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Giovanni Sercambi was born in Lucca on February 18, 1348 in the contrada of San Cristoforo. His father, Jacopo 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 threatened by internal factions and the ambitions of Florence. Sercambi even wrote a Nota di Guinigi, an interesting document of political advice to the four preeminent 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 librilloco, 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 LI) 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 Sismondi 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 Confraternite 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,
Faltore, 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 ono e gran ricco nomato Alus1."8 When he addresses the group he reveals that it is made of people from every walk of life:9

"Carì fratelli a me maggiori, e voi cara e venerabili donne che qui d'ogni condizione siate qui rannicate per fuggire la morte del corpo e questa pestilensa..."

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

...disposse il preposto che al servigio de'omini fusse uno giovane spenditore savio e non d'avarizia pieno, e al servigio delle donne fusse uno uomo di matura età e discreto ne lo spendere, accio 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, comendo che in questo nostro viaggio debba essere autore e fattore di questo libro e di quello che ogni di li commandero.

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 sapiens", 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. 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 Ganso pilucciaio (the furrier), who is also the star character in the third exemplum. This is noteworthy because in the third exemplum Ganso outsmarts the Florentine shoemaker Zanobi who thinks that he can safely play a prank on Ganso since his credibility has been damaged by his behaviour in the previous story. But the third story has a tragic end, for the Initial beffa has turned into a vulgar revenge resulting in Zanobi's castration by means of a fish whose mouth Ganso uses as a tool of decapitation.

The first story, De simplicitate di Ganso pilucciaio, 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. In Italian literature one finds it in Anton Francesco Grazzini's Cene (II,2), in Poggio Bracciolini's Pacezie (360; there are some resemblances also in 116 and 268) and in Girolamo Merlini's Novellae (2). I believe, however, that the original type is found in Boccaccio's Ferondo (Decameron, Ill,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 Batteaud in which dame Erme convinces the foolish husband that he is dead so she can roll in the hay with the priest. The fabliau ends with the proverb: C'on doit for fet temir celul Qui mieu croit as fame 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 Serambi'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 Ganso function as detached spectators, while he works himself into a state of apparent death. In narrating the events Serambi 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 Serambi is not Boccaccio but the fabliau. Ganso's awful appearance is caused by lack of food and weariness: "Sensa parlarne ne mangiare ne bere st mise a camminare venendo verso Lucca." In the fabliau the villain returns home quite hungry: "Vint a mon espoit fametelle" and says to his wife: "Erme, fai tel fai che je mair." This pushes his wife to begin the ruse of convincing him that he is dying: "Couchiez vous tost, quor vous mair.

In Serambi's tale, when Ganso 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 Ganso sets off towards il Bagno a Corsena (today's Bagno di Lucca), and it serves also the purpose of depicting the foolishness of the protagonist.19

Teodora dolce, io sono morto... E giutatis in suu letto senza aprire occhi ne altro sentimento fare, dimostrando esser morto... che pogo spidio avea, si per la malattia avea, si per lo camminare senza aver mangiato ne beuto, si per la paura... la donna giudico esser morto.

In contrast to Boccaccio's tale and the French fabliau, the image of the wife in Serambi'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 stupidita 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:

Ganfo messost la via tra' plè e caminato pianaentemente persoene al Bagno senza aver buvuto e mangiato altruo che un pago di acqua. E quella beve alla lima, che volendo passare la detta acqua, non volendo montare in sul posto, si mise per l'acqua; e lui debile e l'acqua grossa, quasi non insegò. E in questo modo Ganfo aveva bevuto un pago 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 la 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, io 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 "fantesca", is quite vocal in accusing him of keeping forever a piticione 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 risponderei 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: "rimasto 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 hurla, 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:

uno piticciaio, uno matutale e grosso di pasta in tutti i suoi fatti, nomato Ganfo, salvo che alla sua bottega assai guardingo e sortile.

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:

"Il mondo del Sercambi poggia su una brutalità rude, disincantata, da cui ci si scotta, solo mediante la violenza, o mediante la furbizia, anch'essa una specie di violenza più sortile.

Indeed, Sercambi does describe horror, pain and mutilations nonchalantly, without showing much pity, as was
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 visto di chiedere la bottega, dentro vi si nasce... Venuta la sera, Zanobio, conera sua usanza, si puoce il suo marcifaccia per lo pertuza pendente molto, a similitudine che ogni tristo cane ha gran coda."

Sercambi plays with all these words, using obscure expressions such as "marcifaccia" 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 repute them 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 santo." Again Sercambi emphasizes the playfulness and shrewdness of the so-called sciocco, who in reality poises fun at

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 Cave (1,2) 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
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

"La preghia che morra. Toda mia, dolce fece a Dio e l'orazione de' fratelli, mi fanno risuonare, e per tanto la voglio che quelli godano. E cost si deliberà da coloro che il donandavano ridendosi di lui."

As the previous story is woven 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 il marciocchio preso e stretteccato nelle mani serrato la testa, intuendo che Zanobio credette che fusse la gatta, dicendo: Miao, Miao! stringendolo la testa del luccio, Zanobio non potendo più sostenere per lo dolore, e fu costretto a divenire 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 del marciocchio." 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 amenza secretamente ogni di per la sua anima diceva una novella."

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

"un capo ch'egli aveva d'un luccio secco nelle mani...sofflando e malagolando come propriamente una gatta fusa; la quale egli sapeva meglio contrarre che ogni altro uomo del mondo.

The story ends cruelly again, since "il piuolo" must be cut off in order to prevent gangrene: "e pot si fece ronito del succo." 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, iuktos, the luminous one); in fact the expression "bocca di luccio" refers to someone who is insatiable. But in the fabliaux ("Fabliaux de L'Escauto")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 lucciole in the novella of Madonna Cacchina 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'avent!" 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 "marchifaccio" 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'était pas près de lui, dit-elle au jeune homme, ne viens pas non plus ici, il ne faut pas qu'on nous voie; passe mon filet, ton offrande à travers la haie et je le mettrai en ta main. Le garçon s'empressa de faire ce qu'on lui demandait: la jeune fille prit la tête du 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. Eugène Rolland in his *Faune Populaires de la France* says of the pike:38

> Lorsqu'on décante 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 spines of the deepest
black. According to an Italian legend these 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. 

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 phalos and the stupid man is called merlu (Blackbird). From the word merlu (Lat. merula) was derived the name of the fish called merluzzo or merluzzo...". The merlu 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".

Not unlike the pike itself, Gasco 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. It seems therefore, that he invented it by drawing upon the numerous folklore elements available to him, particularly the ones from oral tradition. The Sercambi 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 "scoloco", 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 "marefaccio" which ends up in the mouth of the cat, who 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.

Ganfo is said to be a "pulciato", 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:

Ganfo, posta che fusse di grossa materia, con un sotile ingegno, come sognano fare alcune volte i muti, stimò lo bagnare le sue pelli non esser lont., e disegnò quello di certo vedere.

Ganfo's name strongly evokes that of a medieval saint, a St. Gengoulph. (Gengolfo in Italian, Lat. Gangoílus) 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 Gangoíli Martyris, written in the tenth century, states that he was from a noble family in Burgundy. Réau mentions that he is the patron saint of the maris 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 Gant 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 Gangofo is the protector of leather artisans, tanners and rope makers whose feast is celebrated the eleventh of May.

The Bibliotheca Sanctorum remarks that his cult became rapidly diffused in England, Italy and Germany.
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 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 onomatopoeic 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".

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12 Rossi, 10.


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 52311A, R1222.

16 Rossi, XXVI.

17 *Fabliaux*. Montaiglon et Raynaud, eds., IV, CX9, 212-216.

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

19 Rossi, 27.

20 Ibid., 27.

21 Ibid., 26.

22 Simcrogi, 788.

23 Rossi, 30. CSlI, XVII (1891), 135, "Recensione a Antonfrancesco Grazzini - Le Cone".


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 confezione pelliccia". Moreover, "scoutrc il pellicciaio" means to have sexual relations with a woman, as in Boccaccio X:10, Bandello 4:5, Frenuola 2:109 and others. By extension, "pellicciaio" also means the feminine pudenda, and even the female sexual organ. This indicates that Vespiasia's complaint about not "mending" the *pellicciaio* in the first tale is redolent of sexual allusions and that Ganto the fool can also be a sexual figure.

27 Ibid., 33.


29 Barbezan et Méan, *Fabliaux et contes des poètes français des XIe, XIIe, XIIIe, XIVe siècles*. (Paris: B. Ware, 1806; IV, "Fabliau de l'Escureuil", Montaiglon et Raynaud, V, CXXI.

30 Avetino, 2040. See in Battaglia, "Lucio", 238.


32 *Kryptologia. I. "Contes Flamandis", n. XII*. The idea of phallicism 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".


36 Russian Fairy Tales, (from the collection of A. Afanasiev), 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 Imbrani. *La Novellaia fiorentina e la novellatura milanesa* (Milano: BUR, 1976). In a Florentine version of his novella XII, "La Bella e la brutta", entitled "Il Lucio", a magical fish helps "la brutta" marry the king.


40 Ibid., 352-353.

De Gubernatis, loc. cit.

42 To my knowledge, the name Canio does not appear in Italian literature nor does it appear in documents concerning Sereni’s time studied by Don Pl. Bandi di Lucchese, and others.

43 Claude Gaignebet et Jean-Dominique Lajoux, Arte profane e religione popolare nel Medioevo, (Milano: Fabbri, 1966), 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 Haraswa, Passio Sancti Gengalici Martyris, Patrologia Latina 137, cols. 1083-1094.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BOOKS RELATED TO MEDIEVAL AND XVTH 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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