

# ‘Un beau petit mot’: ‘Lorenzaccio’ and The Many Guises of Seduction

Pedro Querido

It is well known that Alfred de Musset’s *Lorenzaccio* (1834) – which revolves around Lorenzo de’ Medici’s assassination of his cousin, the Duke of Florence, in 1537 – owes its existence in large part to Musset’s then lover George Sand; having previously written a shorter play on the same topic, she essentially bequeathed it to him, and he was to do with its subject matter and raw material as he pleased. However, it is by no means irrelevant to point out that, «[i]n the early 1830s, Alfred de Musset was fascinated by the Don Juan legend and by the nature of the man himself», which prompted him to write, in 1832 and 1833, three poems that «refer directly either to the Don Juan legend or to Mozart’s opera».<sup>1</sup>

Was this influence decisive in Musset’s shaping of ‘Lorenzino’ into a silver-tongued seducer? Or does Benedetto Varchi’s account of the historical Lorenzo, his contemporary, already lend itself naturally to such a portrayal? Which aspects of seduction were emphasised in the different adaptations of this story? This paper will attempt to address this last question, the answer to which could be a first step towards a diachronic analysis of the intricate theme of seduction in the most significant efforts to render the enigmatic figure of Lorenzino de’ Medici.

## 1. Theoretical Groundwork: On Rhetoric, Persuasion, Performance

First things first, though: what exactly is meant here by seduction? While there are sundry viable perspectives which would enrich our understanding of how that theme is handled in this paper’s corpus, here it will be mostly paired with the closely related concept of persuasion, especially (but not only) as a rhetorical process.

Bearing that in mind, Aristotle’s millennia-old treatise on rhetoric is a fitting starting point. According to the Greek philosopher, «[r]hetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion».<sup>2</sup> But while he did concede that the «power of speech» has the potential to both «confer the greatest of benefits [...] and inflict the greatest of injuries», depending on the way it is used (Ibid, p. 7), one could say that his outlook was on the whole optimistic, since he believed that «things that are true and things that are

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<sup>1</sup> K. ELLIS, ‘Rewriting *Don Giovanni*, or “The Thieving Magpies”’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 119, no. 2, 1994, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> ARISTOTLE, *The Art of Rhetoric*, London, HarperCollins, 2012, p. 8.

better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in» (Ibidem), which implies that a successful use of rhetoric merely *brings out* the truth and goodness of a certain argument.

Later theoreticians would be more sceptical and find that, while language can in fact serve truth, it does not guarantee it: it can just as well be used to lie, seduce, manipulate and deceive – and the same holds true for rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, according to Michel Meyer, it is moot to discuss a perceived immorality or amorality of the different uses of language, because to have a problem with speech for being manipulative is to have a problem with its very essence (Ibid, p. 51).

It is more fruitful, then, to look at language and rhetoric not through an ethical standpoint, but through a pragmatic one – and here ‘pragmatic’ is meant both in the common meaning of the word and in its scientific sense. What, if any, is the impact of speech in the real world? The consensual answer to this question has changed radically since John Langshaw Austin’s 1955 ‘William James Lectures’ at Harvard University. In them, the British philosopher challenged the then unanimous idea that speech was necessarily ‘constative’, or descriptive, by famously claiming that, in some instances, «to *say* something is to *do* something», and this gave rise to the notion of «*performative utterance*».<sup>4</sup>

Austin makes it perfectly clear that there are some important constraints: the success – or, in Austinian terms, ‘felicity’ – of what we now call ‘speech acts’ depends on «the appropriate circumstances», meaning that if certain conditions are not met they are deemed to be «abuses» or even only amount to «misfires» (Ibid, pp. 13, 14-15). Crucially, though, the speech act’s impact is in a sense irrevocable: ‘a promise is a promise’, and its performative nature survives its speaker’s lack of sincerity, «[f]or he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement» (Ibid, p. 11, his italics).

The notion of language as performance is particularly pertinent to this paper, given its corpus. To begin with, an analysis of any given theatre play may stand to benefit greatly from speech act theory. According to Anne Ubersfeld, the performative side of speech is unalienable from dramatic discourse, «où chaque protagoniste essaie de *faire faire quelque chose à un autre*

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. M. MEYER, *Questões de Retórica: Linguagem, Razão e Sedução*, trans. into Portuguese by A. Hall, Lisbon, Edições 70, 1993, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> J. L. AUSTIN, *How to do Things With Words*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and M. Sbisà, second edition, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 12, 6, his italics in both instances. This concept has since evolved, having been not only reformulated by Austin himself but also elaborated in disparate ways by renowned linguists such as John Searle and Paul Grice.

(pour satisfaire son propre désir) à l'aide d'ordres, promesses, prières, supplications, menaces, chantages». <sup>5</sup> In other words, the fact that «le discours de théâtre n'est pas déclaratif ou informatif, il est *conatif* [...] ; son mode est l'*impératif*», and that typically «il possède une force *illocutionnaire* ou *illocutoire*», means that speech acts make up its very foundation (Ibidem, her italics). For this and other reasons, «les théories des actes de langage apportent des lumières décisives à l'analyse du discours de théâtre». <sup>6</sup>

Moreover, and even more importantly, the performativity of speech is the actual driving force of rhetoric and seduction. It should come as no surprise, then, that Shoshana Felman relied heavily on «Austin's theory of the performative» to examine the theme of seduction in Molière's and Mozart's renderings of the myth of Don Juan;<sup>7</sup> after all, as Felman states, «[t]he rhetoric of seduction consists, in fact, almost exclusively in the deployment of speech acts» (Ibid, p. 16). For example, promises, often «taken as the exemplary model of speech acts in general» (Ibid, p. 3), is precisely one of seducers' favourite tools to help them achieve their aims.

But how exactly does that happen? Wherein lies the power of promises, which Don Juan exploits by deliberately and systematically breaking them? Here Meyer's words are illuminating, and deliciously apt for this particular topic: rhetoric «is only manipulative and deceitful for those who take arguments at face value, seduction for truth, Don Juan for an honest man, Hitler for a pacifist» (M. MEYER, *Uma Questão de Retórica*, p. 147, my translation). Thus Felman writes that the «real conflict» in Don Juan's story «is, in fact, the opposition between two views of language, one that is cognitive, or constative, and another that is performative» (Ibid, p. 13). This means that, whereas his addressees' view of language is rooted in knowledge, and thus framed in terms of correctness and incorrectness, right and wrong, Don Juan's utterances are blissfully free from such constraints, as he focuses only on the net result of any given interaction; whereas, for his victims, words primarily *mean* things and mostly *represent* them truthfully, for Don Juan words *do* things – for him, language «is performative and not informative; it is a field of enjoyment, not of knowledge» (Ibid, p. 14).

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<sup>5</sup> A. UBERSFELD, *Lire le théâtre I*, Paris, Belin, 1996, p. 191, her italics. Interestingly, she illustrates this point with an excerpt from Musset's *Lorenzaccio*.

<sup>6</sup> A. UBERSFELD, *Lire le théâtre III. Le dialogue de théâtre*, Paris, Belin, 1996, p. 93. However, one should be keenly aware of the limitations of the usefulness of speech act theory for literary criticism. For a stern and cogent articulation of this line of reasoning, see D. GORMAN, *The Use and Abuse of Speech Act Theory in Criticism*, «Poetics Today», 20, 1999, pp. 96, 98, 102 and *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> S. FELMAN, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, transl. into English by C. Porter, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. ix.

All of these aspects contribute decisively to a fuller understanding of the ruses deployed by the ‘Lorenzaccios’ of this paper’s corpus. Yet, before we move on to them, it is imperative to look into Varchi’s account of the historical Lorenzo de’ Medici – for this was the spring from which Sand (and then Musset) drank, and it is there that the legend of the latter-day Brutus began to take on traits more readily associated with Don Juan.

## 2. Varchi’s Lorenzo: Seduction as Collection

In his in-depth study on «the close relationship between sex and power, between the political and the sexual» in sixteenth-century Florence, which focuses on the two Medici dukes Alessandro and Cosimo I,<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Scott Baker sheds much light on Alessandro de’ Medici’s contemporary reputation. It is undisputed that Alessandro did not enjoy a stellar one (Ibid, p. 436), and his cousin Lorenzo played no mean part in that, by assassinating his character (in his *Apologia*) several years after having assassinated his more material self (Ibid, 438). And even though the derogatory writings of Lorenzo «and even Varchi [...] deserve some skepticism» (Ibid, p. 442), the truth is that «[n]early all contemporary observers of Alessandro’s reign and person [...] agreed on the duke’s sexual license» (Ibid, p. 439): his image was then, as is still now, mostly that of a «libidinous womanizer» (Ibid, p. 459). In fact, his «sexual appetite and behaviour [...] marked him as effeminate» (Ibid, p. 452), but that effeminacy did not «connote homoerotic desire in the way that it would in later centuries», which explains «the complete absence of any suggestion of same-sex activity on the part of Alessandro» (Ibid, p. 447).

All of these insights provide an appropriate backdrop – and counterpoint – to Varchi’s narrative, which was written not very long after the event it chronicles took place. Most of it was appropriated with a fair amount of what in adaptation theory is called ‘fidelity’ by Sand and Musset: Lorenzo’s fine intelligence; his thin and frail body, which earned him the nickname ‘Lorenzino’; the debauchery he indulged in and facilitated as his master’s go-between; Scoronconcolo’s role in the preparation of the assassination and in its execution; the ensuing pool of blood (notoriously present in Sand’s text, and notably absent from Musset’s version); and even the words attributed to the self-styled heir of Brutus during the gruesome act.<sup>9</sup>

Yet one of Lorenzo’s most intriguing traits – which is virtually absent from Sand’s version but finds an understated haven in Musset’s play – can be found in an oft-quoted passage

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<sup>8</sup> N. S. BAKER, ‘Power and Passion in Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Sexual and Political Reputations of Alessandro and Cosimo I de’ Medici’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 19, no. 3, September 2010, p. 432.

<sup>9</sup> B. VARCHI, *Chroniques florentines*, vol. XV, <<http://www.site-magister.com/lorenzo4.htm>> [accessed 17 February 2016], pars. 2, 4, 6.

in which Varchi claims that Lorenzo «se passait toutes ses envies, surtout en affaires d’amour, sans égard pour le sexe, l’âge et la condition des personnes» (Ibid, par. 2). This reference to Lorenzo’s elusive sexual orientation should inform not only any reading of Musset’s *Lorenzaccio* (and, as we shall see, the later adaptations examined in this paper) but also, perhaps, the interpretation of the otherwise innocent-looking figurative use of a phrase which stems from the language of courtship: «Lorenzo, étant retourné à Florence, se mit à faire sa cour au duc Alexandre, et il sut si bien feindre, si bien complaire au duc en toutes choses, qu’il alla jusqu’à lui persuader que, pour le service de ce prince, il jouait le rôle d’espion» (Ibid, par. 3, my italics).

Apart from that, these quotations also reveal just how relevant the theme of seduction is to this story. On the face of it Lorenzo, in Varchi’s account, labours under a logic of collection: his overriding concern seems to have been quantity in detriment of quality (inviting comparison with Don Juan, who, though he does not shy away from a challenge, is happy to collect as many sexual encounters as possible), and the sheer number and variety of ‘conquests’ would appear to downplay any consideration of the actual process of persuasion.

But that only scratches the surface, and so fails to do justice to the equally valid reading of Lorenzo as a smooth operator. This is best illustrated by the episode in which Lorenzo convinces Alexandre that he managed to prevail on his aunt so that she may yield to the Duke: «Quoique Lorenzo n’eût parlé de rien à sa tante, il ne laissait pas de dire au duc qu’il l’avait fait, et qu’il la trouvait rebelle; mais que pourtant il viendrait à bout de la séduire et de l’obliger à condescendre à leurs désirs» (Ibid, par. 5). This moment, which features in most literary adaptations of this chronicle, could be said to contain two different kinds of persuasion: a pseudo-seduction and an actual persuasion. Strictly speaking, the first one did not take place; all that seems to tether it to reality is Lorenzo’s (false) utterance and Alexandre’s belief in it. And yet it is every bit as effective as a ‘felicitous’ speech act, because it has its desired effect, since it caused the Duke to act in the way his killer intended. By a subtle irony, the very statement which purports to *describe* an act of persuasion is *itself* nothing more than an act of persuasion; like in the French Don Juan plays, the same utterance is perceived as performative (and only that) by the seducer and as constative (and therefore true) by his victim, and that abuse of trust is key to its efficacy.

These dynamics of persuasion and seduction will be very much present in the flippant and oddly charming ‘Lorenzaccio’ devised by Musset three centuries later. At first glance, they would appear to be missing in Sand’s earlier attempt – but they do crop up in unexpected places.

### 3. Sand’s ‘Conspiracy’: Seduction as Power

Linda Hutcheon, in her seminal work on adaptation, writes that, when one looks at «adaptations *as adaptations*», one finds them to be «haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly».<sup>10</sup> In the case of George Sand and her take on Lorenzo's story (*Une Conspiration en 1537*),<sup>11</sup> Hutcheon's insight holds true not only in relation to Varchi's text but also, in a way, to Musset's own later version (a phenomenon reminiscent of Harold Bloom's theory that 'strong' later poems can actually retroactively influence earlier ones).

Thus it is just as inevitable that Sand's Lorenzo is in various respects true to his historical homonym as it is understandable that Musset would later recycle many excerpts of *Conspiration* in his own *Lorenzaccio*, to the point of echoing some of them almost verbatim. Nevertheless, some of the key elements of *Conspiration* run counter to Varchi's account.<sup>12</sup> One of them, for instance, is Alexandre's declared hatred for his 'Lorenzino',<sup>13</sup> which is entirely at odds not only with Varchi's claim that «Alexandre le favorisait» (B. VARCHI, *Chroniques*, par. 3) but also with the fact that «most sources agree that the two men had become close friends through their shared pursuit of sexual conquest» (N. S. BAKER, *Power and Passion*, p. 439).

Another difference, which is of greater import to the subject at hand, is that in Sand's work the Duke is cast as a master of seduction and persuasion, «LE DUC : [...] moi qui connais toutes les ruses d'usage» (G. SAND, *Conspiration*, p. 26). The lecherous fiend in historical sources, and the brutish philanderer in Musset, are a far cry from the polished ladies' man who croons alluring words with impressive ease,<sup>14</sup> or from the playful instigator who plays his quarrelling subjects off against each other: «LE DUC, *bas à Lorenzo* : Bien, Lorenzino, venge-moi de cet importun censeur. (*Bas à Valori.*) Vous le voyez insolent et bas !» (Ibid, p. 7). In Sand's hands, Alexandre becomes not only hateful but also eloquent, scheming and rather more complex, somewhat akin to a Shakespearean villain such as Richard III. Crucially, his seductive

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<sup>10</sup> L. HUTCHEON, *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York, NY, Routledge, 2006, p. 6, her italics.

<sup>11</sup> It may seem to be a stretch to treat Sand's play as an *adaptation* (which is indisputably the case with Musset's text), but Hutcheon shows that «the ontological shift that can happen in adaptations of an historical event or an actual person's life into a reimagined, fictional form» offers grounds for this notion (Ibid, p. 17). In fact, one of Hutcheon's definitions of adaptation is suitable for both Sand's and Musset's works: «A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging» (Ibid, p. 8, her italics).

<sup>12</sup> Not that this is in any way problematic: as Hutcheon points out, the adaptation's special status and origin «does not mean [...] that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis» (Ibid, p. 6).

<sup>13</sup> G. SAND, *Une conspiration en 1537. Scène historique inédite de George Sand*, «La Revue de Paris», no. VI, 1921, <<http://www.lettresvolees.fr/musset/documents/Conspiration.pdf>>, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> «LE DUC : Cours donc, ami. Dis-lui que le duc de Florence se meurt d'amour pour elle. Dis-lui qu'il couvrira de perles et de pierreries sa noire chevelure et son sein naissant et ses bras moelleux. Dis-lui qu'il lui donnera le plus beau cheval que Naples ait jamais fait courir dans ses fêtes, la plus belle haquenée de toutes les Espagnes, des étoffes d'or et des voiles brodés de Constantinople...» (Ibid, p. 19).

powers are metonymic of his might as ruler. This idea of seduction as power would be most forcefully exploited – or, perhaps more accurately, laid bare – in Paul Morand’s later adaptation, which will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

Lorenzo’s seduction, however, is of an opposite sort altogether: it is partly fuelled by his marginal status, and its strength lies in its perceived weakness. When he mocks Capponi for his «très beau mouvement oratoire» (Ibid, p. 14), or when he is denounced for his «fantaisie est de tout dénigrer et de tout nier» (Ibid, p. 13), Lorenzo strikes an ironic pose which would ordinarily preclude any possibility of persuasion (this will be looked into in greater detail in the next chapter) – but the fact is that he spends a considerable amount of time, energy and words (successfully) coaxing people into believing his deceptions, be it the Duke (Ibid, p. 8 and *passim*), the Republicans (Ibid, pp. 14-15), Scoronconcolo (Ibid, p. 20-21) or Catterina (Ibid, pp. 30-31).

Unlike her decision to bestow more than a dash of slick treachery on the character of Alexandre, Sand’s depiction of Lorenzo as an ingenious manipulator falls in line with Varchi’s chronicle and would become the template for later adaptations, notably for the most accomplished and influential of all, Musset’s *Lorenzaccio*.

#### 4. Musset’s *Lorenzaccio*: Seduction as Process

One important change manifest in Musset’s Romantic drama concerns the dynamics between the Medici cousins: «Compared with the brutal and impetuous Alexandre, Lorenzo appears as a crafty Mephistophelian character», whose «diabolical persuasiveness» makes him stand in stark contrast to the Duke.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the young French poet also turns his protagonist into a walking (and especially talking) tribute to biting sarcasm: «he has an incisive wit and mordant tongue which delights in its power to wound and humiliate».<sup>16</sup> These two traits may appear to be congruent, even complementary – after all, they both attest to Lorenzo’s ‘gift of the gab’ and cunning. But any reading of the theme of seduction in *Lorenzaccio* would greatly benefit from a debate on its use of irony.

Michel Meyer considers that rhetoric really boils down to the negotiation of distance between subjects (M. MEYER, *Questões*, p. 26). This is essential for human relations, since they are based on a dialectic of *identity* and *difference*: identity has to do with similarities, affinities and community, whilst difference denotes opposition, exclusion and power struggles

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<sup>15</sup> E. FALK, ‘Musset’s *Lorenzaccio*’, *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1958, pp. 33, 32.

<sup>16</sup> R. GRIMSLEY, ‘The Character of *Lorenzaccio*’, *French Studies*, vol. XI, no. 1, 1957, p. 17.

(Ibid, p. 135). At the one end of the spectrum lies irony, in which identity is minimal and difference is maximal (Ibid, p. 119); it amounts to an extreme opposition, and this attitude drives a wedge between people (Ibid, p. 124, 127).

At the other end of the spectrum, however, is seduction, since «the seducer's logic aims to diminish the distance and proceeds as though it has been abolished or has ceased to matter» (Ibid, p. 136, my translation). Reconciling caustic irony and smooth seduction in the same character should, in theory, be unfeasible, or at least a strategy doomed to failure – nevertheless, as we have seen, Sand succeeds in making it plausible, and Musset would build from her success. Where the Duke has a brash flair about him, as in Sand, or a «coarse, impatient sensuality» (R. GRIMSLEY, 'Character', p. 16), as in Musset, 'Lorenzaccio' is proficient in a unique kind of persuasion, one that is self-depreciating, slow-acting, insidious. There is no hint of Donjuanian swagger, of an overweening self-confidence, of 'will to power': Lorenzo's persuasion tactics work precisely because of his meek appearance, his presumed phobia of swords, his child-like recklessness and his outward dog-like loyalty and obedience to the tyrant, all of which add to his overall harmless image.<sup>17</sup> This lowers his audience's guard, and allows him to prevail on them surreptitiously, as if through suggestion – a strategy perfectly in tune with the patient, long-run approach adopted by the historical Lorenzo de' Medici.

His efficacy strikes one as even more resounding when compared with how other would-be seducers fare. The Marchesa Chibo and Philippe Strozzi, both of them honest, well-meaning Republicans added to the story by Musset, and keen believers in the power of speech (A. MUSSET, *Lorenzaccio*, pp. 31, 49), adopt yet another possible approach by attempting to advance their cause through a more candid and explicit persuasion, which seeks to appeal to their audience's values, or love (Ibid, pp. 84-85, 99-102) – and they fail miserably every time.

Should there remain any doubt concerning the pride of place that persuasion and manipulation occupy in *Lorenzaccio*, it is readily dispelled after a careful examination of Cardinal Chibo, a priest whose ruthlessness, deceitfulness and low-key machinations ensure that the state of affairs, with which the large majority of the population is manifestly dissatisfied, is maintained. Lorenzo may seem to be fighting against it, but the truth is that he «succumbs to a profound pessimism» and «disillusionment»<sup>18</sup> well before he assassinates the Duke, as he is certain that no change will result from his drastic action. His relentless cynicism and pessimism

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Alexandre's own assessment of his favourite subject: «Renzo, un homme à craindre ! le plus fieffé poltron ! une femmelette, l'ombre d'un ruffian énervé ! un rêveur qui marche nuit et jour sans épée, de peur d'en apercevoir l'ombre à son côté !» (A. MUSSET, *Lorenzaccio*, Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 2000, p. 35).

<sup>18</sup> A. CALLEN, 'The Place of *Lorenzaccio* in Musset's Theatre', *Forum for Language Studies*, vol. V, no. 3, 1969, p. 226.



(which are very much Musset's as well) turn out to be prophetic, and the Cardinal, whom Ubersfeld describes as a «prêtre machiavélique», «politique lucide» and «clairvoyant», cheats and manipulates his way to the final scene's triumph: «c'est lui qui est véritablement couronné».<sup>19</sup>

This prompts a very valid question: why, then, did Musset's Lorenzo carry the murder out? Because the title character is less than clear in his ruminations about his motive, the question seems to be open-ended, and many legitimate interpretations have been put forward. For the purposes of this paper, it might be worth looking into the possibility that Lorenzo was *seduced by his own seduction*. The rhetoric process contains in itself the pleasure of language (M. MEYER, *Questões*, p. 23), or rather, one feels tempted to say, the pleasure *in* language, in its sheer performance (S. FELMAN, *Scandal*, p. 76), which is why, for Don Juan, to seduce is «to prolong, within desiring speech, the pleasure-taking performance of the very production of that speech» (Ibid, p. 15).

It could be argued that Lorenzo, who does not carry out his intended action multiple times – as Don Juan is when he breaks promises, thus ‘denegating’ their end, and also his own (Ibid, p. 25) –, rationalises his countless instances of corruption (an absolutely crucial variation of the theme of seduction in *Lorenzaccio*) as necessary for ‘getting into character’, and postponed the murder under the guise of ‘biding his time’, just so that he can enjoy those instances of seduction and their processes. This enjoyment is particularly evident in the scene where he rehearses the assassination (A. MUSSET, *Lorenzaccio*, pp. 124-126), as he clearly derives immense pleasure from that build-up, from the expectation of the moment – and, crucially, from the very monologue which makes up that scene.

This hypothesis has more than a leg to stand on. For all the scorn he constantly pours on idle prattle and rhetorical flourishes – «Pas un mot ? pas un beau petit mot bien sonore ?» (Ibid, p. 64) –, even when soliloquising – «Ô bavardage humain !» (Ibid, p. 124) –, Lorenzo is an outstanding wordsmith, «un homme de la parole», which is evidenced by «son goût et son sens de la parole, de la joute oratoire, de l'ironie provocatrice, l'abondance de son discours sur soi-même» (A. UBERSFELD, ‘Dossier’, p. 153). When, in the very first scene of the play, Lorenzo composes an impromptu ode to corruption (A. MUSSET, *Lorenzaccio*, pp. 19-20), it is hard to say whether he is just ‘in character’ or whether he actually means it when he sings the praises of the process of seduction, thereby expressing a sincere fascination with the massive effect that

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<sup>19</sup> A. UBERSFELD, ‘Dossier’, in A. MUSSET, *Lorenzaccio*, Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 2000, p. 156.

a few words can have on someone. Furthermore, in Varchi's account as well as in Sand's adaptation, Lorenzo never attempts to corrupt his bait; after all, there is no need, since only Scoronconcolo and he will pay the Duke a visit. Interestingly, however, Musset's Lorenzo has to hold his tongue in order not to corrupt his beloved relative: «LORENZO : N'as-tu pas été flattée ? un amour qui fait l'envie de tant de femmes ! un titre si beau à conquérir, la maîtresse de... Va-t'en, Catherine, va dire à ma mère que je te suis. Sors d'ici. Laisse-moi ! (*Catherine sort.*) Par le Ciel ! quel homme de cire suis-je donc ? [...] J'allais corrompre Catherine» (Ibid, p. 118).

It would not be terribly off the mark, then, to suggest that *Lorenzaccio* can also be read as a tale about a man's love for the process of seduction, and for words – despite his own copious words to the contrary. After all, by now, with the benefit of Austin's, Meyer's and Felman's insights, we should know better than to pay heed to anything a seducer says, or rather, to what they purport to *mean*.

### 5. Morand's 'Lorenzaccio': Seduction as Predation

This paper will end with a brief analysis of the theme of seduction in a rather atypical adaptation: Paul Morand's 'Lorenzaccio ou le retour du proscrit' (1925), whose connection with Lorenzo's story would probably be lost on every reader were it not for the title. In fact, it has precious little in common with the adapted text; but arguably, and most surprisingly, one of the points of contact is actually its unflinching depiction of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. It is mentioned as a point of contact because this thematic is already present, as we have seen, in Varchi's chronicle, and is latent, though not explicit, in Musset's *Lorenzaccio* (A. UBERSFELD, 'Dossier', p. 154).

It is interesting to note that, once that play, which for many years remained unperformed, began to appear more regularly on stage, the part of Lorenzo was usually played by an actress (A. CALLEN, 'The Place of *Lorenzaccio*', p. 231). This fact is, by itself, very indicative of the play's (and the story's) immense potential for the exploration of topics related to sex and gender issues – as is the fact that Régis Penet's graphic novel *Lorenzaccio* (2011), which follows Musset's blueprint very closely, represents Lorenzo as a clearly androgynous character, with a feeble physique, fine features and a perennial enigmatic smile.<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon argues that this kind of transformations are bound to happen, because «adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places»; an adaptation, she notes, «does not exist in a vacuum» (L.

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<sup>20</sup> R. PENET, *Lorenzaccio*, Paris, 12bis, 2011, pp. 3ff.

HUTCHEON, *Theory*, pp. 176, 142). Indeed, sometimes «the adaptation “de-represses” an earlier adapted text’s politics» (Ibid, p. 147). And it is certainly important to bear the latter observation in mind when reading Morand’s novella.

*Lorenzaccio ou le retour du proscrit* is set in Portugal, and its protagonist is Tarquínio Gonçalves, a (fictional) former Portuguese dictator who, having been exiled, returns to his home country a couple of decades later. Upon his return, he discovers that his illustrious family’s house has become a «club de nuit».<sup>21</sup> In it, «un homme du peuple, très jeune, des côtelettes à peine dessinées sur les joues pâles», who had gambled away his possessions, asks for some money to eat (Ibid, p. 142). Tarquínio, without a word, «tira de son portefeuille un billet, le mit, d’un geste brusque, dans la poitrine du marin, issue d’un jersey très décolleté, lui tourna le dos et sortit» (Ibidem).

With his terse speech, his movements awkward and *mal à l’aise* – «très anglais, libre comme un prisonnier déferré» (Ibid, p. 139) –, his days spent in solitude in his country house growing roses, Tarquínio does not seem to warrant a place in this discussion of seduction. Towards the end, however, that same young man is sent to his house as a hired gun (the political climate was fraught with terror and repression, and Tarquínio, on whom many citizens pinned their hopes but who wanted nothing but to be left alone with his roses, was seen by ‘the powers that be’ as a potential threat to them for as long as he lived).

Before we go on, it would be useful to distinguish between two different types of persuasion: seductive and predatory. According to Michel Meyer, rhetoric is usually made up of a mixture of those two aspects (M. MEYER, *Questões*, pp. 136-137). While the seducer, as we have seen, attempts to shorten distances and abolish difference, the predator follows a «logic of power»; for him, «the difference exists [...]. The predator’s logic is to exclude third parties, whereas socially the logic of seduction is to include third parties» (Ibid, p. 136, my translation). Despite their apparent opposition, however, they are two sides of the same coin: there can be little seduction without predation, and vice-versa (Ibidem).

Morand’s dictator distorts this notion and gives expression to it in the starkest terms imaginable: first, Tarquínio faces his aspiring killer, and talks him out of his intentions. Then, this seduction, which quickly escalates to the point of becoming unmistakably explicit, degenerates into predation just as swiftly – yet this predation is not the one Meyer has in mind, but rather one more readily reminiscent of the more common use of the term; it does not go after a third party, but after the second one, as it were. This happens when the young man asks why

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<sup>21</sup> P. MORAND, ‘Lorenzaccio ou le retour du proscrit’, in *L’Europe galante. Chronique du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1985, p. 140.

Tarquínio gave him so much money; the former dictator's first reply, rather unexpectedly, seems to have been dipped in honey:

– ... Parce que tu es beau, avec tes bras blancs de criminel ingénu, parce que tu as dix-huit ans et la peau sans rides, et la figure phénicienne des pêcheurs d'Ovar, parce que tu es victime de pions en redingote, parce que tu dances bien...

La voix de Tarquinio Gonçalves était rauque qui disait :

– Je te donnerais bien plus encore... (P. MORAND, 'Lorenzaccio', p. 150)

The climactic power struggle becomes an increasingly lopsided affair: the young hitman may have set out with weapons and the surprise factor, but Tarquinio disarms his would-be assassin both literally and figuratively, in a ruthless display of both verbal and physical domination. In addition, the reader, having already been primed by a number of innuendoes, cannot fail to notice that this domination is heavy with sexual undertones, and it culminates in what can hardly be interpreted as something other than rape.<sup>22</sup> Later, the old statesman, motionless and unseen, stares at his victim as he gets up and puts his clothes back on, and the story ends with him drily ordering the young lad back to Lisbon, as he hands him back his unused guns and adds a single rose (P. MORAND, 'Lorenzaccio', p. 151).

In Morand's novella, Tarquinio's assertive, self-assured, predatory nature appears to echo Sand's portrayal of Alexandre, whereas this story's 'Lorenzo', who remains unnamed until the end, is all but unrecognisable. This gritty *Lorenzaccio* shows the dark side of persuasion, its sinister underbelly, in much more vehement terms than any talk of 'corruption' in Musset ever manages to do. Seduction, when paired more explicitly with predation, sheds its idealised veneer of harmless mischief and comes across as a merciless force. First, seduction seeks to abolish the difference between the charmer and their victim, and then, after this is accomplished, predation re-establishes that difference. Yet there is no mere return to the status quo, as there is a vile twist: an annihilation of sorts, not material but in some ways a more thorough one than any gun might be able to inflict. Something – be it power, innocence, self-worth or dignity – is lost, most likely irrevocably so.

Thus in the final scene the rose, usually a symbol of (the ideal of) seduction, becomes an ironic token, a jeering reminder, a most subtle *coup de grâce*.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example G. FLAMERIE DE LACHAPELLE, 'L'Antiquité Gréco-Romaine de Paul Morand', *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, no. 1, 2007, p. 141, or G. DUGAS, 'Un personnage à clef de la nouvelle "Lorenzaccio ou le retour du proscrit" (*L'Europe galante*)', *Prospero: Rivista di Letterature Straniere, Comparatistica e Studi Culturali*, vol. 13, 2006, p. 40.