



*A Venetian 'Life of the Rake', one of four known copies*

**Pl. 1 (title) The Rake courts a courtesan at her window (platemark 170 × 205 mm)**

## Anonymous Venetian printmaker

### Vita del Lascivo.

[Venice], 'Con Lic. De' Supe. & Privileg.', [no publisher named, circa 1660–1680]

OBLONG QUARTO (215 × 300 mm), a suite of twelve numbered engravings by an anonymous printmaker (matrices circa 170 × 205 mm) with a quatrain engraved beneath each image, the first print additionally lettered upper left *Vita del Lascivo*.

PAPER watermark PM within a circle surmounted by a trifoliate leaf (height 65 mm).<sup>1</sup>

All the prints good impressions in excellent state of preservation. Corners of binding rubbed.

PROVENANCE Librairie Damascène Morgand, *Bulletin* (Paris 1892), v, p.816, item 20331 — Pierre Louÿs (1870–1925), libertine writer, his sale 'Livres anciens et modernes, rares et précieux' (F. Lair-Dubreuil, C.-P.; L. Giraud-Badin, expert), Paris, 24–27 November 1930, lot 646 (505 fr.) — Pierre Berès, his sale by Pierre Bergé & Associés, 'Fonds de la librairie Pierre Berès. Des incunables à nos jours, 4ème partie', Paris, 17 December 2007, lot 94

BINDING nineteenth-century blue half-morocco.

**A** N ENGRAVED 'Life of the Rake', an extremely rare set of prints retelling the cautionary tale of the Prodigal Son in seventeenth-century Venice.

The work is an early example of a new genre of popular prints with didactic intentions that flourished mostly in the cities of Venice and Rome, conveying normative social values simultaneously (and often redundantly) by both image and brief moralising text. Such prints appealed to a new public situated between the educated elite and the consumers of roughly-illustrated broadsheets, and were destined for the most part for domestic use and

<sup>1</sup> A similar watermark with same initials PM is reproduced by Edward Heawood, *Watermarks, mainly of the 17th and 18th centuries* (Hilversum 1950), no. 3033 (dated 1686); a similar mark with initials RM and identified as 'carta veneta sec. XVII' is recorded by Stefania Massari, *Giulio Romano pinxit et delineavit: opere grafiche autografe di collaborazione e bottega* (Rome 1993), p.375. This type of mark later became common in papers manufactured at Bologna; see the online project of the Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, 'Filigrane bolognesi tra 1650 e 1750', recording marks with initials GA, GMS, GR, PR, etc. (<http://badigit.comune.bologna.it/filigrane/index.html>).

the edification of youth.<sup>2</sup> The new print genre promoted ‘correct’ and desirable behaviour through both ‘positive’ (historical or allegorical *exempla*) and ‘negative examples’, such as the heedless lives of a prostitute and her client which are recounted here in a series of twelve episodes. An inscription on the first print ‘Con Licentia de’Superiori & Priuilegio’ confirms that the social values expressed were endorsed by local ecclesiastical and political authority (the Reformatori dello Studio di Padua and Venetian Senate respectively).

The prototypes of our publication were multi-vignette broadsheets composed of a number of small, sequentially placed images with brief texts placed below (a type of early ‘comic strip’). The earliest known broadsheet ‘Life of the Harlot’ was printed probably in Venice about 1600; the earliest surviving broadsheet ‘Life of a Rake’ was published at Rome by Callisto Ferrante in 1611.<sup>3</sup> In turn, our *Vita del Lascivo* is identified as one of the prototypes and precedents of Hogarth’s narrative series, the ‘Harlot’s Progress’ (painted in 1731, engraved in 1732) and ‘Rake’s Progress’ (painted in 1733, engraved in 1735).<sup>4</sup>

A Roman publisher’s catalogue of 1614 advertising two broadsheets, ‘The Life and Fate of Whores’ and ‘The Life and Fate of those who frequent Whores’, suggests that the multi-image broadsheets were sometimes conceived as pendants.<sup>5</sup> Our *Vita del Lascivo* is thus assumed to be the pendant to a lost ‘Vita della Cortigiana’, similarly developed in twelve scenes and set in Venice, which survives in versions engraved by Giacomo Piccini after designs by Curtio Castagna (Venice *circa* 1650),<sup>6</sup> by Giuseppe Longhi (Bologna *circa*

1660),<sup>7</sup> and by Federico Agnelli (Milan *circa* 1700).<sup>8</sup> It is notable that our ‘Lascivo’ prints are smaller than both Piccini and Longhi’s versions of the ‘Cortigiana’ prints and that the verses below each scene are also reduced (from three stanzas of *terza rima* to a quatrain).



Pl. 3 The Courtesan invites the Rake to her house (platemark 170 × 205 mm)

<sup>2</sup> Sara F. Matthews Grieco, ‘Pedagogical prints: moralizing broadsheets and wayward women in Counter Reformation Italy’ in *Picturing women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (Cambridge 1997), pp.61–87; Tessa Storey, *Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Cambridge 2008), pp.11–14.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Il Miserabile fine di quelli che seguono le meretrici’, reproduced by Achille Bertarelli, *L’imagerie populaire italienne* (Paris 1929), pp.44–45, and David Kunzle, *History of the Comic Strip, Volume 1: The early comic strip: narrative strips and picture stories in the European broadsheet from c.1450 to 1825* (Berkeley 1973), pp.276–277 (from the only known impression, in the Bibliothèque nationale de France).

<sup>4</sup> Hilde Kurz, ‘Italian models of Hogarth’s picture stories’ in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15 (1952), esp. pp.146–147.

<sup>5</sup> Kurz, *op. cit.*, pp.145–146: ‘it is clear that the two series [*Vita della Cortigiana* and *Vita del Lascivo*] were conceived as pendants’; Grieco, *op. cit.*, p.76.

<sup>6</sup> The Castagna-Piccini *Vita della Cortigiana* is known only by single impressions of plates 5 and 7; see *Fuoco acqua cielo terra* [Stampe popolari profane della ‘Civica raccolta Achille Bertarelli’], edited by Aurelio Rigoli and Annamaria Amitrano Savarese (Vigevano 1995), pp.464–465 nos. 651–652; and Storey, *op. cit.*, pp.33–38.

<sup>7</sup> The first print of Longhi’s twelve-part *Vita della Cortigiana* (or ‘Lo Specchio al Fin de la Putana’, the words that close the verse in the last scene) carries the shop address ‘Sotto alle Scale’ which he occupied between 1655 and 1658; for reproductions, see Kurz, *op. cit.*, pp.146–147 plates 32–33; Kunzle, *op. cit.*, pp.274, 278–280, 452; *Fuoco acqua cielo terra*, *op. cit.*, p.469 nos. 657–658; *Le cortigiane di Venezia dal Trecento al Settecento: il gioco dell’amore*, catalogue of an exhibition held in the Casino municipale, Ca’ Vendramin Calergi, Venice (Milan 1990), pp.141–143; and Storey, *op. cit.*, pp.33–38 figs.3.1–3.12.

<sup>8</sup> Agnelli’s prints are reversed copies after Longhi; impressions of plates 2, 4, 6, 7 are reproduced in *Fuoco acqua cielo terra*, *op. cit.*, no. 656.

Like the young man of the 1611 broadsheet, the 'Lascivo' begins by courting a courtesan at her window; it is spring, the pigeons are mating, and he offers her a flower. We assume he has no independent means, because in the next scene he steals a pair of flame-coloured English stockings for her sake from a haberdasher, which gains him entry (scene three) to her apartments (the courtesan's servant locks the door behind him, suggesting there will be no escape; a caged bird surveys the scene). Then follows the father's violent expulsion of the wastrel from the family home as punishment for his indiscretion, ignoring his mother's pleas. In the fifth scene, the 'Lascivo' obtains his inheritance (the Prodigal's 'portion') secretly from his mother, and in the sixth, he returns triumphantly to his mistress, bringing this time a basket of fowl as well as flowers, and afterwards is shown living lavishly, enjoying a formal banquet with musical accompaniment, in the company of two ladies and a friend.

In time the 'Lascivo' becomes a victim of his pride: in scene eight he purchases a fake German barony, and retires with his mistress to a country villa, where he becomes even more profligate. 'From swindling [an allusion to his assumed German title] the unfortunate now advances to gambling' says the text under scene nine, where we see the 'Lascivo' being fleeced by two women and by a fellow-gambler. Having lost his fortune and been jilted by his mistress, the 'Lascivo' resorts to obtaining money through crime – a street robbery, for which he is arrested by the police, and taken to prison (scene ten). He is rescued in the penultimate scene by the charity of a true friend. Although freed from prison, the dishonoured 'Lascivo' is unable to earn a living, and we see him for the last time in a soup-line outside a hospital for the destitute.

The difference in moral content and purpose of the two narratives, if they were indeed issued as pendants, is remarkable. In the 'Life of the Harlot', a young girl of humble social class is seduced by a young rake, becomes his mistress, and begins to enjoy a life of luxury. During the carnival season she gives her attention to a foreigner, who quickly installs her in a fine house; the 'first lover' surprises them there and kills his rival; the unfortunate girl has to sell her possessions, and turns common prostitute; ravaged by disease, she descends to begging, and dies in a hospital.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the artist of the 'Life of the Rake' series punishes his hero gently, sparing him the final judgment of social rejection, syphilis, and death; evidently, the courtesan was regarded as a greater threat to society than her client/victim. The 'Lascivo' is presented in fact with some sympathy, as the spoiled child of a noble family, alternately tyrannized and indulged by his parents, whose behaviour is derided as much

<sup>9</sup> A contrary synopsis of the courtesan's career path, from poverty to wealth and back again, is given by Storey, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp.47–48, who draws on a longer narrative version published as *La Fortunata cortigiana sfortunata, dove s'intende Principio, Mezo e fine della vita Cortigianesca* (Venice & Treviso 1668; copy in Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, Palatino, E66 153i).

as the promiscuous life of the son himself. In several scenes he is overshadowed by his mistress, who occupies centre stage; in some others, he almost disappears. His rakishness is treated with light humour, as in the scene where his avaricious father beats him out of the house, like the miserly Pantalone in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, and the publication provides amusement and edification in almost equal measure.



Pl. 4 The Father expels the Rake from the family home (platemark 170 × 205 mm)

The anonymous artist enlivens the scenes with subsidiary figures – a chair mender, a group of little boys playing marbles, various street vendors – and these together with richly-detailed views of familiar and less-familiar Venetian sights – the haberdasher's shop at the 'Insegna della Maestrada', the state prison or *Piombi* (from which Casanova in the next century made his celebrated escape), the civic hospital (the Lion of Saint Mark above the gateway and dress of the intendant indicate that it was run by a secular rather than by a religious authority) – throw 'fresh light... upon the peculiar character of the city in which

the story is set'.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the prints are proving useful to scholars in different contexts.<sup>11</sup>

Like many popular prints, the suite is now extremely rare, with just four other copies known:

- New York, New York Public Library, Print Room, Bequest of John Lambert Cadwalader (1837–1914), MEB (Vita del lascivo)
- Milan, Civica Raccolta 'Achille Bertarelli', Stampe Popolari Profane, m F-9 / Albo D-168<sup>12</sup>
- anonymous consignor, Sotheby's Italia, 'Libri Antichi e Moderni', Florence, 30 October 1990, lot 1432 ('qualche leggera fioritura, cartone del secolo XIX', estimated Lire 3,000,000–4,000,000; returned to the market with Libreria Antiquaria Pregliasco, Catalogo di Libri Rari e di Pregio, September 2010, item 95)
- anonymous consignor, Bassenge, Auktion 106, Berlin, 26 November 2015, lot 5312 (11 plates only, lacking pl. 4)

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<sup>10</sup> Kunzle, *op. cit.*, p.282.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance* (New York 1987), p.191, reproducing prints 1, 3, and 8 (from the New York Public Library copy); Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (New Haven & London 2004), p.182 fig. 204, reproducing print 7 (from the New York Public Library copy); Heiner Borggreffe, 'Tizians ruhende Göttinnen und die Dienerinnen der Liebe' in "...wir wollen der Liebe Raum geben": *Konkubinate geistlicher und weltlicher Fürsten um 1500*, edited by Andreas Tacke (Göttingen 2006), pp.394-395 Abb.2, reproducing print 1.

<sup>12</sup> For reproductions, see Kurz, *op. cit.*, pp.156–157 plates 35–36 and p.168 'Appendix IV'; Kunzle, *op. cit.*, pp.283–285; Storey, *op. cit.*, pp.39–44; Patricia Allerston, 'Reconstructing the second-hand clothes trade in sixteenth and seventeenth century Venice' in *Costume: the Journal of the Costume Society* 33 (1999), p.53 fig. 3 (reproducing print 2).