

THE TALE OF MARIOTTO AND GANOZZA BY MASUCCIO
SALERNITANO (TOMMASO GUARDATI)

In the Thirty-Third Tale of Masuccio's *Novellino*,¹ the scene is laid in Siena. No mention is made of the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti*, nor of any other supposedly rival "families." Yet this *novella* represents perhaps the greatest single step in the early development of the Romeo and Juliet plot, and contains most of the essential elements utilized by Shakespeare in his tragedy on that subject.

According to Masuccio's narrative, Mariotto Mignanelli is in love with Ganozza, daughter of a prominent citizen of Siena. For an unexplained reason, a secret wedding is desired, and an Augustinian friar is bribed to perform the ceremony. A few days later Mariotto, during a quarrel, strikes his adversary a fatal blow with a club. The *Signori* and the Podesta sentence him to perpetual banishment, proclaiming him a rebel.

After bidding Ganozza a tearful farewell and charging his brother Gargano to keep him informed of events in Siena, Mariotto escapes to Alexandria. There he takes refuge with his uncle, the rich merchant ser Nicolò Mignanelli.

During Mariotto's absence Ganozza, alleging various reasons, declines numerous offers of matrimony. Her father eventually becomes so exasperated that he demands from her an immediate decision. In despair, she sends for the friar. This trusted counselor composes for her a fluid made of divers powders; by drinking it she will not only sleep for three days, but will also appear to be dead. Ganozza, after first despatching a cousin to advise Mariotto of her project, swallows the potion and almost immediately falls to the ground in a stupor. Her father, summoned by the frightened servants, sends for a physician who pronounces her dead. The afflicted family, after watching over her all day and the following night, has her buried in a sepulcher at the church of St. Augustine.

Towards midnight the friar, aided by a companion, removes her

¹ Masuccio Salernitano. *Il Novellino*. Alfredo Mauro, ed., "Scrittori d'Italia" series, Bari: Gius. Laterza e figli, 1940, *Novella* XXXIII, pp. 270-77. Cf. *Il Novellino di Masuccio Salernitano, Restituito alla sua antica Lezione*. Luigi Settembrini, ed., Naples, 1874, pp. 358-68.

from the tomb to his room and brings her back to consciousness by building a fire and making other necessary provisions. As soon as she has recovered her faculties, she disguises herself as a friar, and sets sail for Alexandria, intending to rejoin her husband.

Quite naturally Gargano informs Mariotto of the supposed death of Ganozza. At the same time, unfortunately, Ganozza's messenger is captured and killed by corsairs. Mariotto, believing his wife to be dead, embarks on a passing Venetian galley ship without warning his uncle and reaches Siena disguised as a pilgrim. He conceals himself within the church of St. Augustine until nightfall when, venturing forth, he attempts to pry off the lid of the sepulcher. A sexton, disturbed by the noise, arouses the friars, who surround Mariotto with cries of "Stop thief!" On being submitted to the rack, Mariotto confesses the whole story. In spite of the universal sympathy, especially on the part of the women who consider him the world's most perfect lover, he is condemned to death and beheaded.

Ganozza, on arriving at Alexandria, learns from ser Nicolò of the departure of Mariotto, and returns to Siena three days after the execution. Obtaining admission to a convent, she dies within a short time, lamenting the death of her lover.

The *Argomento* prefixed to the *novella* has a different ending. In this version Ganozza, finding Mariotto beheaded, falls upon his body and expires of grief.

Until recently, no serious attempt was made to determine the sources of this *novella*. Most critics have contented themselves with references to a number of more or less remote originals. Among the sources thus vaguely suggested may be mentioned Ovid's poetic version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe,² or perhaps the prose redaction in the *Gesta Romanorum*,³ which had the widest circulation in the Middle Ages and was frequently the subject of imitation.⁴ Masuccio may also have had vaguely in mind the well-known classical story of Hero and Leander, or perhaps the despairing love of Tristan, as recounted by Thomas.⁵

In the *novella* of Masuccio, the Pyramus and Thisbe (or Hero and Leander) *motif* is combined with that of the sleeping potion.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. IV, vv. 55-166. Cf. D. P. Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella in Prose*. "Indiana University Series No. 2," Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1942, N343.

³ See Georg Hart, *Ursprung und Verbreitung der Pyramus-und Thisbe-Sage*, Munich dissertation, Passau, 1889, p. 7. The author here cites the *Gesta Romanorum*, H. Oesterley, ed., Berlin: Weidmann, 1872, pp. 633ff.

⁴ Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 19, and pp. 30-31.

⁵ Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*. Joseph Bédier, ed., "Société des anciens textes français," Paris, 1902, I, vv. 3022-3120.

Of the more ancient potion romances, the one most nearly approaching Masuccio's version is perhaps the *Ephesiaca* of Xenophon of Ephesus, which was written early in the Christian era,⁸ and once was proposed by the Shakespearean scholar Douce as a source for the legend of Romeo and Juliet. Douce admitted, however, that Xenophon's story had remained in manuscript until the seventeenth century, and the general opinion of modern scholars is that Masuccio never read it,⁷ although J. J. Munro contends that the existence of the *Ephesiaca* proves the existence of "some other source" having to do with sleeping potions.⁸

It has been suggested that Masuccio may have been familiar with some of the later forms of the premature burial theme, such as the story of Fénice feigning death, as related in the *Cligès* of Chrétien de Troyes (ca. 1170). Or he may have read in another Old French romance how a wife of Solomon was believed to have simulated death for four days, in order to escape to her lover.⁹ He may also have been influenced by the fourteenth-century *novelliere* Giovanni Sercambi's fragmentary tale of Tamaris, wife of King Astechi, who feigns death by taking a sleeping potion, in order to be with her lover Martino, innkeeper at Luni.¹⁰ Another remote original which has been proposed for Masuccio concerns the premature burial of Ginevra degli Almieri.¹¹

While the stories cited above bear a certain resemblance to Masuccio's *Novella XXXIII*, no positive evidence exists that he was familiar with any of them. In fact, our information concerning the life of Masuccio is distressingly small. Not even regarding the dates of his birth or of his death is there any certainty.¹² One

⁸ Xenophon of Ephesus. *Ephesiaca*. Rudolphus Herscher, ed., Leipzig: Teubner Press, 1858, pp. 366-99. For the date of the *Ephesiaca*, see Wilhelm von Christ's *Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur*, revised by Wilhelm Schmid and Otto Stählin, Munich: Beck, 1924, II, pp. 810-11.

⁷ See "Romeo and Juliet" in *A Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, sixth edition, Horace Howard Furness, ed., Philadelphia, 1899, I, p. 398, et cetera.

⁸ Munro, J. J. *Brooke's 'Romeo and Juliet.'* London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Duffield and Co., 1908, p. xvii.

⁹ See Gaston Paris, "La femme de Salomon," *Romania*, IX (1880), pp. 436-43. Paris refers to the episode of Solomon's wife, related in *Élie de Sainte Gile*, vv. 1793ff.

¹⁰ Sercambi, Giovanni, *Novelle Inedite di Giovanni Sercambi Tratte dal Codice Trivulziano CXCIII*. Rodolfo Renier, ed., Turin: E. Loescher, 1889, pp. 426-27. See also p. 427, note 1. Fazio degli Uberti refers to this legend in his *Dittamondo*. (*Il Dittamondo*, Vincenzo Monti, ed., Milan, 1826, Bk. III, Chap. vi, p. 220.) A more complete narrative is given by F. Leandro Alberti Bolognese, in his *Descrittione di Tutta l'Italia*, Venice, 1577, fo. 26. Cf. Ronunda, *op. cit.*, K1862; N343.3.

¹¹ Velletri, Agostino. *La Storia di Ginevra degli Almieri che fu sepolta viva in Firenze*, A. D'Ancona, ed., Pisa, 1863.

¹² Settembrini, *op. cit.*, p. iv.

fact, however, may be stated positively. His contemporaries considered him the imitator *par excellence* of Boccaccio. Luigi Pulci referred to him as "molto imitatore del nostro M. Giovanni Boccaccio."¹³ Furthermore, Masuccio himself, in the proemium of the third part of his *Novellino*, boasted of his indebtedness to the author of the *Decameron*.¹⁴

Now, Francesco Flamini once observed that the "Giulietta e Romeo" of Luigi da Porto was occasionally suggestive of the Fourth Day of the *Decameron*.¹⁵ I will here venture the assertion that it is to Masuccio, far oftener than to Da Porto, that we should look for direct borrowing from Boccaccio.

For instance, Masuccio's Ganozza, like Boccaccio's Ferondo, after drinking a sleeping potion is stricken as she stands and falls to the ground apparently dead.¹⁶ Masuccio's corrupt Augustinian friar here plays a role strikingly similar to that of the vicious priest in the *Decameron* who administers the potion to Ferondo and who, with a companion, removes the body of the victim at night.

Masuccio's priest takes Ganozza to his room, just as Boccaccio's Gentil Carisendi removes the unconscious Madonna Catalina to his house. Gentil Carisendi's mother warms Madonna Catalina back to life "con grandissimi fuochi e con alcun bagno."¹⁷ Similarly, Masuccio's priest restores Ganozza "con fuoco e altri necessarii provvedimenti." Owing to the exigencies of his plot, Masuccio has no lady at hand to administer a bath to Ganozza and, it would seem, attempts to cover this lacuna by the words "altri necessarii provvedimenti."¹⁸

In describing the death of the lovers, Masuccio seems to follow the *Decameron* rather than the *Metamorphoses*. According to the *Argomento* prefixed to Masuccio's *Novella XXXIII*, Ganozza expires of grief when she finds Mariotto beheaded, just as Boccaccio's Salvestra falls dead on the lifeless body of Girolamo.¹⁹ In

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. v. This phrase occurs in Pulci's dedication of a *novella* to Madonna Ippolita, daughter of the Duke of Milan, and wife of Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Calabria.

¹⁴ Masuccio, Mauro, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁵ ". . . e deve anche qualche tratto al *Decameron*, la cui quarta Giornata offriva all'autore parecchi esempi d'amanti riuniti dopo la morte in una medesima tomba."—Flamini, Francesco. *Il Cinquecento*. "Storia letteraria d'Italia scritta da una Società di Professori." Milan: Vallardi, p. 364.

¹⁶ See Chap. III, *k*.

¹⁷ See Chap. III, *e*. Cf. Rotunda, *op. cit.*, T37 and R212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See Chap. III, *m*. Cf. Rotunda, *op. cit.*, T81.3.

Masuccio's tale itself, however, a slightly different ending is provided.

It might be noted also in passing that Ganozza, who seeks Mariotto in Alexandria, recalls the tale of Florio's going to the same city in search of Biancofiore, in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. The grandfather of Florio is the great "admiral" of Alexandria, much as the uncle of Mariotto is a great merchant of Alexandria, ser Nicolò Mignanelli. Moreover, if Biancofiore is the victim of Mediterranean corsairs, so also is Ganozza's messenger.

The very fidelity with which Masuccio follows Boccaccio leads him into a glaring inconsistency in his treatment of the marital relations between Mariotto and Ganozza. Masuccio states that Mariotto, returning to Siena, wished to enter Ganozza's tomb, in order to accompany forever *quello delicatissimo corpo, che vivendo non gli era concesso lo godere*.²⁰ Here the author, representing Mariotto as a frustrated lover, uses almost the exact words employed by Boccaccio to explain Gentil Carisendi's entrance into Madonna Catalina's tomb.²¹ The trouble is that in so doing Masuccio contradicts himself flatly; he has already stated that Mariotto's marriage to Ganozza was happily consummated.²²

Masuccio's self-contradiction has been strangely overlooked by critics, but seems to be telltale evidence that he was striving unsuccessfully to weld together two different sources. At the same time, it furnishes an argument against the generally accepted theory of a single lost source.²³

It is probable that Masuccio's second model was the popular anonymous tale of *Ippolito e Leonora*. The wedding ceremony in Masuccio's *novella*, performed by a corrupt friar, recalls the highly informal marriage of Ippolito and Leonora, which was brought about through the connivance of an abbe.²⁴ If Ippolito is falsely accused of robbing the house of his bride,²⁵ Mariotto also

²⁰ ". . . e volentieri, se avesse potuto, seria dentro la sepultura intrato, a tale che con quello delicatissimo corpo, che vivendo non gli era stato concesso lo godere, morendo lo avesse col suo eternalmente accompagnato;"—Masuccio, Mauro, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 275.

²¹ See Chap. III, a.

²² "E per dare al fatto con opera compimento, corrotto per dinari un frate agustinese, per mezzo del quale occultamente contrasse detto matrimonio, e appresso, da sí fatta colorata cagione pigliatase sicurtá, con non meno piacere de l'uno che de l'altro, interamente adimpiero loro bramose voglie. E avendo de tal furtivo e licito in parte amore alquanto con felicitá goduti, . . ."—Masuccio, Mauro, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 271.

²³ See Munro, *loc. cit.*

²⁴ Cf. Chap. IV, h.

²⁵ See Chap. IV, i.

is wrongly charged with pilfering his wife's grave. Both heroes are brought before the podesta and sentenced as thieves.²⁶ The podesta hesitates to condemn Ippolito because of his handsome appearance and courteous bearing.²⁷ Similarly, Mariotto is bewept not only by the podesta, but also by all the women who regard him as a *perfetto amatore*. With grave robbery a commonplace in Mediaeval and Renaissance fiction,²⁸ it would have been a simple matter for Masuccio to transform the alleged house-breaking of Ippolito into the more serious charge against Mariotto.

Whatever suggestions Masuccio may have obtained from the *Ippolito e Leonora* story, his chief model remains the *Decameron*. A different theory for the sources of his famous Thirty-Third *novella* was proposed, nevertheless, by the late Henri Hauvette, according to whom Masuccio borrowed from Sermini's tale of la Montanina and Vannino the following features of the Romeo and Juliet legend:

(1) emploi d'un narcotique permettant d'escompter le réveil au bout d'un temps déterminé;

(2) complicité d'un ou de plusieurs moines, dont l'intervention n'est pas désintéressée.²⁹

An attempt will be made to show that these features were probably taken directly from Boccaccio, rather than from Boccaccio's imitator, Sermini.

1. Hauvette wrongly implies that Sermini invented the idea of a drug which would induce sleep for a given length of time. Boccaccio had already described a narcotic which would cause a semblance of death for three days,³⁰ exactly like the one mentioned by Masuccio. This coincidence is the more remarkable in view of the variants later introduced. According to Luigi da Porto, the sleeping potion was effective for about forty-eight hours.³¹ Bandello changes the approximate time to forty hours,³² while Shakespeare compromises with forty-two hours.³³ In Sermini's *novella* we are told that la Montanina, who had taken the drug earlier in the evening, regained consciousness

²⁶ Cf. Chap. IV, *k*.

²⁷ Cf. Chap. IV, *j*.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Second Day, Fifth tale, and Ninth Day, First Tale.

²⁹ Hauvette, Henri. *La "Morte Vivante."* Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1933, p. 134; cf. pp. 126, 127, 129. Cf. Rotunda, *op. cit.*, K1862.

³⁰ Cf. Chap. III, *j*.

³¹ Chiarini, Cino. *Romeo e Giulieta*. Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906, p. 23.

³² Bandello, Matteo. *Le Novelle*. Gioachino Brognoligo, ed., "Scrittori d'Italia" series, Bari: Gius. Laterza e figli, 1910, II, p. 391.

³³ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, *op. cit.*, IV, i, v. 105.

alle ventidue ore. She thus remained unconscious a far shorter time than in any other version of the Romeo and Juliet story which I know,³⁴ in sharp contrast with the period of *three days* on which Boccaccio and Masuccio are exactly agreed. Furthermore, the duration of la Montanina's sleep is not announced in advance, as in the other versions. In fact, la Montanina's schedule is so loosely arranged that she has enough spare time on her hands to chat with her lover Vannino until six o'clock in the morning, when the monks come to open the tomb. In Masuccio's version, the friar and his companion enter Ganozza's tomb, as agreed, *before* the time for her awakening, just as Boccaccio's abbot, accompanied by a Bolognese monk, removes Ferondo from his sepulcher *before* he regains consciousness.³⁵

What is even more extraordinary, Masuccio agrees with Boccaccio in the time required for the drug to take effect. Masuccio's Ganozza, like Boccaccio's Ferondo, is stricken as she stands and falls immediately, apparently dead.³⁶ On the other hand, Sermini's heroine la Montanina, while waiting for her narcotic to work, has time to conceal her lover Vannino; to receive an unwelcome visit from her husband Andreuccio; to send for two monks, and to dictate to them her will.³⁷ Other variants are numerous. According to Luigi da Porto, more than two hours were necessary to put Giulietta to sleep.³⁸ Bandello reduced the required time to *uno o dui quarti d'ora*.³⁹ For the immediate effectiveness of the drug, Masuccio thus agrees exclusively with Boccaccio.

Masuccio also seems to follow Boccaccio, rather than Sermini, for his description of the drug. Boccaccio had introduced *una polvere di maravigliosa virtù*.⁴⁰ Masuccio also mentions a powder—or rather powders.⁴¹ Sermini, however, refers vaguely to a beverage, not to a powder.⁴²

2. Masuccio agrees with Boccaccio in describing a single friar, or abbot, who is interested in disinterring a person buried alive,⁴³

³⁴ Boccaccio's abbot could regulate the length of Ferondo's sleep. In the first instance, Ferondo was to remain unconscious three days, as stated above. Later, the abbot gave Ferondo enough of the drug to cause sleep *forse quattro ore*. Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Il Decamerone di Messer Giovanni Boccacci*. Pietro Fanfani, ed., Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1904, Third Day, Eighth Tale, I, p. 281.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278. Cf. Masuccio, Mauro, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 273.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Sermini, Gentile. *Le Novelle*. Livorno, 1874, pp. 18–21.

³⁸ Da Porto, Luigi. "Giulietta e Romeo." Reprinted by Cino Chiarini, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–42; cf. here p. 26.

³⁹ Bandello, *op. cit.*, II, p. 391. When Giulietta drank the potion, however, the effect was more rapid than Bandello's Fra Lorenzo had estimated: ". . . e guarì non stette che s'addormentò."—*Ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴⁰ Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, *op. cit.*, Third Day, Eighth Tale, I, p. 277.

⁴¹ "una certa acqua con certa composizione de diverse polvere . . ."—Masuccio, Mauro, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁴² "certa bevanda che avea in casa nascosta . . ."—Sermini, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴³ Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, *op. cit.*, Third Day, Eighth Tale, I, p. 277.

although in both instances the physical aid of a subservient companion is invoked. In Sermini's account, there are two apparently equal monks who know nothing about the premature burial.⁴⁴ As Hauvette himself pointed out, their role is substantially that of the grave robbing friar who is described by Boccaccio as being startled out of his wits by the unexpected emergence of Andreuccio from the tomb (*Decameron*, Second Day, Fifth Tale).⁴⁵ Hauvette might have added, moreover, that Sermini borrows the same *motif* again from Boccaccio when he makes the friars, on the way to the burial, drop Vannino's casket precipitately when they hear him cry from within: "Che diavolo mi fate voi?"⁴⁶

3. Last but not of least importance, the fact should not be overlooked that Sermini's Vannino is buried with his lady love, la Montanina, a fate not at all shared by Masuccio's Mariotto Mignanelli, nor by Boccaccio's Gentil de' Carisendi, principal model for Mariotto.

It would seem that Ireneo Sanesi was correct in classifying Sermini's first *novella* primarily as a variant of the *Decameron*, X, 4 (the tale of Carisendi).⁴⁷ Hauvette, however, was doubtless justified in stating that Sermini's chief interest lies in the "combinaison d'éléments, empruntés à droite et à gauche, qu'il a réalisée."⁴⁸ Of these extraneous elements, the most important is surely the tale of Andreuccio da Perugia (*Decameron* II, 5), which, as has been observed, Sermini imitates at least twice. By his vagaries, nevertheless, Sermini so far separates himself from the main Romeo and Juliet theme that his influence on such a writer as Masuccio becomes, in my judgment, negligible.

In conclusion, and to summarize: The Thirty-Third Tale of Masuccio's *Novellino* was patterned closely on the *Decameron*, with certain elements taken also from the *Filocolo*. Boccaccio's influence was exerted directly, and not in a roundabout manner, through folk transmission. A secondary model was probably the story of *Ippolito e Leonora*, but the theory of Sermini's influence, proposed by H. Hauvette, lacks adequate proof. Masuccio's attempt to weld together materials from different sources was on the whole successful, but led to self-contradiction in at least one important instance, which is almost proof positive that his *novella* was not based on a single "lost document."

⁴⁴ Sermini, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Hauvette, *op. cit.*, p. 125. Cf. Sermini, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁷ Sanesi, Ireneo. *Il cinquecentista Ortensio Lando*. Pistoia, 1893, p. 202; cf. p. 199.

⁴⁸ Hauvette, *op. cit.*, p. 124.