briefly wonders whether he'll be punished in the hereafter, decides, like Castruccio Castracani, that there are many good people in hell (IV, 1).⁴⁶ As in Machiavelli's more serious works, nothing need burden the conscience if one is not discovered in an immoral act. Only the imprudent have need of repentance.

Timoteo prefers another *favola* to demonstrate that "the end is to be regarded in all things" (III, 1). This, of course, is a precept Machiavelli puts forth in *The Prince* while denying that there is any higher judgment for consciences to look to (P. XVIII). The Frate's "end" is, as usual, quite different from the end to which Christians look. Timoteo cites the story of Lot's daughters in Genesis and argues that they were not disobedient to God and should not be blamed. Rather, they acted prudently, sacrificing their personal virtue for another end: the good, the advantage, of the greatest number. Lucrezia has already told her mother that nothing could justify the adultery to her, even if she were responsible for the continuation of the whole human race (III, 10). Her confessor assures her that, "because their [Lot's daughters'] intention was good, they did not sin" (III, 11). He glibly approves of an act which

Biblical commentaries are reticent to discuss. Even if Genesis does not condemn the daughters, the narration is careful not to exonerate them.

In his depiction of Timoteo, Machiavelli takes liberties with the Christian Bible as well as with the Hebrew. His new preacher is not like the members of "new orders" like the Franciscans and Dominicans (D. III, 1) who try to return to the original principles of their religion. Nor are his ends those of Savonarola who attempted, but failed, to restore Christian faith through "new modes and orders" (P. VI). On the contrary, Machiavelli's new preacher seems to reject what his own religion stood for in its beginnings. This may be indicated in his name, which appears to be more than an ironic joke about his failure to honor God. In the New Testament, Timothy is the recipient of two letters from Saint Paul, who describes him elsewhere: "I have no one like him who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served me in the Gospel."⁴⁷ Paul recognizes in Timothy a young man who will take up the Apostle's mission now that Paul is approaching his own end. What does Paul expect from the Timothies who will follow him? Most of the first Epistle is devoted to the problems of church administration and the behavior of clerics. It also speaks at length of the modesty of women, especially of widows like the one Timoteo counsels in his first appearance. Although woman transgressed, she "will be saved through bearing children if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."⁴⁸ Finally, the letter contains the famous warning that "love of money is the root of all evils."⁴⁹ Machiavelli is well aware of the "evils" which originate in avarice, but his depiction of Timoteo and his discussions in the political writings make clear the differences between his attitudes and Paul's.

From his first appearance, to the last scene of the play, Timoteo is depicted in the act of receiving money. The Frate's desire for private wealth is not emphasized, for reasons discussed below, but the likely abuse of the responsibility to collect money for others is evident to Machiavelli, who repeatedly refers to the prominent place of greed in human nature. He is deeply critical of teachings and institutions which do little to mitigate the evils of human nature while ineffectively exhorting men to purify themselves in anticipation of

an afterlife. The Frate's position shows what Machiavelli sees as a tension between prescriptions of otherworldliness and poverty on the one hand, and the injunction to minister to one's flock on the other. He also thinks that "love of money" need not be the "root of all evils." The Frate's aim is clearly money, but in this play its use is not specified. Timoteo's continuing personal "good" depends on the "good" of his parishioners, and so he aims at a Machiavellian arrangement of mutual self-interest: some of the money *will* be used to maintain belief by acts of charity. Thus Machiavelli suggests that Timoteo's "love of money" may result in some "goods,"—though not in Paul's sense—as well as evils. The same would be even more true of unfettered political leaders in uncorrupt states. While avoiding the amassing of private fortunes and the concomitant growth of faction, luxury, and indolence, a prudent leader *can* guide his state to glory and power by the judicious management of money and men's love for it.

Mandragola should also be read in conjunction with Paul's second Epistle to Timothy:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people. For among them are those who make their way into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.⁵⁰

Machiavelli's Timothy is an instrument and ally of "such people" and he knowingly ignores the Epistle's advice to the soldiers of God "not to get entangled in civilian pursuits."⁵¹

Machiavelli gives us revised versions of characters from old books. Perhaps his boldest innovation is his presentation of an unholy family in the act of conception. Instead of a divine lover who "took our infirmities, bore our diseases" by fathering a baby,⁵² we see a cunning "doctor" visit a chaste wife's bed at night under cover of the grotesque *mandragola* story, leaving the participants feeling "reborn" the next morning. In Machiavelli's renaissance and renewal, men who know this world rely on themselves alone, not on hopes of being saved.⁵³

Those who believe that Machiavelli was a believing Christian will question the identification of Timoteo with his creator. Such readers might protest that the distortions of religion by a stage character are not Machiavelli's and that the author is attacking only institutional corruption and not the principles of the religion itself. They might remind us that thoughtful readers of dramatic dialogue always assume that no character is speaking for the author; relaxing this assumption would be like attributing to Molière the casuistic blasphemies of Tartuffe, something Molière goes to great lengths to deny in his defensive and moralistic preface to that play. But, as we have seen, Machiavelli is curiously unassertive about the conventional moral lessons to be drawn from this play. He does not claim—because he cannot—as Molière does, that he has removed all that might confuse good with evil.⁵⁴

Like Ligurio, Timoteo is introduced as a familiar stock character. But just as the conventional parasite metamorphoses into a version of Machiavelli's *capitano*, Timoteo turns out to be like Machiavelli's projected preacher for Florence. The "*frate mal vissuto*" of the Prologue is *not* presented as an evil and disgusting example to alienate the audience. Compared to his brother friars in the works of Machiavelli's contemporaries, Timoteo is remarkably reserved. For example, there is no indication that the Frate enjoys luxurious food and clothing, or women, and he is scrupulous about performing his formal duties. Productions which present him as a repulsive sensualist who paws Lucrezia, misunderstand Machiavelli's intent. He is not like Boccaccio's Frate Alberto, as Meredith thought, nor is he an Italian model for Tartuffe: "The Frate Timoteo of this piece is only a very oily Friar compliantly assisting an intrigue with ecclesiastical sophisms (to use the mildest word) for payment."⁵⁵ As we have seen, he is shrewder and more self-controlled than the usual Tartuffes, and as a result, he is a far greater threat to the religion he professes; for, like Ligurio, what he really wants is not bodily pleasure, but money and the satisfaction of manipulating his fellow men.

Although Machiavelli is amused at his friar's hypocrisy, and recognizes that the Frate is used by better men, he does share the *credo* articulated by Ligurio and affirmed by the Frate. This is evident from the Song about trickery which immediately follows Timoteo's long discussion with Lucrezia in Act Three. The Song is

Machiavelli's: it comes between the acts as a comment on the action. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to Machiavelli's role as a teacher of youth and to his use of *comedy* as a vehicle to instruct the audience in the ways of Timoteo and Ligurio.

III. COMEDY AND THE YOUNG

Like the Platonic Socrates and like Saint Paul, Machiavelli is, in his political writings, self-conscious and explicit about his relationship to the young. His aim is to substitute his teachings of "new modes and orders" for the teachings of earlier writers. *The Prince* and the *Discourses* are written treatises. Although they differ in form, magnitude and emphasis, they are alike in that they are books with public subjects which are addressed to readers who will study them privately. The busy young ruler to whom Machiavelli dedicates *The Prince* will read this short terse handbook and learn the Machiavellian mode of acquiring and maintaining a state. The longer and more rambling *Discourses* are dedicated to two friends of the author, young gentlemen worthy to be princes, who will peruse the volumes at their leisure. Machiavelli's stated intention is to inspire these readers to carry his project to its "destined place" (D. I, pref.). In the Introduction to the second book, he hopes to excite the minds of the young who will outlive him:

For it is the duty of a good man to teach others that good which, through the malignity of the times and of fortune, he has not been able to perform; so that, many capable ones hearing of it, some of them, more loved by heaven, might be able to perform it. (D. II, intro.)

These political books are also, in a way, *about* the young, since youth and vigor, although they do not guarantee *virtù*, are likely to be accompanied by it. Machiavelli says that Fortune, which always figures in the outcome of events, is "the young man's friend" (P. XXV), and he admires "those who had the honors of triumph when very young men" (D. I, 60).

Mandragola differs from the treatises in being a publicly presented work with a private subject. The hostile Prologue, as Guicciardini suggested, says more about the author than about his audience,^{5 6}

and cannot be considered a dedication. But the identity of this audience is of the utmost importance in understanding Machiavelli's intent. Insofar as *Mandragola* has the same aim as the political writings, it too is addressed to the young, to those who are not yet fully formed. Machiavelli's audience is composed of young gentlemen, like Buondelmonte and Rucellai of the *Discourses*, who frequented the social and cultural gatherings in the courts and great houses of Italian cities. In Urbino they participated in soirées of the sort depicted in Castiglione's *Courtier*; in Florence they gathered for discussions with Marsilio Ficino in the court of Lorenzo de' Medici or, more recently with Machiavelli himself in the Rucellai gardens. And they attended productions of Roman and contemporary plays like those patronized by the Duke of Ferrara, or presented at various celebrations, like the wedding of Lucrezia Borgia.

Mandragola is not intended directly to reach the public at large. But the particular coterie to whom the play is addressed is one whose attitudes and future actions will have the greatest effect on the wider community. For these elite young gentlemen are the future princes, or in the right circumstances, the future republican leaders of Italy. The circumstances under which Machiavelli wrote make all his writings "political" events. What he says must always be considered in the context of what he *could* say. It is thus necessary to pay the utmost attention to the sources to whom he attributes his teachings, that is, to the dramatic "characters" in his political books. The genre of *Mandragola* makes it the most public of his attempts to teach the young.⁵⁷ It also permits Machiavelli to say everything, for in a drama, the author himself says nothing.

Machiavelli's concern with the young is especially evident in *The Art of War*, which should be considered with *Mandragola*. Like the play, it is a dialogue in which the author never speaks. These two "dramatic" works are vehicles for the same principles Machiavelli sets forth in the political books, but their forms make these teachings more palatable, and hence, more publishable. In the lightest and in the gravest pursuits the core of Machiavelli's teachings about justice is commonly acknowledged: all's fair in love and war. In the political books, not published during the author's lifetime, we learn that the true prince is as self-serving as a lover and as ruthless as a military *capitano*.

The Art of War is a technical handbook; its comments on

Christianity, justice, and leadership are absorbed as the reader pores over military strategems. The dialogue is clearly concerned with the young. Old Fabrizio Colonna converses in the Rucellai gardens with elite young men who will learn from him to revive ancient military practices. Like Machiavelli, Fabrizio won't live to see the enterprise through. The youngest questioner wishes to see the imagined army in action. Fabrizio's exchanges with him seem to parody Socrates' discussions with other young men about an imagined city: Fabrizio's projections are realizable.

The Art of War, like *Mandragola*, makes clear that love is an activity inferior to war. Cosimo Rucellai wrote love poems until Fortune would lead him to "higher activities." The form of the dialogue seems to parallel that of Boccaccio's *Decameron*: in a ravaged and suffering Italy worthy young people retire to a garden for conversation, taking turns at "absolute power." Machiavelli's version replaces the theme of love with that of war. There are no women in the Rucellai gardens, and the consolations of love are replaced by the remedy of military *virtù*.

Philosophers, poets, and political men have remarked that poetry is more suited to teach morality than is history. This is implied in Aristotle's statement that poetry is more philosophic than history: in poetry human events occur not by chance, but as they would in a moral and rationally ordered universe. In *The Advancement of Learning* Francis Bacon elaborates on this view: "because true history propoundeth the success and issues of action not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed Providence. . ."⁵⁸ In the terms of his famous formula about Machiavelli, poetry depicts, not what men do, but what they ought to do.⁵⁹ For Bacon, "poesy" is useful only as an expression of human customs, passions, and yearnings. He thus advises reading *history* as a practical guide for human action: "it is not good to stay too long in the theatre."⁶⁰ Perhaps he might consider Machiavelli's theatre an exception. For *Mandragola* is effective precisely because it depicts poetically—and universally—the material Bacon assigns to history: the world as it is, not as it should be according to philosophers, poets, and preachers. Thus, we are shown what traditional morality would probably view as a deplorable but "true-to-life" situation: clever men enjoying the fruits of their immoral actions. But Bacon's formulae, both about

history and about Machiavelli, are misleading. The greatest histories are "poetic"; they order events so as to draw universal, philosophic conclusions about them. This is true of Machiavelli's histories, or commentaries upon history. Furthermore, like these "poetic" histories, Machiavelli's "historical" poetry does not really abandon the attempt to set standards for human behavior. Rather, it substitutes new standards for the "merits of virtue and vice." Thus, we must explore further the poetic vehicle Machiavelli uses to make his "historical" views of human action the accepted ones.

It has been said that there is no place for tragedy in the works of Machiavelli.⁶¹ His views of human *virtù* and Fortune preclude a world where pity, fear, and the recognition of divine justice constitute the proper human attitude. But Machiavelli is at home in the comic realm, both within his political writings, and in his avowedly comic works, dramatic, narrative, and poetic. One effective way to undermine the sacred doctrines of older teachings is to refuse to recognize their seriousness. As Leo Strauss says, "If it is true that every complete society necessarily recognizes something about which it is absolutely forbidden to laugh, we may say that the determination to transgress that prohibition *sanza alcuno rispetto*, is of the essence of Machiavelli's intention."⁶² But Machiavelli's "comic" *view* does not fully explain the way in which the genre of *Mandragola* is so well suited to his project. We must now return to the question of how Machiavelli uses *comedy* to teach the young as they watch "*un giovane*" seduce "*una giovane*"⁶³ from her older husband and from her old-fashioned morals.

A. Comedy and Morality

The greatest comedies in the western tradition tend to conserve established "modes and orders." They may be critical of particulars—of timely fashions, government policies, the pretenses of the professions, the rigidity of age and authority—but they usually end by affirming the traditional teaching about virtues and vices which the older generation seeks to pass on to the young. Thus, in one type of intrigue plot the young lover and his supporters conspire to defeat or circumvent an opponent (often older) who would "usurp" the lover's place and interfere with his desires. New information, chance, the ability of the intriguers, and the stupidity of the opponents, accomplish what the audience recognizes as the appropriate and

better arrangement: the enemies of youth are defeated, either reformed and reconciled, or punished and expelled. But youthful exuberance and passion must also accept limits, and so moral virtue is not really questioned. Individual elders may err, comically and with consequences, but the old *morality* emerges intact. A more satirical intrigue plot presents a conspiracy of clever rogues who prey on equally vicious or on foolish dupes. Here, too, the action may imply serious criticism of the established values and authorities, but, in the end, the play demonstrates the nonviability of deviations from the life of virtue.⁶⁴ In the plays of Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Molière, these two intrigue plots—with modifications and variations—occur repeatedly.⁶⁵ In them deviants may be loved and enjoyed, and even ambivalently admired, but eventually they are exposed and perhaps punished, and the rightful order is restored.

But this conservative effect is easily lost—through artistic shortcomings or by design. As a result, moral authorities have always been suspicious of the youthful intrigues of comic drama. Not necessarily, but not infrequently, comedy has been justly charged with subverting morality. The remainder of this essay will examine how changes in the traditional elements of intrigue plots enable Machiavelli to exploit some subversive *tendencies* of comedy in order to convey his truly subversive teachings. His intrigue plot is as different from those of conventional intrigue comedies as *The Prince* is from the conventional “mirror of princes” books whose form it resembles. Machiavelli’s writings, both comic and serious, are still didactic, but what they teach is new.

B. Comic Conspiracies

Readers of the *Discourses* know that Machiavelli thought carefully about what might now be called the “psychology” of conspiracies. Readers of *Mandragola* have recognized, in the remarks of Callimaco, Ligurio, and Timoteo, key maxims of Machiavelli’s teachings about conspiracy. The early acts of the play depict the formation of the conspiracy as new members are added. In comedy Machiavelli employs an appropriate vehicle for his teachings because comedy often works by effecting a “conspiracy” outside the play, as well as within it. Bergson’s suggestion that laughter functions as a “social gesture,” assumes that members of an audience in a theatre feel a

common bond as they identify with some characters on stage and laugh at others: "laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity with other laughers."⁶⁶ The nature of the conspiracies which a playwright establishes (1) among the characters, (2) among the spectators, and (3) between the spectators and the characters on stage, is responsible for whether the play will have a conservative or subversive effect on the morality of those spectators.

The comic theatre can be, as Bergson suggests, an institution which restricts immoral or unsocial deviations, as do the plots described above. On the other hand, comedy shares the power of all drama to make the audience identify with the characters imitated on stage—even if they would condemn them in real life. Thus, as Rousseau feared, stage imitations have a special ability to undermine morality:

Let us dare say it without being roundabout, Which of us is sure enough of himself to bear the performance of such a comedy without halfway taking part in the deeds which are played in it? Who would not be a bit distressed if the thief were to be taken by surprise or fail in his attempt? Who does not himself become a thief for a minute in being concerned about him? For is being concerned about someone anything other than putting oneself in his place? A fine instruction for the youth, one in which grown men have difficulty protecting themselves from the seductions of vice! Is that to say that it is never permissible to show blamable actions in the theatre? No; but in truth, to know how to put a rascal on the stage, a very good man must be the author.⁶⁷

The tendency to be "drawn into" the play is especially strong in intrigue comedies because the spectator is so often invited to identify with a successful *group*, rather than with an outstanding but isolated and doomed individual, as in tragedy. This suggests that comedy is capable of both greater social and moral "affirmation" (the spectator vicariously participates in the *group* reconciliation and celebration of accepted values), and greater "subversion" (the spectator identifies with a *group* that successfully celebrates its rejection of those values).

Returning now to the play itself, we can see that Machiavelli's views about human nature and politics are responsible for his revisions of the conventional conspiracy plot. These revisions are, in turn, responsible for differences in audience response, and, thus, for the Machiavellian subversion. This is evident in his depiction of the

intriguers and their success, and his depiction of the duped—the objects of the intrigue—as well.

In his comic intriguers, Machiavelli makes attractive what would ordinarily be condemned as immoral. Callimaco is young, handsome, vigorous, and intelligent. Macaulay's objections to the comedies of Wycherly and Congreve is apt here, since the writers for the English Restoration stage sometimes used—or abused—some of the same comic elements as Machiavelli. Referring especially to their subversive attitudes towards "conjugal fidelity," Macaulay argues that ". . . morality is deeply interested in this, that what is immoral shall not be presented to the imagination of the young and susceptible in constant connection with what is attractive."⁶⁸ "Conservative" comedies often present an attractive young hero who embraces immoral schemes to satisfy immoral desires. But, as I shall suggest below, in these comedies our potential sympathy for such actions and passions gradually undergoes a metamorphosis. For example, either the hero's (and our sympathetic) initial fancy or lust is discredited by laughter or punishment, or it is controlled and transformed into a more spiritual and a legally sanctioned love. Neither of these things happens in *Mandragola*.

Machiavelli's conspirators defy a distinction often made in comedies between "well- or ill-intentioned" rogues.⁶⁹ They most resemble the sympathetic schemers of a plot like that of *Cassina/Clizia*. However, in *Mandragola*, the young dupers are not the rightful opponents of a would-be usurper, but, as I have suggested, the usurpers themselves. Thus, like Volpone and Mosca in Jonson's play, they are underminers of morality. The merging of the two intrigue plots described above and exemplified here by *Cassina* and *Volpone*, leads the audience to approve of Machiavelli's attractive conspirators. There is no conventional "poetic justice" in *Mandragola*. According to Machiavelli, justice is not a primary consideration, except insofar as it too might contribute to success. Machiavelli's rogues are eminently successful and thus are never exposed and punished. Their success, as I have suggested, depends on their benefiting others. Thus, although the conspirators are subverters of morality, they are not conventionally vicious, that is, ill-intentioned.⁷⁰ If comedy supports morality by making us angry at (or at least contemptuous of) the right things—by sharpening our sense of justice—Machiavelli's comedy deliberately undermines morality. We experience nothing like

our desire to see the tripping up of such arch-deceivers as Molière's Tartuffe, Jonson's Volpone and Mosca, or even more sympathetic deviants like Malvolio or Falstaff. Nor do we feel our initial relish for the intrigue turn to contempt, as we do for Boccaccio's comic (though unstaged) Frate Alberto. The conspiracy succeeds completely and there is no suggestion, like those found repeatedly in Jonson's didactic comedies, that the partners will defeat themselves.

Some readers have thought that Machiavelli's plays exhibit the successful maneuverings of clever people in order to help those who witness them learn to protect themselves. The printer of the first edition of *The Prince* suggested something similar when he sought Church protection against those who "do not know that those who instruct in the use of herbs and medicine, also instruct in poisons, in order to know how to guard against them." This would seem to be the intent of traditional moral fables like Aesop's or La Fontaine's, which often present a simplified narrated version of tricks like those in the intrigue comedies. But the fables, like some comedies, run the risk of mis-teaching—precisely because the schemer is attractive and goes unpunished. In *Émile*, Rousseau discusses the didactic effect of these stories on the "very young." According to Rousseau, the problem with La Fontaine's engaging fables is that they have the effect, if not the intention, of encouraging the young to identify with the successful fox, ant, or lion. Furthermore, since fraud is more admirable than force, when a clever gnat defeats a lion, the child's sympathies will be with the gnat. This, I believe, is the *intended* effect of *Mandragola*, and it is well described by Rousseau: "You are teaching them how to make another drop his cheese, rather than how to keep their own."¹ Unlike Jonson, whose moral lesson requires the humiliation and punishment of Volpone, the Fox, Machiavelli openly advertises elsewhere (P. XVIII) that he is teaching the "virtues" of the fox (and the lion). Machiavelli's fox is, of course, much more prudent than Jonson's.

The injunction to develop subhuman characteristics is accompanied by the celebration of Chiron the Centaur, identified by Machiavelli as the teacher of Achilles (P. XVIII), and, we might add, of Asclepius the physician. Machiavelli, who in the Dedication to *The Prince*, presents *himself* as the teacher of princes, seems to identify his teachings with those of Chiron. The centaur makes no appearance in *Mandragola*, but he watches from the wings, directing the action

from backstage. Whether or not Machiavelli was responsible for the frontispiece of the first edition of the play (1518), the picture it bears could not be more appropriate. A centaur stands before us. In addition to the conventional strung bow on his back, this centaur bears another bow with which he plays a violin. The second bow distinguishes him from the many centaurs of classical and neo-classical art, those imprudent half-beasts who rape women and fight wars over the stolen brides of others. He is Chiron, the pupil of Artemis and Apollo, who told Peleus a cunning way to win the elusive Thetis as his lawful wife, and who later became the tutor to the son of this union. Although the author of the play was known, this first title page does not bear his name. Instead, it bears what might be considered a personal emblem. The prudent use of arms is a central theme in Machiavelli's political writings. Here, however, the instruments of war are at rest, and the centaur concentrates on the instruments of love and of poetry, the violin (*lira da braccio*) being a modern Italian improvement on the lyre of Apollo. As I have suggested above, princes can be taught remedies for the ills of their times through plays and poetry, as well as through political writings.⁷²

Machiavelli's view of human nature is responsible for differences in our attitudes towards the conventionally *deceived* characters, as well as towards their deceivers. In most "conservative" comedies the former are either virtuous and unjustly abused innocents, or vicious and justly abused rogues. In *Volpone* the victims with whom we sympathize are superhuman personifications named Bonario and Celia. Similar characters often appear in plays whose authors emphasize their moral purpose. Even *The Country Wife* has its Alithea and Harcourt, hardly superhuman, but clearly exemplary by the end of the play. *Mandragola* strikingly lacks characters like these who, however pallid and weak they appear next to Jonson's and Wycherly's able rogues, invite allegiance because they stand for an uncorrupt morality.⁷³ *Mandragola*, as Robert Heilman remarks, "is sometimes called a satire, but it is hard to see it as such, for it includes no dramatic assertion of an alternative standard which would invite criticism of the mode of life depicted."⁷⁴ Once again, the absence of such characters is not surprising in a play by a writer who rejects the traditional exhortations to imitate the superhuman as a standard for human beings. Machiavelli also omits—and in this he

resembles Jonson—any characters who are virtuous but also intelligent and witty.⁷⁵ Once more this suggests that intelligence means knowing how to be both moral and immoral, depending on the circumstances.

Let us now turn to the other victims of the standard intrigue plot, the rogues who are punished by superior rogues. Again, Machiavelli's view of human nature is responsible for changes in our attitudes. Though other examples would do, *Volpone* provides an especially revealing contrast. Jonson demeans the vicious duped, as well as the vicious dupers, by caricaturing them as subhuman beasts. Thus, the wicked Volpone and Mosca prey on characters named Corvino, Voltore, and Corbaccio. Again, it is not surprising that Machiavelli, the teacher of *virtù* rather than of moral virtue, never suggests that his characters are less than human, either in their moral or intellectual shortcomings. As far as I can tell, the word "*bestia*" (or its derivatives) occurs six times in the play: in reference to Callimaco's desperate plot (I, 3), to women mismatched with inferior men (I, 3), to Lucrezia's fanatic piety (II, 6), to Sostrata who can be counted on to convince her daughter to cooperate (III, 9), and to widows without children (III, 11), and to men without women (V, 6). In the first and fourth cases the "bestial" is embraced and put to use. In the third and last cases the term refers derogatorily to human beings who refuse to "accommodate" themselves—another frequent phrase—in order to secure their comfort and convenience in this world. Machiavelli thus inverts the traditional sense of this term as he does others.

Messer Nicia and Jonson's Corvino both arrange for their wives' adultery and their own cuckolding. But the naturalistic characterization and almost affectionate tone of Machiavelli's play reveal a radical difference between the two comedies. Corvino is depicted as vicious and evil, while Nicia is shown only to be simple and lax; Corvino is punished by the Scrutineo, while Messer Nicia not only escapes notice of the Eight, but is peculiarly rewarded. Machiavelli's neutral presentation of the anonymous Donna in Act Three, Scene One is another example of his refusal to condemn either forceful superior people or their weak inferiors as "immoral."⁷⁶ Human beings are neither all good nor all evil (D. I, 27). Lowering our moral expectations or standards makes us judge only in terms of *virtù*. In stage comedy, as in life, it is difficult to feel righteously hostile or

vindictive towards people who lack ability. Justice does not require the punishment of stupidity and Machiavelli mutes Nicia's moral shortcomings. Thus, we only laugh at Nicia's simplicity. If ability and aptness to succeed are all that matter, we will support the conspiracy of the able.

C. *Comic Misrule: Roman Comedy*

One way in which many comedies depict the overthrow of the sanctioned rules of society without subverting these "modes and orders" by audience complicity in the overthrow, is to indicate clearly the *temporary* character of the upset. The conventional "comedies of misrule" are related, however distantly, to medieval Feasts of Fools and Saturnalian carnivals, whose function was to serve as an outlet and, ultimately, to *preserve* the order and hierarchy of everyday moral life.⁷⁷ This conservative function helps explain why they were sanctioned by Roman officials and, later, though more uneasily, by the Church. Machiavelli seems to have given some thought to the political uses and consequences of carnival and its absence.⁷⁸ But his play differs greatly from Roman and Shakespearean comedies which allowed nonparticipating spectators to experience vicariously the release which the older festivals had provided. The nymphs and shepherds in the first song of *Mandragola* emphasize the permanence of their withdrawal from serious pursuits. As I have argued, the play which follows emphasizes a similar permanent "release" from the restrictions of ancient morality and the Church. A brief look at the Roman plays from which *Mandragola* is superficially descended will demonstrate what a distant grandchild Machiavelli's play really is.

In Plautus and Terence there is much that is racy and vulgar, and the plays are populated with those engaged in irregular sexual pursuits. But the reader will find few plays which inherently undermine the strict Roman morality of the audience that watched it. Once again, chastity and grave Roman women serve as a gauge. Virgins do not appear on stage;⁷⁹ habitual sexual license is limited to courtesans and their pimps; rapes are committed but there are mitigating circumstances; maidens remain miraculously intact or are overcome only by force and are often married when their true identity is discovered. Young people who defy their elders—even when they are justified by the folly of these elders—are reconciled

with them and recognize their authority. They often ask for pardon or forgiveness, thus admitting their misbehavior.⁸⁰ Young men grow out of their impulsive yielding to nature, and become responsible husbands, fathers, and senators. Slaves may trick their masters, but they don't demand their freedom; there are reminders that they may be punished after the plays end. The dramas are only brief releases from the stringent moral codes of Roman life, and rarely fail to affirm accepted notions of piety, filial duty, chaste conjugal love, and friendship. As Duckworth says, "the plots are basically moral; the good are rewarded and villainous or lustful characters (*leno, miles, senex amato*) are punished . . . all this is not very edifying, perhaps, but neither is it harmful to the morals of the spectators."⁸¹

Furthermore, the plays avoid the danger of corruption or more than a temporary desire for "misrule" in the spectators, by not presenting a too-naturalistic world with which these spectators might identify. They are set far from Rome in a place infamous for license. The characters are, for the most part, stock stage types rather than naturalistic individuals, and the language, too, is conventional and removed (music and verse). In contrast, as Carlo Goldoni recognized, the power of *Mandragola* lies in its naturalism. It was precisely this powerful naturalism in the service of dubious actions which made the admiring young Goldoni uncomfortable—even as he resisted his father's ire for reading such literature.⁸² To those who would protest that the action Machiavelli's play presents is limited to the make-believe world of the stage, we might remember Macaulay's reply to Lamb's apology for the English Restoration playwrights: Machiavelli's setting is the audience's Florence, the people are recognizable, the language is natural, and "one hundred little touches make the fictitious world look like the actual world."⁸³

Perhaps these generalizations about Roman comedy are more consistently applicable to Plautus, but they also describe most of Terence's plays as well. The one Latin comedy which most resembles *Mandragola* is Terence's *Eunuch*, in which a carefully plotted rape is described in all its ugliness and even rationalized before the situation is saved by the conventional marriage.⁸⁴ The play ends with an "adulterous" ménage-à-trois of a prostitute, her lover, and a braggart soldier who will unsuspectingly support them. Like *Mandragola*, *The Eunuch* seems to defy the conventional morality: it presents approvingly, situations which make us vaguely uncomfortable even as

we comply with the request for applause at the end. Perhaps our discomfort is provoked by the inclusion of all the unpleasant details of the action. It is hard to know what Terence intended in *The Eunuch*; the play may be an interesting failure.⁸⁵ But Machiavelli's play *intends* to divide us from our conventional assumptions. To do this it must avoid recognizing the unpleasant implications of its action. Its artistic—though not moral—superiority is indicated by our feeling *little* discomfort at the end. Interestingly, as Elder Olson points out, Terence's failures to remain within the comic limits are related to his "tendency to humanize the characters,"⁸⁶ that is, to naturalize.

D. *Commedia Erudita*

Many of the plays of Machiavelli's contemporaries adhered more closely than *Mandragola* does to the Roman plots discussed above. Others added to the more familiar settings and characters, new plots of cuckoldry and adultery, like those found in the popular novellas. From these plays one sees clearly the way in which the comic *intreccio* (intrigue) plots arouse audience support for what would ordinarily be judged as base actions. One can also see how the same action is so much more vivid on stage than it is in the novella. This is not the place for a comparison of *The Decameron* and the plays derived from it, but one might begin by noting the effects of (1) the author's moral frame for the stories, (2) the individual narrator's comments, and (3) the difference between a privately read narrative account and a publicly viewed physical representation.

Although some of the *Commedia Erudita* plots have elements in common with *Mandragola*, there are important differences. As in the Roman plays, the success of *Commedia* intrigues is often due to chance. Although the plays are cheerfully lax about language⁸⁷ and approving of adultery, there are few articulate rationales for the behavior presented. They do not consistently exclude the moral point of view. Furthermore, the rambling structures and, for the most part, stereotyped characters, undercut the audience's identification. There is something artificial and mechanical, not to say boring, about many of these plays, and this keeps an audience at its distance. Because they are artistically inferior to *Mandragola*, they are less successful at undermining traditional values.

E. *The Comic Project: Conclusion*

There are still other ways in which Machiavelli encourages the acquiescence of the audience in his "new case." In addition to amplifying our complicity in the plot and removing all suggestions that its values are temporary fictions, Machiavelli prepares us to accept his premises by offering more shocking notions in order to get us to accept less shocking ones. We, like Timoteo, are tested by the proposed abortion plan which is then withdrawn. *Mandragola* is substituted for the abortion medicine and, like the Frate, we abandon abortion and accept adultery. However, one might wonder whether, once chastity, conjugal fidelity, honesty, and the other virtues which Machiavelli turns to matters of prudential judgment elsewhere, are reduced to mere "fables," one shouldn't accept the practical arguments Ligurio makes in favor of abortion as well. Given the principles of action and "conscience" articulated in the play, one also wonders whether any but a prudential argument would stand up against *really* killing a vagrant lute player if this would further the purpose of the conspirators. If the power of *mandragola* were not a fiction, and Callimaco and many others would benefit from one unfortunate sacrifice, Machiavelli's play might seem to sanction such a murder.

But *Mandragola* is effective precisely because it only implies the most unseemly consequences of the action. When the Machiavellian principles are put forth in *The Prince*, readers are shocked and repelled. But comedy, by convention, is permitted to treat the most serious matters lightly. Comedy laughs at everything, and the audience laughs too. The same immoral teachings, now exhibited in the private, as well as the public, realm are less shocking. But, as Machiavelli says in "Discourse about Our Language," the concealed serious lessons of comedy are tasted only after the laughter in the theatre has stopped. In *Mandragola* these new lessons are "underneath" the ancient comic form and come into focus when viewed alongside the ancient historic subject. Machiavelli does well not to call attention, in this play, to the conventional didactic purpose of comedy, because what he has to teach is far from conventional; it is truly "a new case born in this city." In the Prologue, the alienated author says that he hopes "you will be tricked [*ingannate*]" as Lucrezia was. This seems to apply to the ladies in the audience. But by the end we all have been taken in, and by taking us into the plot,

the author insures that we have been taken in by his teachings. Machiavelli, the formidable *capitano* in a new campaign against the old teachings, is an articulate "preacher" of the "*verità effettuale*." As the most eloquent "seducer" in his comedy *Mandragola*, he administers a remedy for the illness of the "present age."

¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, Letter to Guicciardini (October 16-20, 1525), *Lettere*, a cura di Franco Gaeta, Milano, 1961, p. 438.

² *Ibid.*, p. 439.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 439-40.

⁴ For introductory surveys of contemporary Italian comedy see Marvin T. Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance* (Urbana, Illinois, 1960) and Douglas Radcliff-Ulmstead, *The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1969).

⁵ P. ded., XV, XXVI and D. ded., I intro., II intro., III 1.

⁶ D. I intro. refers to sculpture, law, medicine, and government. One wonders why he omits drama. Elsewhere one of his speakers says, "This land seems to be born to raise up dead things, as she has in poetry, painting and in sculpture." See "The Art of War," in Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, North Carolina, 1965), II, 706. See also "History of Florence," *Chief Works*, III, 1233.

⁷ See also P. VI. These and other passages suggest that Machiavelli considers himself a political founder of some sort.

⁸ "Clizia," Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere Letterarie*, a cura di Luigi Blasucci (Milano, 1964), p. 71.

⁹ See Martin Fleisher, "Trust and Deceit in Machiavelli's Comedies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (July, 1966), 370.

¹⁰ "Discorso o Dialogo Intorno Alla Nostra Lingua," *Opere Letterarie*, p. 225.

¹¹ The story of Lucretia is told also by Ovid in *The Fasti* for February 24, and by Boccaccio in his *De Claris Mulieribus*, with which Machiavelli might have been familiar. Variants of the incident are found in contemporary works like Boccaccio's *Decameron* (II, 9). English readers will know Shakespeare's version of Lucretia and will recognize it as the source of the subplot of *Cymbeline* which refers to it explicitly. But in Boccaccio's story and in Shakespeare's play, the woman is not actually taken. The name of Machiavelli's heroine points to Livy's Lucretia rather than Boccaccio's, despite similar elements.

¹² Livy, trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), I, 199.

¹³ Livy, I, 201.

¹⁴ Leo Strauss suggests that Machiavelli named him after the Athenian general, Nicias, whose Sicilian campaign failed, in part, because of his superstition. In discussing this general, Machiavelli does not explicitly mention this quality. See *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle, 1969), p. 284; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, VII, 50 ff. and 86; and D. I 53 and III 16.

¹⁵The songs were composed for a production of the play at Faenza or Modena in 1526. Unlike some readers, I assume that Machiavelli considered them relevant to the play, despite their later composition.

¹⁶Theodore Sumberg, "La Mandragola: An Interpretation," *The Journal of Politics* (XXIII, 1961), 322. This article came to my attention after most of the present essay was written. Sumberg takes the play seriously and reads it in the context of Machiavelli's other works. However, by drawing too close analogies between the play and the political works, he fails to explain adequately the function of the drama for Machiavelli. Nevertheless, he touches on many key issues.

¹⁷See, for example, Plautus' Phormio. In some of the Roman plays the clever slave or parasite seems to personify reason in the service of his master's passion.

¹⁸See *Mandragola* (I, 1; Song after the first act; IV, 9) and *Clizia* (I, 2).

¹⁹The evil quality of the plot is referred to only once by Ligurio: "As if God granted grace in evil things as well as good ones!" (II, 2). By the end of the play, it would seem that "God's grace" is irrelevant.

²⁰See Strauss, p. 343 (Notes) for a list of relevant passages without reference to the play.

²¹P. XIX and D. III, 6.

²²Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, (III, 44), trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, New York, 1959), p. 248.

²³Lest the reader be misled by the following discussion, the context should be noted. Machiavelli completes the sentence with a reference to an earlier chapter (III, 6) in which he discusses, not the breaking up of concluded marriages like Nicia's, but the breaking off of planned ones. See also Aristotle, *Politics*, 1311a, 1314b.

²⁴Livy, II, 145.

²⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a. See also the references to adultery in the discussion of justice in Book Five.

²⁶Livy, I, 37-39.

²⁷P. XIII and D. I, 19 and 26. David's adultery is one of the two principal examples in Machiavelli's "Exhortation to Penitence," *Chief Works*, I, 173-74.

²⁸Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* (I, 19), trans. Henry Bettenson (England, 1972), pp. 28-29. See also II, 17, pp. 66-67, for Augustine's comments on the rape of the Sabines.

²⁹Castiglione, (III, 55), p. 261.

³⁰Castiglione, (III, 70), p. 275.

³¹Castiglione, (IV, 69), p. 355.

³²As Erich Auerbach says, Boccaccio also exalts a new doctrine of "love and nature" over the medieval ethic of love as "the mother of all virtue and everything noble in man." But Boccaccio's rejection of the medieval view is inadequate because the new order he substitutes for it is incomplete. See "Frate Alberto," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, New York, 1953), pp. 177-203. Read by itself, *Mandragola* elaborates the Boccaccian view of love and nature, as opposed to the Christian courtly ethic. Read in conjunction with the political books, the play is

part of a complete replacement, applicable to all realms of human experience.

³³ *Lettere*, pp. 402-05.

³⁴ See Part III.

³⁵ Matthew 12:35.

³⁶ Letter to Guicciardini (May 18, 1521), *Lettere*, p. 409.

³⁷ See P. VI and D. II, 2 and III, 27.

³⁸ Matthew 19:12.

³⁹ See D. I intro. and II, 2.

⁴⁰ Charles S. Singleton, "Machiavelli and the Spirit of Comedy," *Modern Language Notes* (November, 1942), 585.

⁴¹ *Clizia* (II, 3). In the extant version of *Mandragola* the Frate does not pray for a miracle for Lucrezia, nor is there any suggestion of sexual misbehavior.

⁴² Raphael accompanies Tobias (in the Apocryphal book of Tobit) when he goes to claim Sarah as his wife. Raphael tells Tobias to burn the heart and liver of a fish to save himself from her demon lover Asmodeus, who has killed each of her seven other husbands on their wedding nights. This remedy drives away the demon and makes possible Tobias' marriage. In a prayer of thanksgiving, Tobias emphasizes his sincerity and denies any lustful desires. See Tobit: 2-9.

⁴³ Matthew 5:48.

⁴⁴ See in contrast, Nicia's instinctive rejection of "sugar and vinegar" in II, 6.

⁴⁵ *City of God* (I, 19), p. 29.

⁴⁶ Machiavelli, "The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca," *Chief Works*, II, 558.

⁴⁷ Philippians 2:22.

⁴⁸ 1 Timothy 2:15.

⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 6:10.

⁵⁰ 2 Timothy 3:1.

⁵¹ 2 Timothy 2:4.

⁵² Matthew 7:17; John 3:16.

⁵³ See the language of the Exhortation which ends *The Prince* (XXVI).

⁵⁴ Preface to *Tartuffe*: ". . . from one end to the other, he [Tartuffe] says not one word, performs not one action, which does not depict to the spectators the character of a wicked man and which does not bring out that of the true man of good whom I oppose to him." See note 73.

⁵⁵ George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," *Comedy* (Garden City, New York, 1955), p. 244.

⁵⁶ Letter to Guicciardini (December 26, 1525), *Lettere*, p. 447.

⁵⁷ For a vivid depiction of the seductive effect of Machiavelli (and of those he seems to approve) on a promising and impressionable youth, see Maurice Samuel's engrossing novel, *Web of Lucifer* (N. Y., 1947). Somerset Maugham's *Then and Now* (N. Y., 1947) also conveys this quality. Maugham's novel makes *Machiavelli* the protagonist in a plot adapted from *Mandragola*'s. The best discourse I have read about Machiavelli's intentions with respect to the young is Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli*.

⁵⁸ Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," *Selected Writings of Francis Bacon*, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York, 1955), p. 244.

⁵⁹ Bacon, p. 330.

⁶⁰ Bacon, p. 247.

⁶¹ Strauss, p. 292.

⁶² Strauss, p. 40.

⁶³ The Italian word order in the Prologue draws attention to the youth of the protagonists more than most English translations do.

⁶⁴ See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York, 1969), pp. 163-86, for a discussion of archetypal comic plots.

⁶⁵ Shakespeare, although he wrote one Plautian comedy, departed from the Latin models and developed his own comic forms. In this essay, I have tried to use for comparisons examples from comedies of the Latin type—Plautus, Terence, and the *Commedia Erudita*, which Machiavelli knew, and, despite their ambiguities, plays of Jonson and Moliere.

⁶⁶ Henri Bergson, "Laughter," *Comedy* (Garden City, New York, 1956), p. 64. See also Frye, p. 164, on the Roman *plaudite*.

⁶⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, New York, 1968), p. 46.

⁶⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Hunt's Comic Dramatists," *Critical and Historical Essays* (New York, 1923), pp. 414-15.

⁶⁹ Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), p. 52.

⁷⁰ There is a corresponding collapse of the traditional classification of rulers at the beginning of *The Prince*. Machiavelli does not distinguish regimes according to whether they exist for their own or for their subjects' benefit, but according to modes of acquisition.

⁷¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (New York, 1957), p. 79.

⁷² For a discussion of this frontispiece, and whether Machiavelli had authorized the first edition, see Roberto Ridolfi, *Studi Sulle Commedie del Machiavelli* (Pisa, 1968), pp. 25 ff. Ridolfi speculates about the date and place of publication, the decorative border, and the title, but does not mention the picture.

⁷³ Although this is not the place for such a discussion, one could argue that *Tartuffe* and *Volpone* are in fact deeply critical of Christian religion. But if Moliere and Jonson have inherited even part of the Machiavellian view, they present it more warily. These plays may be critical of Christian values, but they are careful not to hold up for emulation the behavior which undermines those values.

⁷⁴ Robert B. Heilman, *The Ghost on the Ramparts and Other Essays in the Humanities* (Athens, Georgia, 1973), p. 160.

⁷⁵ Shakespeare's comedies, which I take to be the greatest of "conservative" comedies, abound in attractive, intelligent characters who are also "moral." Such characters distinguish these masterpieces from the heavy-handed didacticism of eighteenth-century English sentimental comedy.

⁷⁶ See the discussion of this Donna in Singleton, "Machiavelli and the Spirit of Comedy."

⁷⁷ The best discussions I know on this subject are in C. L. Barber,

Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom (Cleveland, 1968) and Erich W. Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

⁷⁸See for shows and carnivals: Letter to Vettori, 15 January, 1513; and *History of Florence*, V 15, VI 1, VII 12 and 21, VIII 36. Also *History of Florence* II 2, 17, 36, III 9.

⁷⁹Many of the early *Commedie Erudite* continued the Roman practice of not showing the virgin on stage. Machiavelli translated *Woman of Andros*, which had no *virgo*, and, in *Clizia*, calls attention to the fact that the audience won't see the contested girl. Appropriately, *Mandragola* boldly exhibits the girl, only to transform her original from chaste matron to adulterous wife—a category which does not exist in Roman drama, but which is standard fare in Boccaccio and some contemporary comedies.

⁸⁰Jonson's *Alchemist*, despite its controversial ending, pays lip service at least, to the need to pardon and forgive the wrongdoer. Whether the contrite admission of guilt is to be taken seriously is too long a question to discuss here.

⁸¹George Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1952), pp. 303-04.

⁸²See Carlo Goldoni, *Memoirs*, trans. John Black (Boston, 1877), pp. 71-72.

⁸³Macaulay, p. 414. Machiavelli's care to make this world familiar to his audience is often undone by translators who attempt to substitute contemporary equivalents to make it familiar to their own. Unless the whole play is rewritten, this practice would seem to obscure Machiavelli's intentions.

⁸⁴Augustine criticizes the play on the grounds that the young rapist justifies himself by citing the example of Jupiter. See *City of God* (II, 7), p. 55, and *Confessions* (I), trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York, 1949), pp. 19-20.

⁸⁵See Olson, pp. 82-85, for a discussion of this play.

⁸⁶Olson, p. 84. See also Goldoni on *Mandragola*.

⁸⁷*Mandragola* contains strikingly less obscenity, both in language and gesture, than most Roman or contemporary Italian plays. Bawdy language and overt sexuality are not necessarily indications of a corrupting influence.