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¹² J. B. Bernard Grosson, *Almanach historique de Marseille*, (Marseille, 1771): 108.

¹³ Victor Saxer, "Sermo in sollemnitae...", op. cit.

¹⁴ Antoine de Ruffi, op. cit., 2ème éd. 1696, Tome II, 5.

LITERARY MODELS AND FOLK TRADITIONS:

GANFO THE FOOL IN

GIOVANNI SERCAMBI'S *NOVELLIERE*

GIUSEPPE DI SCIPIO

GIOVANNI SERCAMBI was born in Lucca on February 18, 1348 in the *contrada* of San Cristoforo. His father, Iacopo di ser Cambio, an apothecary and notary public, was not very much involved in the public affairs of the city as his more famous son would later be. Giovanni formally entered the political life of his city in 1372 and held important positions until 1400, when, as *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, he was instrumental in promoting Paolo Guinigi as supreme leader of the city which was being treated by internal factions and the ambitions of Florence. Sercambi even wrote a *Nota ai Guinigi*, an interesting document of political advice to the four prominent members of the Guinigi family. Giovanni followed his father's trade, though never abandoning his political and civic activities, and had two apothecary shops in Lucca, one of which he ran with a doctor named Jacopo di Coluccino Bonavia.

There is evidence that he traded in books: the holdings of both the Sercambi and Guinigi libraries are at present only partially published and would yield much more information on this matter. The list of books belonging to Sercambi's library include, among other items: "*Uno libro di medicine in carta di capretto*" and "*Uno libro da cognoscere Erbi, Uno Teseo in*

vulgare, *Un libro di cose ecclesiastiche...Un libriccioio, con coverte verdi, tratta de' Viti e Virtù*.¹

These details partially account for Sercambi's utilization and knowledge of herbs, potions and powders in several *novelle* (see for example *novella LXXX*) and for the wealth of available literary and oral sources for his *Novelle* or *Novelliere*.² It seems undeniable that Sercambi availed himself both of oral and literary sources. While Giovanni Sinicropi believes that Sercambi made use mostly of oral traditions, Luciano Rossi takes the opposite stance and provides a detailed scholarly documentation of literary sources, which is not, however, exhaustive.³ Many *novelle*, in fact, do not have a literary antecedent, strongly indicating that this is an author who is familiar with a rich cultural tradition, oral as well as literary. The alert reader will notice how Sercambi avails himself of everything he has access to, given his social position in Lucca, his office of *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, which he began in October 1397, his profession of *speziale* and his contacts with Paris through his uncle Giglio Sercambi, who had moved to that city to conduct his business affairs. In the *Croniche*, Sercambi's historical account of Lucca from 1164 to 1423, the author shows that he is well acquainted with and informed of transalpine events. It is in fact quite possible that Sercambi received books and manuscripts from France.⁴ Yet, while he was very involved in the political and cultural affairs of his time and belonged to the comfortable urban bourgeoisie, his *Novelle* are a rich source for the tracing of late medieval folk traditions in Tuscany.

Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelle* or *Novelliere* (a collection of 155 *novelle*) were written between 1390 and 1402, employing as *cornice* the plague that afflicted the city of Lucca between 1371 and 1373, though the author gives the year 1374 as the date of the event. As in Boccaccio's *Decameron* the plague is a pretext for a group of young people to move out of the city in order to escape it and engage in something edifying and

spiritual. In Sercambi's work, the protagonists, men, women, friars, priests and others, set out on a journey throughout Italy, after having met in the church of Santa Maria del Corso in Lucca, a church which no longer stood in 1374. However, it is also possible that Sercambi wrote some of his *novelle* after 1402.⁵ Indeed, the *Croniche* include, in the last book, 15 *novelle*, 14 of which are among those of his *Novelliere*. The *Croniche* cover the period from 1164-1400 in Book I and 1400-1423 in Book II. Sercambi was most active in the political life of the city between 1392 and 1400. After Paolo Guinigi took over the rule of the government, Sercambi remained an ally, though at times disagreeing with him and keeping a certain distance. In the *Croniche* he offers a long list of hardships caused by his friendship with the Guinigi. After this period, he was mainly involved with his apothecary shop and his writings.

Sercambi's company of travellers leaves Lucca under the authority of a *preposto*, a leader, who instructs the author, *l'altore*, to tell tales and gather them in a book. The company functions just like a trade company, with a common capital, with rules and regulations for appropriate behaviour but also for entertainment, such as dances, songs, music and a poetry recital. The songs are in large part authored by N. Soldanieri, a famous Florentine composer of popular songs whom Sercambi knew personally and whose rhymes he introduced also in his *Croniche di Lucca*, (without ever mentioning the author).⁶ Sercambi himself wrote a number of these songs, while others have been attributed to several authors such as Boccaccio, Francesco Landini, Antonio Pucci and Fazio degli Uberti, from whose *Dittamondo* (written in 1367) Sercambi borrowed the Italian itinerary of the *Novelliere*. Thus, Sercambi combined Boccaccio's idea of the *cornice* with the travel theme derived from Fazio's work, with its description of a journey to the three

parts of the earth in which the protagonist is accompanied by Solinus, the great geographer of Antiquity.⁷

The *Novelliere* displays an earthy characterization of people and places and a tendency towards the popular rather than the refined. Sercambi is in fact writing for the city bourgeoisies -the low and middle ones- of which he himself was an integral part as an apothecary, book merchant and politician reflecting the political passion of Trecento Italy. His audience is mirrored in the text itself, through the types of travellers engaged in this tour of Italy. This *brigata* of travellers which functions as a mercantile company has as a leader: "uno eccellentissimo omo e gran ricco nomato Alutzi."⁸ When he addresses the group he reveals that it is made of people from every walk of life:⁹

"Cari fratelli a me maggiori, e voi care e venerabili donne che qui d'ogni conditione siete qui raunate per fuggire la morte del corpo e questa pestilensia..."

These travellers are not at all poor, in fact, Sercambi relates that when the *preposto* orders the collection of money for the trip, the sum amounts to three thousand florins and the group agrees to provide more funds whenever they are exhausted. A treasurer is chosen, the *camarlingo*, who is assisted by two *spenditori* or administrators, one in charge of women, the other of men. It is very clear that for Sercambi money plays an important part in the administration of this travelling society:¹⁰

...dispuose il preposto che al servizio dell' omni fusse uno giovane spenditore savio e non d'avarisia pieno, e al servizio delle donne fusse uno uomo di matura età e discreto ne lo spendere, acciò che tutta la brigata di niente si potesse lamentare.

It is of historical importance, I believe, that the year in which Sercambi sets the story is the very year 1374 when the popular party prevailed in the politics of Lucca. The nobles or

ottimati had to retreat, but the head of the popular party was Francesco Guinigi, who was not exactly poor.¹¹ Since Sercambi was disappointed by the Guinigi it is quite possible that the whole book was written with an anti-aristocratic view. The key can be found in the passage where the author is charged with the office of narrator and storyteller:¹²

A colui il quale sen cagione ha di molte ingiurie sostenute, e a lui senza colpa sono state fatte, comando che in questo nostro viaggio debbia essere autore e fattore di questo libro e di quello che ogni di li comanderò.

SERCAMBI'S GANFO THE THE FOOL

A CAREFUL STUDY OF SERCAMBI'S *NOVELLIERE*

indicates that Sercambi employed almost all the established types or forms of the *stolto*, the fool, in his work. The word *folia* is mentioned right at the exordium of the introduction or *cornice* where human nature is faulted with depriving itself of celestial bliss by sinning. Yet, this is a commonplace idea and in no way does it indicate a religious flavor of the work. It does correspond, however, to the Christian notion of the inverted wisdom of the world which St. Paul discusses in I Corinthians 3:18-20:

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone of you thinks himself wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may come to be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God..."

As the narrative of the *Novelliere* begins, the essential medieval notions of mystical wisdom and *stultitia* are given as strictly secular with the traditional *exemplum* of the fool, mostly as simpleton, presented in the ironic mode.¹³

Sercambi starts off his *Novelliere* with a story entitled "De sapiensa", intentionally I would say, as if to show what type of wisdom he considers possible. The protagonist Manasse has extraordinary powers of observation and is capable of solving all

riddles, a story which is a well-known tale from oral tradition.¹⁴ The second tale, on the contrary, is entitled "De simplicitate" and deals with the theme of the dead fool who cannot resist the temptation of answering back those who are insulting him, therefore he speaks and makes a double fool of himself. The protagonist is Ganfo *pilicciato* (the furrier), who is also the star-character in the third *exemplum*. This is noteworthy because in the third *exemplum* Ganfo outsmarts the Florentine shoemaker Zanobi who thinks that he can safely play a prank on Ganfo since his credibility has been damaged by his behaviour in the previous story. But the third story has a tragic end, for the initial *belfa* has turned into a vulgar revenge resulting in Zanobi's castration by means of a fish whose mouth Ganfo uses as a tool of decapitation.¹⁵

The first story, *De simplicitate di Ganfo pilicciato*, is a version of the theme of the man who thinks he is dead and speaks up when he hears something provoking. This story is present in Tuscan oral tradition as well as in the folk tradition of many countries.¹⁶ In Italian literature one finds it in Antonfrancesco Grazzini's *Cene* (II,2), in Poggio Bracciolini's *Pacezie* (360; there are some resemblances also in 116 and 268) and in Girolamo Morlini's *Novellae* (2). I believe, however, that the original type is found in Boccaccio's *Ferondo* (*Decameron*, III,8), the foolish and jealous husband to whom the priest, in collusion with his wife, administers a powder which makes him fall asleep. As he wakes up he is made believe that he is in Purgatory.

Boccaccio may well have adopted the basic skeleton of the plot from the fabliau *Du Vilain de Batlleul* in which dame Erme convinces her foolish husband that he is dead so she can roll in the hay with the priest. The fabliau ends with the proverb:¹⁷

C'on doit por fol tenir celui
Qui nieus croit sa fané que lui.

While in the fabliau and in Boccaccio the ruse is originated by the wife in order to satisfy her carnal desires with her lover the priest, this is absent in Sercambi's tale. His tale revolves around the foolishness of the protagonist whose actions are totally irrational but funny and are provoked by what others say. The people around Ganfo function as detached spectators, while he works himself into a state of apparent death. In narrating the events Sercambi provides a rich description of the local milieu and its customs. There is, however, one element in common to both this tale and the previously mentioned fabliau which convinces me that the direct source of Sercambi is not Boccaccio but the fabliau. Ganfo's awful appearance is caused by lack of food and weariness: "*Sensa parlare né mangiare né bere si mise a camminare venendo verso Lucca.*"¹⁸ In the fabliau the villain returns home quite hungry: "*Vint a meson mult fameilleus*" and says to his wife: "*Erme, j'ai tel faim que je meir.*" This pushes his wife to begin the ruse of convincing him that he is dying: "*Couchiez vous tost, quar vous morez.*"

In Sercambi's tale, when Ganfo arrives home he tells his wife that he is dead. The woman is immediately convinced of this by his sickly appearance due to lack of food. The fact that he had not eaten anything is stressed already at the beginning of the story, when Ganfo sets off towards il Bagno a Corsena (today's Bagni di Lucca), and it serves also the purpose of depicting the foolishness of the protagonist.¹⁹

*Teodora dolce, io sono morto - E gütatost in sui letto
sensa aprire occhi né altro sentimento fare,
dmonstrando esser morto - che pogo spirito avea, si per la
malattia avuta, si per lo camminare senza aver mangiato
né beuto, si per la paura - la donna giudicò esser morto.*

In contrast to Boccaccio's tale and the French fabliau, the image of the wife in Sercambi's tale is one of honesty and devotion, shown particularly through her grief when he "dies". She is also in control of the household finances and warns her

husband not to spend too much during his therapeutic trip to the healing baths at Corsena. While the woman's image contrasts completely with the *stultitia* of the husband, her wisdom is of a practical, mercantile and domestic type, while Ganfo's folly is a form of logic in reverse which functions on a different plane.

When Ganfo gets to the Bagno, weakened by having ingested nothing more than a bit of water, he refuses to use a perfectly good bridge to cross the water and he almost drowns in attempting to wade on foot across the dangerous river Lima:²⁰

Ganfo messosi la via tra' pte e caminato pianamente pervenne al Bagno senza aver beuto e mangiato altro che un pogo di acqua. E quella bevè alla Lima, che volendo passare la ditta acqua, non volendo montare in sul ponte, si mise per l'acqua; e lui debite e l'acqua grossa, quasi non afogò. E in questo modo Ganfo avea bevuto un pogo d'acqua.

As Ganfo arrives at the Bagno, he sees everyone naked and asks himself how he will identify himself among so many people. He decides, in his stupidity, to place a cross on his shoulder adding: "*Mentre che lo arò ta croce in sulla spalla io serò desso.*" Sercambi creates the comic by the impact of words themselves. As Ganfo plunges into the water the cross falls off and lands on the back of a Florentine to whom Ganfo says: "*Tu sei io e io son tu.*" The Florentine considering him mad retorts: "*Va via, tu sei morto.*" which is a Tuscan expression for a brainless idiot. The effect of these words is so powerful that Ganfo returns to Lucca immediately without taking any food or drink and without talking to anyone until he reaches his destination and tells his wife: "*Teodora dolce, lo son morto.*" It is the same power of words that makes him speak again while he is being led for his own burial. Vettessa, one of his customers, being a "*fantasca*", is quite vocal in accusing him of keeping forever a *pillicione* of hers which she gave him to mend. Having been provoked, the falsely dead man cannot resist the temptation and replies with words which are again ambiguous: "*Vettessa, Vettessa, s'io fusse*

vivo come son morto, lo ti risponderai bene." The pall bearers, upon hearing this, drop the casket believing that a ghost is speaking. Ganfo comes out of this adventure somewhat sore, but altogether healthy after a while: "*rimenato a casa, e confortato divenne sano e la sua arte esercitò.*" For this story, the author may have employed well known literary sources but he also endowed it with the color and characteristics of his own city. The tone, the accents are very popular. It is the language of the *burla*, with the typical quick-witted Florentine whose words are the catalyst of the story. It is quite possible that Sercambi was personally acquainted with such a type of fool. In fact, he places Ganfo and his shop of furs "nella contrada di San Cristofano", which is his own neighborhood in Lucca and describes him as:²¹

uno pillicciaio, uno materiale e grosso di pasta in tutti i suoi fatti -nomato Ganfo-, salvo che alla sua bottega assai guardingo e sottile.

The happy conclusion, as well as the fact that Ganfo is not a fool in his business dealings, is important for the dramatic development of the following tale.

THE THIRD EXEMPLUM entitled "De Malvagitate et Malisia" presents Ganfo "on stage" with Zanobi the shoemaker, whose prank will cost him his life. This tale is representative of a certain type of *novella*, which is traditionally rather bloody, crude and unrefined. Giovanni Sinicropi, for one, defines Sercambi's world as cruel:²²

Il mondo del Sercambi poggia su una brutalità nuda, disincantata, da cui ci si riscatta, solo mediante la violenza, o mediante la furbizia, anch'essa una specie di violenza più sottile.

Indeed, Sercambi does describe horror, pain and mutilations nonchalantly, without showing much pity, as was

often the case in his cultural environment. However, it seems that commentators stress the literary dimension of the work and the author's personal contribution and overlook the existence of folklore patterns in which cruelty is *objectified*, devoid of any moral content and reflecting a completely symbolic and amoral system of representation.

In this tale, we witness the castration of Zanobi by means of a pike's mouth. Neither Rossi nor Sincropi have found reliable sources for this tale. Rossi does point out similarities with a story in Grazzini's *Cene* (I,2) which had been earlier remarked upon by Renier who believed in a direct connection between the two texts.²³ This motif belongs to the tradition of the *penis captivus* and, implicitly, the *vagina dentata*, although the term is not mentioned in the story. But the theme of the *penis captivus* is fully exploited by Sercambi as well as by Il Lasca (alias of Pierfrancesco Grazzini). There is also the element of urination which suggests a common oral tradition.

Sercambi is the first to create a written tradition which will be adopted, with variations, by Poggio Bracciolini (*facezia* n.270 "*De monacho qui misit per foramen tabulae priapum*"), by Sacchetti and Grazzini. Poggio's rather contrived incident involves imprisoning the unruly *priapus* in a plank but there are non-Western versions of this story, known by the name "Tooth-Breaker", which are closer to Sercambi's version, since they include the vaginal fish-teeth which must be removed. A modern version of the "Tooth-breaker" joke is even closer, in which a young man attempts to have intercourse with a young lady by using a hole in the kitchen door. The father, however, is waiting with a catfish head with which he bites the young man's organ.²⁴

Sercambi's version has many interesting aspects worth considering. The basic plot is that Zanobi feels confident to trick Ganfo and harass him without being caught, since no one will believe such a fool who thought he was dead. His intent is to

drive him away from the *bottega* which both occupy. Ganfo is on the main floor with his fur shop; Zanobi occupies the second with his shoemaker shop. Zanobi urinates twice a day, through a hole in the stairway on Ganfo's furs and hides, claiming that it's the work of mice. Ganfo, unsuspectingly, says that he will get a cat to catch the mice, or he will leave the shop. Zanobio, hearing this, increases his daily ration of urine. One evening Ganfo decides to stay in the shop to find out the truth;²⁵

"E fatto vista di chiudere la bottega, dentro vi si nascose... Venuta la sera, Zanobio, com'era sua usanza, si puose il suo marcifaccta per lo pertuzo pendente molto, a similitudine che ogni tristo cane ha gran coda."

Sercambi plays with all these words, using obscure expressions such as "*marcifaccta*" for penis, literally meaning to make something rot, and a clear allusion to the upcoming struggle between the dog whose "tail" awaits the bite of the "cat". The language used shows that this "cat" also has female connotations which bring us back to the implied theme of the *vagina dentata*. True to the medieval tradition of sexual language, Sercambi names nothing directly and makes everything clear through a series of connected allusions.

Ironically, Ganfo the fool does not react impulsively, but deliberately decides to show his wisdom against Zanobio's real foolishness. As Sercambi puts it - "*con sottile ingegno, come sogliono fare alcune volte i matti*"- fools can outsmart those who reputedly are fools, who indeed may be even bigger fools. Ganfo announces in a loud voice that the cat he will put in the shop that night surely will catch the mice, or he will abandon the premises. Then he proceeds to purchase a large pike, "*un grosso luccio di più di libbre xx*", and asks his wife to prepare it except for the head which he will bring to "*frate Zanobio, ch'era molto sanio*." Again Sercambi emphasizes the playfulness and shrewdness of the so-called *sciocco*, who in reality pokes fun at

everyone, his sneaky rival and the gourmet friars, who, with their prayers, helped his "resurrection" in the preceding tale. When, for example, Ganfo is questioned as to what he plans to do with such a large fish, (one must take into account the price of pike which was an expensive, highly appreciated food) he replies:²⁶

"Li preghi che monna Tedora mia dolce fece a Dio e l'oratione de' frati mi feno risuessere; e pertanto io voglio che quelli godano - E cost si deliberò da coloro che li domandavano ridendosi di lui."

As the previous story is weaved into the second one, Ganfo uses his reputation to laugh at those who laugh at him. The rest can be easily deduced. As Zanobio is urinating Ganfo awaits with the fish in his hands, under the staircase:²⁷

"...aperto la testa del luccio e'l marcifaccia preso e strettamente colle mani serrato la testa, intanto che Zanobio credette che fusse la gatta, dicendo e alettando la gatta con dolci parole. Ganfo dimostrando esser gatta, dicendo: - Miau, Miau -, stringendo la testa del luccio, Zanobio non potendo più sostener per lo dolore, e fu costretto a dover gridare."

The narrative continues in a light tone, disregarding the cruel act. But this is part of the *beffa* and it requires emphasis on the comic and ironic, rather than on physical pain. It is in this fashion that the neighbors hearing Zanobio's screams arrive and blame him for having gotten caught in the cat's teeth, the clearly female *gatta*. Ganfo releases "it" upon hearing that the neighbors will be fetching him to open the shop "*per levare la gatta dal marcifaccio*." A few days later Zanobio dies, having first confessed his sin and asked for Ganfo's forgiveness. The story is concluded with another touch of irony: "*Di che Ganfo per amenda secretamente ogni di per la sua anima diceva una avemaria.*"

In Grazzini's tale, Amerigo Ubaldi plans his revenge against his "*pedante pedagogo*" who has stifled and oppressed him for years. As the pedagogo is urinating through a hole in the *bottega* of il Piloto, the latter catches his virile organ with:²⁸

"un capo ch'egli avea d'un luccio secco nelle mani...sofflando e magolando come propriamente una gatta fusse, la quale egli sapeva meglio contraffare che ogni altro uomo del mondo."

The story ends cruelly again, since "*il phuoid*" must be cut off in order to prevent gangrene: "*e poi si fece romito del sacco.*" As can be seen both the *luccio* and the idea of the fake cat are present in this tale in such a way that they seem to be a reproduction of Sercambi's tale. However, of the two items, the "*luccio*" appears to be the most important.

The pike, "*il luccio*", is a voracious and large fish (Lat. *lucius*, Greek, *luktos*, the luminous one); in fact the expression "*bocca di luccio*" refers to someone who is insatiable. But in the fabliaux ("*Fabliau de L'Escureul*")²⁹ the male organ is called "*la loche*", and indeed this was the meaning of *luccio* in the old Italian vernacular. Aretino used it in that manner in the expression: "*appoggiando il luccio nel serbatoio.*"³⁰ Thus, Sercambi employed the pike motif, knowing that it had the double symbolic function of a voracious and toothed animal as well as that of the object which it intended to mutilate. Undoubtedly both connotations were quite familiar to him through oral tradition as well as the fabliaux. Sacchetti (c.1335-1401) uses the *lucciolo* in the novella of Madonna Cecchina but not with this meaning.³¹ These links both enrich the comical aspect of the tale and place it within traditional literature dealing with sexual symbolism. In Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, motif K 1222 is "The woman who tricks importunate lover with the head of a pike. Thereafter he thinks the vagina is toothed."

The pike appears in a similar context and with a similar motif in several modern tales reprinted in volumes of the *Kryptadia* collection. In the *Contes Flamands*, there is a story of a young woman who satisfies her sexual appetites by inserting an eel in her vagina, having heard that it does perform this function well. Subsequently she is unable to remove the fish, and when her lover, a priest, tries to perform his usual act, he is bitten by the eel. At this point he remarks that he has no objection to her desire to turn her vagina into a "vivier pour le poisson...mais que tu prennes ma pinne pour une canne à pêche, je m'y oppose formellement."³²

In the *Contes Picards* the story entitled *La Tête du brochet* narrates the misadventure of "a jeune fermier, un peu simple d'esprit, amoureux de la servante de sa mère" who constantly attempts to seduce the maid. One day, as he is about to succeed, she escapes but the lady of the house witnesses the scene. As a result the young man's mother advises the maid to utilize the head of the pike they are preparing for dinner to fend off the next sexual attack. The young lady follows her advice and the youth finds out how bloody and painful his uncontrollable desire can be, exclaiming, with frustrated misogyny: "cette gueuse-là a un con qui mord. Du diable si j'y touche jamais à l'aventur." When he gets married, his bride wonders why he does not wish to consume their marriage. He tells her that her vagina has teeth, and as she wishes to disprove him and shows him her organ, he remarks, comparing it to a whole mouth: "je vois bien la petite languette là."³³

In the *Contes secrets russes*³⁴ (n. XIII) there is a version of this tale with the double motif of the implied *vagina dentata* and the "marcifaccio" inserted into an object which separates it by a barrier from its owner, putting the latter at serious risk. The story presents variations and additions particular to the Russian environment. In Sebeok's *Studies in Cheremis Folklore* this story is listed as type K 1222.4.³⁵ The Russian tale, in

Kryptadia's French translation, describes with precision how the young woman mutilates her suitor:

Je n'rai pas près de toi, dit-elle au jeune homme, ne viens pas non plus ici, il ne faut pas qu'on nous voie: passe-moi plutôt ton affaire à travers la haie et je le mettrai où tu sais. Le gars s'empresse de faire ce qu'on lui disait: la jeune fille prit la tête de brochet et, après en avoir écarté les mâchoires, y introduisit l'objet qui était présenté. Sentant une douleur cruelle, le jeune homme retira son membre ensanglanté et se sauva chez lui, où il s'assit dans un coin.

In heraldry, the pike represents cruelty. It is often a symbol of evil because of its voracity. In another Russian fairy tale, for example, "The Pike with the Long Teeth", the pike is born the night before St. John's in the Shesma river. It is an evil creature, symbol of the devil, who devours all the other fish.³⁶ Sébillot states that the pike, called "le loup de rivière est pourtant bien connu pour sa voracité."³⁷ This voraciousness can be interpreted as a sexual metaphor, equally applicable to the pike as the object of castration (the *vagina dentata*) and to the male organ itself, which in the versions of the tale discussed here appears as a punished "offending" or "importune" organ (in the Italian tales, it urinates improperly, in the French and Russian, it belongs to an unwelcome suitor).

However, the pike is also connected with Christ in several ways. Eugene Rolland in his *Faune Populaire de la France* says of the pike:³⁸

"Lorsqu'on démonte pièces à pièce la tête d'un brochet on y retrouve, avec un peu de bonne volonté, tous les instruments de la passion."

In a Lithuanian legend the pike is made king of fishes because it helps Christ cross a stream (A2223.4). The pike is connected with the fish called *Zeus faber*, a huge and monstrous fish whose

"back is brownish, with yellow stripes; the rest of its body is of silvery-grey color; on its sides it has two spots of the deepest

black. According to an Italian legend those two black spots...were caused by the marks left upon it one day by St. Christopher, while carrying Christ upon his shoulders across the river."³⁹

De Gubernatis showed that the pike was connected both to the fool and to Christ and was also a phallic symbol through various transformations. Thus, the pike, when drunk, becomes a fool; there is a correspondence between the phallic figure and the simpleton; in Piedmontese dialect "the phallos and the stupid man is called *merlu* (Blackbird). From the word *merlo* (Lat. *merula*) was derived the name of the fish called *merluccio* or *merluzzo*..."⁴⁰ The *merla* is also a sexual image in Italy as well as in France (Aquitaine), where the *merle*, or blackbird, is another word for the woman's *gatta*. Pike and bird were also connected in the dialect of St. Léger, where it was called "*ba de cane*, "*bec de can*".⁴¹

Not unlike the pike itself, *Ganfo* is the type of fool who, although marked by stupidity in the first story, can be cunning and cruel precisely because of his reputation of being a simpleton. Sercambi points this out several times and in this may reside the origin of the name. This polyvalence of a single symbol is thought-provoking because it may echo Sercambi's understanding of the double nature of the fool, derided and derisive, cuckolded and sexually active, naive and cruel or violent.

SERCAMBI'S CHOICE OF THE NAME *GANFO* for the character in his story also brings out interesting aspects of the impact of folk tradition on his work, particularly because such a name is not found anywhere else.⁴² It seems therefore, that he invented it by drawing upon the numerous folkloric elements available to him, particularly the ones from oral tradition. The Sercambian fondness for puns and the utilization of word-play is an important factor in the narrative. Sercambi, in fact, begins the whole jest with the name of the protagonist himself, *Ganfo*,

which could well mean "*sciocco*", from the word "*gufo*", owl, just as Sacchetti named one of his characters *Golfo* punning on "*gufo*" and "*goffo*". The play-on-words continues with the "*marcifaccio*" which ends up in the mouth of the cat, who is in reality a pike. Yet, the name *Ganfo* may be also connected to the etymology of *fallo*, phallus, which in Italian is from "*il gonfiante*", that which is inflating.⁴³

Ganfo is said to be a "*pilicciato*", which means both a furrier and a tanner, who was a simpleton in everything but his trade and the affairs of his shop. Sercambi repeats this characterization in both tales. In the second, however, he adds:⁴⁴

Ganfo, posto che fusse di grassa materia, con un sottile ingegno, come sogliono fare alcune volte i matti, stimò lo bagnare le sue pelli non esser lopi, e dispuose quello di certo vedere.

Ganfo's name strongly evokes that of a medieval saint, a St. Gengoulph. (*Gengolfo* in Italian, Lat. *Gangolfus*) who was venerated as a martyr, having been murdered in the 9th century by a monk who was his wife's lover. His life, *Passio Sancti Gangolphi Martyris*, written in the tenth century, states that he was from a noble family in Burgundy.⁴⁵ Réau mentions that he is the patron saint of the *marts trompés* because of his wife's libidinous behaviour and that he is invoked for the unity of the household. He was also honored by the glove makers, *gantiers*, because one of the forms of his name was *Gand* and because he proved his wife's adultery by having her immerse her arms in a miraculous water which detached the skin from her fingers as if it were a glove, the irrefutable proof of her betrayal. Réau adds that by analogy *Gangolfo* is the protector of leather artisans, tanners and rope makers whose feast is celebrated the eleventh of May.⁴⁶ The *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* remarks that his cult became rapidly diffused in England, Italy and Germany.⁴⁷

It is quite possible that these folkloric elements contributed to the formulation of the name Ganfo, to the character in question and to his behaviour as a fool who employs the pike, a symbol of the phallus, of the fool and, at the same time, of Christ. Sercambi may have used or adapted a truncated version of oral tales dealing with the pike employed as an emasculating object by a character whose name evokes the patron saint of cuckolded husbands, although in his stories Ganfo's wife was not adulterous. His ire and revenge are directed against a shoemaker who thinks he can outsmart him and who is not sufficiently protected by his patron "San Crispino."

It is noteworthy that Sercambi, an author not known for his refined style, for he employs the *sermo humilis*, provides his reader with two tales rich in medieval folkloric traditions, in which characters, themes and models are an original summation of previous sources, as well as their transmitter. The ambiguous and polysemous narrative elements and symbols, -the pike, the type of fool, the onomastic and hagiographic element and the mocking comic tone itself- provide a stimulating reading which confirms the vital importance of writers of the so called "*scrittura bassa*".



NOTES

¹ The critical editions of Sercambi's *Novelle* are:

Giovanni Sercambi, *Novelle*, a cura di Giovanni Sinicropi, 2 vols., (Bari: Laterza, 1984);

Giovanni Sercambi, *Il Novelliere*, a cura di Luciano Rossi, 3 vols., (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1974).

Quotations in this article are from the Rossi edition. For biographical information on Sercambi see the above and also A.D. Dinucci's biography "Giovanni Sercambi e le sue Cronache" in *Rassegna Nazionale*, nos. 57, 59 (1927): 43-67. See also Salvatore Bangi's "Preface" in his edition of Sercambi's *Cronache*, 3 vols., (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano, 1892).

The list of Sercambi's library holdings is published in Sinicropi's "Nota Bibliografica", vol. 2, *Novelle*, 762. Sercambi's books have also been studied by Marco Poli, *Arte e Committenza privata a Lucca nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento. Produzione artistica e cultura libraria*. (Lucca: Maria Pazzini, 1986).

² In Ms. 193 of the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan, Sercambi's work is called *Novelliere*.

³ See L. Rossi, "Introduzione", III-LXXIV and Sinicropi's "Nota Bibliografica", 762-794.

⁴ Rossi, XVIII. On Sercambi and France, see Christian Bec, *Les Marchands Etrangers*, (Paris: Mouton, 1967), particularly 175-199. Sercambi's uncle, Giglio Sercambi, died in Paris in 1404. He had made money by providing supplies for the military campaign of Jean Sans Peur at Nicopolis. The Lucchese colony in Paris was quite large and active in business affairs. One of their most prominent members was Dino Rapondi who had lent large sums to Philippe le Hardi. I am presently writing an article on Sercambi's connection with Paris.

⁵ Rossi, XIX.

⁶ See "Niccolò Soldanieri", in *Rimatori del Trecento*, a cura di Giuseppe Corsi. (Torino: UTET, 1969).

⁷ Although Chaucer visited Italy in 1378, it seems unlikely that he had access to Sercambi's work. See Donald McGrady, "Were Sercambi's *Novelle* known from the Middle Ages on?", *Italica*, 57, 1 (1980): 3-18.

⁸ Rossi, 6; it has been suggested that that the *preposto* is the figure of Paolo Guinigi.

⁹ *Ibid.* Sercambi's language is heavily marked by his Lucchese dialect.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Sinicropi, 787. See also Giuseppe Chiecci, "Sulle moralità in Giovanni Sercambi *Novelliere*", *Lettere italiane*, XXIX, n. 2 (1977): 133-147.

¹² Rossi, 10.

¹³ See F. Sautman, "Les Métamorphoses du Fou à la fin du Moyen Âge" in L. Harf-Lancner et D. Boulet, *Pour une Mythologie du Moyen Âge*, (Paris: ENS, 1988), 197-216 and article "Folie" in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*. Fondé par M. Viller, F. Cavallera et J. de Guibert. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937).

For a complete and meaningful definition of the *beffa* and its presence in the *Decameron*, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Games of Laughter in the *Decameron*", *Romanic Review* 69 (1978) 118 and his volume *Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1986). See particularly chapter 6, "The Comedy of Love", 159-185.

¹⁴ See Giuseppe Di Scipio, "Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelle*: Sources and Popular Traditions", *Fables and Tales*, II (1) (1988): 25-35.

¹⁵ The motif of the man who thinks he is dead (Type 1313, A, B, C, 1406) is common. The castration by means of a fish head is type 1313A and motif J2311A, K1222.

¹⁶ Rossi, XXVI.

¹⁷ *Fabliaux*, Montaiglon et Raynaud, eds., IV, CDX, 212-216.

¹⁸ On the *fabliaux* as sources of Sercambi's *Novelliere*, see Rossi's "Introduzione". However, he does not mention "Le Villain de Baillieu".

¹⁹ Rossi, 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²² Sincropi, 788.

²³ Rossi, 30. *GSLI*, XVII (1891), 135, "Recensione a Antonfrancesco Grazzini - *Le Cene*".

²⁴ Gershon Legman, *No Laughing Matter*, 2 vols., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), vol. 2, 433.

²⁵ Rossi, 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Note that, according to Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (Torino: UTET, 1970), *pellicciaio* means: "chi conca peli e confeziona pelliccia". Moreover, "sciutare il pelliccione" means to have sexual relations with a woman, as in Boccaccio X:10, *Bandello* 4:5, *Firenzuola* 2:109 and others. By extension, "pellicciaio" also means the feminine *pundera*, and even the female sexual organ. This indicates that Vetessa's complaint about not "mending" the *pellicciaio* in the first tale is redolent of sexual allusions and that Ganfo the fool can also be a sexual figure.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸ Antonfrancesco Grazzini, *Le Cene*, (Roma: Editore Salerno, 1976), *Cena* 1, 2, 15-17.

²⁹ Barbazan et Méan, *Fabliaux et contes des poètes français des XI, XII, XIII, XIV et XVe siècles*, (Paris: B. Warée), 1808; IV, "Fabliau de L'Escureul"; Montaiglon et Raynaud, V, CXXI.

³⁰ Aretino, 20:40. See in Battaglia, "Luccio", 238.

³¹ Franco Sacchetti, *Cento Novelle*, a cura di Raffaello Fornaciari, (Firenze: Sansoni, 1957), *Novella* 201, 44.

³² *Kryptadia*, I, "Contes Flamands", n. XII. The eel as phallus is also discussed by De Gubernatis, 341-343.

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. XI, *Contes picards*, n. 81, 200-203. There is a variant with a "tête de mouton".

³⁴ Afanassiev, *Contes secrets russes*, n. XIII, 20-24.

³⁵ Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Studies in Cherevits Folklore*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

³⁶ *Russian Fairy Tales*, (from the collection of A. Afanaset), Norbert Guterman, trans (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1973), 54. In the tale "Ivan the Cow's Son", the pike is a reproductive symbol.

See also Victor Imbriani, *La Novellaja fiorentina e la novellaja milanese* (Milano: BUR, 1976). In a Florentine version of his novella xiii, "La Bella e la brotta", entitled "Il Luccio", a magical fish helps "la brutta" marry the King.

³⁷ Paul Sébillot, *Le Folklore de France: La Faune*, (Paris: Imago, 1964), 349-50.

³⁸ Eugène Rolland, *Faune populaire*, (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1877), 145-149.

³⁹ De Gubernatis, *Animal Mythology* (London: 1872, 2 vols), 339-340.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 352-353.

Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1927-42. article "Hecht", 1608-1613) gives many examples of folk beliefs (chiefly Germanic) concerning the pike: the presence of the instruments of the Passion, the use of the pike head as an amulet against evil, as well as the contradictory identification of the pike with sorcerers and even the Devil. The article also includes a wealth of folk medicine remedies based on parts of the pike.

⁴¹ Antonin Perbosc, *Contes licentieux de l'Aquitaine*, 1 (Carcassonne: GARAE, 1907; rep.), conte XV, 112-114, "Le Merle qui n'avait pas encore siffé", VII, 227-228, "La pénitence au perdreau", II, 240, "Le Merle". Tale XVII, "Le Meilleur morceau est pour le chal", 179-180. is a version of the classic French tale of the cat playing with the man's exposed anatomy.

De Gubernatis, loc. cit.

⁴² To my knowledge, the name Ganio does not appear in Italian literature nor does it appear in documents concerning Sercambi's time studied by Bongl. *Bandi di Lurca*, and others.

⁴³ Claude Gaignebet et Jean-Dominique Lajoux. *Arte profane e religione popolare nel Medioevo*, (Milano: Fabbri, 1986), 174. Claude Gaignebet also comments on the existence at the Vatican of a Christ with the head of a cock whose beak is a large phallus.

⁴⁴ Rossi, 31.

⁴⁵ Hroswitha. *Passio Sancti Gengolii Martyris, Patrologia Latina* 137, cols. 1083-1094.

⁴⁶ Louis Réau. *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, III-II, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 569-570.

⁴⁷ *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (Roma: Gio. XXIII della Pont. Università Later., 1965) VI, "Gengolia", 127-128.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BOOKS RELATED TO MEDIEVAL

AND XVITH CENTURY FOLKLORE, 1985-1990.

THIS IS PART I OF A CONTINUING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL UPDATE PREPARED BY THE EDITOR. ADDITIONAL ENTRIES ARE WELCOME.

Dissertations will be included in a separate forthcoming issue along with other bibliographies on a number of themes which are pertinent to medieval folklore.

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