Achademia Leonardi Vinci

Publisher: FeDOA Press - Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche dell'Università di Napoli Federico II - Registered in Italy
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: http://www.achademialeonardivinci.it

# The 'Pointing Lady'

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To cite this article: Pedretti C. (1969) [2022], *The 'Pointing Lady'*: Achademia Leonardi Vinci, 2022, anno II, n. 2, 11-20.

*Nelle pagine seguenti:* Pedretti, Carlo, The "Pointing Lady". *The Burlington Magazine*, III (1969), pp. 339-346.
Articolo nuovamente pubblicato per gentile concessione della Nuova Fondazione Rossana e Carlo Pedretti.

CARLO PEDRETTI

# The 'Pointing Lady'*

QUITE early in his career Leonardo must have learned the pictorial device advocated by Alberti, the figure of the 'commentator' which belongs to a marginal section of a picture and turns his face to the spectator as if to invite him into the space of the scene represented. The figure of a youth on the extreme right of the *Adoration of the Magi* has been interpreted as such, as an ideal self-portrait of the young painter. His body still faces the Virgin, but his head is sharply turned around, away from her. The young man seems to pay no attention to the scene, neither does he appear concerned with the spectator. His eyes are reaching for something still farther than the facing spectator, his hands are not indicating anything to anybody. Yet one can sense his right arm thrust forward, his hand reaching for the shoulder of the first kneeling figure in the arch of the adorers, as an invitation to make room for more adorers to come. With the left hand he is holding the garment, revealing something of the shape of his legs, and therefore suggesting their position. He rests on his right leg, on which he has stopped as he had been advancing, and the left leg can be sensed as being just one step behind, along the diagonal direction of the falling garment. It is exactly this pose that still makes him a commentator. Eventually, he will take part in the scene (will he ever?), as he is about to walk into it. But he has stopped a moment, waiting for us.

The device comes from sculpture, and Leonardo's teacher was a sculptor. In the history of Florentine art several are the works that can be taken as symbols of the new age of the Renaissance. Vasari saw one in Donatello's architecture of the central niche of Or San Michele, in which Donatello's St Louis of Toulouse was to be placed. But so prominent a niche demanded more than one figure, and the example of Nani di Banco in one of the side niches could not be ignored. So came Verrocchio. The problem was no longer that of crowding a niche with the ghosts of a sarcophagus, as in a *sacra conversazione*. It was not to be a conversation among the dead, but one with the living. Thus, out of such a principle came the magnificent group of the *Incredulity of St Thomas*. The relation with the spectator is established not by means of glances. The emotional intensity of the group does not allow any interference, and the two figures are bound together by their gestures. But even if we do not see the face of St Thomas, he is still with us. It would be incorrect to say that he steps out of the niche: he has not entered it yet. His right leg is turned around, and we now know that not long before he was facing us, as he was walking towards Christ. No matter what the upper part of the body is doing, any figure in such pose represents an intermediary element, a link that determines the impulse to follow its invitation, as one follows a person who walks from one place to another. It is not a glance, a smile that invites us, but a foot, which constantly attracts our eye.

Renaissance artists did not invent the motif, neither had they revived it. It belongs to Classical art, as one can find it in sarcophagi and standing figures. There is hardly a figure that exemplifies it more poetically than the celebrated *Fanciulla di Anzio*. But it appears again and again in mosaics and medieval illuminations. The graceful procession of Virgins in the nave of St Apollinare is enlivened by the sharp diagonal folds of the garments which seem to radiate upwards from the right feet turned to us, as in a dance on a stage. Once the formula was established in all its effectiveness it could be applied profitably to any figure, as is the case with the figure of Moses receiving the tablets of the law, in St Vitale. It would be in fact a mere task of erudition to show the continuity of such a motif throughout the history of art, from Hellenistic images to Mantegna's *Triumph of Caesar* at Hampton Court. When we come to Leonardo's *Pointing Lady* (Fig.4) we are prepared to realize that the origin of the motif is all too obvious.

In fact, it is not the motif that has attracted the attention of scholars but the character of the drapery and the enigmatic quality of the figure. The drawing – perhaps the most beautiful drawing of Leonardo – has been variously dated and interpreted. Some have assigned it to Leonardo's early period, on account of its Botticellian flavour.[1] Richter even found it appropriate to illustrate Leonardo's own advice on how to represent the drapery of a nymph, in a note dating from the 1490s.[2] Others, with a deeper understanding of Leonardo's style, saw that it was to be considered a late

* This article appears on the occasion of the exhibition at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 'Leonardo da Vinci' (opened 9th May), and of the publication of the second edition of the *Catalogue of the Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle* by Sir Kenneth Clark (Phaidon Press Ltd, 3 volumes), the first edition of which was published in 1935. The new edition has been revised and much expanded by the author, with the assistance of myself. I should like to take this opportunity of saying how rewarding is the experience of working with Sir Kenneth and of learning from him. The illustrations are from a set of new photographs of the Leonardo drawings at Windsor made by John R. Freeman, London, and financed by the Kress Foundation, New York. They are reproduced by gracious permission of H.M. the Queen.

[1] A. VENTURI: *Leonardo da Vinci pittore*, Bologna [1920], pp.108–9, fig.67, and *Commissione Vinciana*, fasc.III, pl.90. The early date was first suggested by P. MÜLLER-WALDE; *Leonardo da Vinci, Lebensskizze und Forschungen über sein Verhältniss zur Florentiner Kunst und zu Rafael*, Munich [1889], p.74ff and fig.39, who called the *Pointing Lady* 'Beatrice'. Shortly afterwards (1893), Aby Warburg put forward the theory that the Windsor 'nymph' was related to the *Giostra* of Poliziano, thus suggesting its identification with Simonetta Vespucci. Cf. A. WARBURG: *La Rinascita del Paganesimo Antico*, Florence [1966], pp.54–55.

[2] J. P. RICHTER: *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, London [1883] (second edition [1939]), § 391, pl.XXVI. The passage from MS. Ash. I, fol. 18 *recto*, was transcribed in the *Treatise on Painting* by a pupil of Leonardo (Codex Vaticanus Urbinas Lat. 1270, fol. 169 *verso*) as chapter 539 (Ludwig edition [1882]) and 569 (McMahon edition [1956]): '... Portray almost the true size of the parts of the body only in a nymph or an angel, who are shown dressed in very thin garments, driven or pressed by the blowing of winds. In these and others like them you can very well display the forms of their bodies.'

4. *The 'Pointing Lady'*, by Leonardo da Vinci. (Royal Library, Windsor Castle No.12581.) *Reproduced by Gracious Permission of H.M. The Queen.*

5. *A Masquerader,* by Leonardo da Vinci. (Royal Library, Windsor Castle No.12575.) *Reproduced by Gracious Permission of H.M. The Queen.*

work,[3] if not the latest—a most fitting image for the romantic view of an ageing man who looks back at the fabulous world of his memories, an image that reveals the smile of his youth through the mist of time. Any theory that would explain it as being anything except a study for a masquerader would be found satisfactory. The latest theory is that put forward by Dr Peter Meller,[4] according to which the drawing belongs to a series of illustrations to Dante, and as such it would represent the mysterious Matelda, who suddenly appears to Dante at the end of the *Purgatorio,* canto XXVIII, and becomes his guide until the appearance of Beatrice. In the new edition of his catalogue of the Leonardo drawings at Windsor Castle, Sir Kenneth Clark accepts this theory, and admirably comments upon it:

'She stands with her feet together, as one who dances, and points out to him [i.e. Dante] the river of Lethe and the rustling grove. There is much to be said in favour of this identification. The drawing cannot be interpreted except as an illustration, and its unique appeal to our feelings suggests that it illustrates some great moment of poetry. The whole passage in Dante, with its description of the movements of air and water, could have had a particular appeal to Leonardo'.

In his summary of Meller's theory, Sir Kenneth Clark goes on to mention the Venice drawing of the dancing maidens, which is so close in style to the *Pointing Lady* and which recalls the remarkably similar figures of Botticelli's illustrations to the next canto of the *Purgatorio,* where they are referred to as '*tre donne in giro dalla destra ruota venien danzando . . .*', that is, according to Landino's commentary, the personifications of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Dr Meller extends his theory to a number of masquerade costumes at Windsor; in fact, he suggests identifying nearly all of them as illustrations to Dante. Sir Kenneth Clark finds it feasible to accept only two or three as such, and rightly points out that Leonardo's note-books do not give evidence of a sustained interest in Dante's poetry. In fact, Leonardo's quotations from the *Divine Comedy* are almost all of Dante's conjectures on the nature of the physical world, so that his response to Dante's poetry seems to be closely connected with the experience of Botticelli's illustrations. And since these had been done for Pier Francesco de' Medici, with whom Leonardo was in contact in the years 1502 and 1503, Dr Meller's theory implies that the series at Windsor, and therefore the *Pointing Lady,* should be dated from a period earlier than that which has been suggested on the basis of style.

I would be extremely reluctant to deprive the *Pointing Lady* of such a noble identity. Furthermore, it is the kind of theory that can be replaced only by a better one. But I must confess that I find it difficult to dissociate the drawing from the series of masqueraders, such as the young man and the female figures in the Windsor drawings 12575 to 12577, which Sir Kenneth Clark does not recognize as illustrations to Dante. If the masqueraders are not for Dante, who is the *Pointing Lady*? At least I can try to answer the question of its date.

Some have suggested that the masqueraders should be dated from Leonardo's second Milanese period, from 1506 to 1513, and that they should be identified with the drawings that the French governor of Milan, Charles d'Amboise, asked of Leonardo.[5] This would make 1511 the terminal date, because Charles died in that year; and in fact any date after 1509 would be highly improbable on account of the political situation in the Milanese that prevented the French governor from indulging in his favoured occupations of a leisurely life.[6] Above all, the style of the *Pointing Lady* is definitely that of the young man in the Windsor drawing 12575, although the media of the latter are different, i.e. pen and ink, and wash, over black chalk. But we have seen that the Venice drawing of the dancing maidens, which is so close in style to the *Pointing Lady,* is also in pen and ink. We find the identical style (I am tempted to say the identical calligraphy) in the celebrated series of the deluge drawings also at Windsor, for which all the evidence points to a date around 1515.[7] All these drawings must have been done when Leonardo was still in Italy, before 1516. On 10th October 1517 in France, Leonardo is reported as being affected by a 'certain paralysis' in his right hand, so that it would be difficult to expect so much assurance and mastery from his left hand.[8] All the evidence we have of the last three years of his life is that of architectural drawings and geometrical studies.[9]

The preceding period of Leonardo's activity, in Rome, does not appear to offer any hint as to the purpose of such drawings, unless one considers them as independent of any commission, and therefore done by Leonardo for himself. This is highly improbable. Dating from his Roman period we have a great amount of geometrical studies in the Codex Atlanticus, which are carried out with much passion and deliberation, and with the end of writing the treatises *De ludo geometrico* and *De quantità continua.* Thus even such abstractions had a precise purpose for him, and cannot be taken as an indication of his state of mind. It is impossible to reach a satisfactory explanation of the enigmatic series

[3] A. E. POPP: *Leonardo da Vinci. Zeichnungen . . .*, Munich [1928], p.89. An up-to-date bibliography is given in the new edition of Sir Kenneth Clark's catalogue, vol.I, p.114 (No.12581). The drawing is used as a frontispiece of Sir Kenneth's volume on Leonardo da Vinci in the series of the *Selected Drawings from Windsor Castle* (London [1954]), and again of my edition of Leonardo's lost *Libro A* (Berkeley and Los Angeles [1964]). It is in fact in *Libro A 26* (*c.*1508) that Leonardo writes of gestures as follows: 'Affective gestures pointing to things near either in time or space should be made with the hand not too far from the body of the person pointing; and if the objects are remote, the hand should be far from the body, and the face turned to the person to whom the pointer is pointing them out.'

[4] P. MELLER: 'Leonardo da Vinci's Drawings to the Divine Comedy', *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae,* II [1955], p.135ff, fig.1.

[5] '*Disegni et architectura et altre cose pertinenti alla condictione nostra*', as mentioned in a letter of Charles d'Amboise to the Signoria of Florence of 16th December 1506. Cf. L. BELTRAMI: *Documenti riguardanti la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci . . .*, Milan [1919], No.181. L. GOLDSCHEIDER, in his Phaidon *Leonardo* dates the masquerade costumes from Leonardo's second Milanese period.

[6] P. GIOVIO: *Dialogo dell'imprese militari e amorose . . .*, Lyons [1574],pp. 103*ff.*: '*Egli fu di dolce natura e molto dedito agli amori . . . dilettandosi di feste, banchetti, danze, e comedie.*'

[7] A preliminary study for the deluge series, Codex Atlanticus 79 *recto*-c, RICHTER, § 610, pl.XXXVIII, contains a black chalk note referring to a shipment of artillery from Venice to Lyons at the time of Francis I's expedition to Italy in 1515. Cf. *Raccolta Vinciana,* fasc. XIX, p.267.

[8] '*. . . ben vero che da lui per esserli venuta una certa paralesi ne la dextra, non se ne può expectare più cosa buona*', says Antonio de' Beatis, secretary to Cardinal Louis of Aragon. (L. PASTOR: *Die Reise des Cardinals Luigi d'Aragona,* Freiburg [1905], p.143).

[9] See my appendix D (The Geometrical Studies) in the new edition of Sir Kenneth Clark's catalogue, and my forthcoming book: *Leonardo da Vinci, The Royal Palace at Romorantin,* Harvard University Press.

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of the deluges and masqueraders on the basis of the drawings alone. Unless documents are found that can be related to them, any attempt to explain them by means of iconography is destined to remain a theory.

The later period of Leonardo's activity has not had the good fortune of having been investigated by the great historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even the fundamental study by Gerolamo Calvi on the manuscripts (1925) ends around 1510. This state of Leonardo scholarship is reflected in every biography or general evaluation of his art: invariably every book on Leonardo grows thinner in the sections which deal with the years from after 1510, and every author finds it necessary to supply the lack of documentation with views and interpretations which are still rooted in a romantic image of Leonardo's personality, and which originate from Vasari's short account of Leonardo's Roman period.[10]

It is inaccurate, first of all, to call Roman period that which runs from 1513 to 1516. For some time, during that period, Leonardo was away from Rome, in North Italy; a note-book shows him in Parma in 1514,[11] and the Codex Atlanticus contains indications of his presence in Florence in 1515, engaged on the project of a palace for Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici.[12] It may be objected that Leonardo could have jotted down his project in Rome, yet the possibility of his presence in Florence, in 1515, is further suggested by his note on the measurements of the Medici stables constructed in Florence in that year,[13] and above all by an important document pertaining to the mechanical lion, which again points to the date 1515. It is exactly this evidence that may explain the origin of the masquerade costumes, and perhaps the deluge series.

The story of the mechanical lion belongs to the Leonardo literature since the account of Lomazzo, 1584.[14] The complete lack of documentation has undoubtedly contributed to its charm: we do not know what the lion looked like, and how it worked. Not a single hint as to its mechanism can be found in the existing Leonardo manuscripts. Even the exact occasion for which it was done has been the matter of much speculation. We know something more now, but in an amazingly indirect way. In fact, it is in the *Descrizione delle felicissime nozze della Cristianissima Maestà di Madama Maria de' Medici Regina di Francia e di Navarra*, by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, published in Florence in 1600, that we read that at a banquet in honour of the Queen there appeared a mechanical lion which split itself in two to show that it was carrying flowers in its chest, *concetto simile a quello, il quale Leonardo da Vinci nella Città di Lione nella venuta del Re Francesco, mise in opera per la nazion fiorentina* (concept similar to that which Leonardo da Vinci realized on the occasion of the entry of Francis I into Lyons, on commission of the Florentine nation).

The occasion of the event can be clarified by a series of deductions. The triumphal entry of Francis I into Lyons took place on 12th July 1515. The chroniclers speak of great festivities organized by the Florentine colony.[15] The lion, at one time symbol of Florence (*marzocco*) and of Lyons, was commissioned by the *nazion fiorentina*, that is, by Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, whom his uncle Leo X had elected governor of Florence on 24th May 1515.[16]

The symbolism of the mechanical lion is further explained by the presence of lilies in its chest: they are the *fleur-de-lis* of France. Thus the Florentine nation intended to show its devotion to the new king, whose aunt, Philiberta of Savoy, had just been married (January 1515) to the brother of the Pope, Giuliano de' Medici.[17] Finally, we must bear in mind that in December 1515 the Pope himself entered Florence on his way to meet Francis I in Bologna, and was received with great festivities in both cities.[18] There is a document that has been interpreted as evidence of Leonardo's presence in Bologna on that occasion.[19] This may be questionable, but it shows with certainty that in 1515 Leonardo was in the pay of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, governor of Florence.

The historical evidence alone points to several occasions when Leonardo could have done drawings of masqueraders around 1515, but it is safer not to jump to conclusions. It is still the kind of elusive evidence that can only be taken to show that around 1515 Leonardo had reasons to design masquerade costumes, which may or may not have been inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Similar kind of evidence comes from Vasari. In the Life of Pontormo he speaks of the festivities organized in Florence for the election of Leo X in 1513, and states that *quelli che feciono et ordinarono gli abiti delle figure furono Ser Piero da Vinci padre di Lionardo e Bernardino di Giordano, bellissimi ingegni*. The statement is incorrect because in 1513 Leonardo's father had been dead nine years; but if it is to be taken as a reference to Leonardo himself, the occasion could not be the pageantries of 1513, because Leonardo was still in Milan at that time, but those of 1515, which were organized for the Pope's visit to Florence on his way to meet Francis I in Bologna. The event is described by the chronicler Landucci:

'*Andandogli incontro . . . circa 50 giovani, pure de' più ricchi e principali, tutti vestiti a una livrea di veste di drappi pagonazzi, con vai al collo, a piede, con certe asticciole in mano darientate, molto bella cosa; poi grandissima cavalleria a cavallo.*[20]

One is tempted to recognize one of the young men with *certe asticciole in mano darientate* in the Windsor drawing

[10] In addition to Vasari's account there is a reference to Leonardo's presence in Rome in B. VARCHI: *Orazione funebre . . . nell'esequie di Michelangelo Buonarroti . . .*, Florence [1564], p.54.
[11] MS. E, fol. 80 *recto*: '*a Parma alla Campana a dì 25 di settembre 1514*'. BELTRAMI: *Documenti*, No.220.
[12] Codex Atlanticus 315 *recto*-a and *recto*-b. See my *A Chronology of Leonardo da Vinci's Architectural Studies after 1500*, Geneva [1962], pp.107ff, and figs.60–62.
[13] Codex Atlanticus 96 *verso*-a. See my *A Chronology*, *cit.*, pp.125-128. and fig.68.
[14] G. P. LOMAZZO: *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura . . .*, Milan [1584], p.106. Cf. BELTRAMI: *Documenti*, p.204.
[15] V. -L. BOURRILLY: *Le Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris sous le Règne de François Ier (1515–1536)*, Paris [1910], p.16. See my note 'Leonardo at Lyon' in *Raccolta Vinciana*, fasc.XIX.
[16] L. LANDUCCI: *Diario Fiorentino dal 1450 al 1515 . . .* ed. by I. del Badia, Florence [1883] (English edition by A. De Rosen Jervis, London [1927]), pp.362–363.
[17] The event is mentioned by Leonardo himself on the cover of MS. G. Cf. BELTRAMI: *Documenti*, No.230.
[18] See my article 'An Arcus quadrifrons for Leo X', *Raccolta Vinciana*, fasc.XX.
[19] *Archivio di Stato*, Florence. Carte Strozziane, Ia serie, n.10. Cf. BELTRAMI: *Documenti*, n.224, and my *Documenti e Memorie riguardanti Leonardo da Vinci a Bologna e in Emilia*, Bologna [1953], pp.105–108 (with facsimile). But the reference to '*Bolognja*' could be to Boulogne, in France, where Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici went to marry Madallena de la Tour d'Auvergne in 1518. See my note 'Leonardo at Lyon' in *Raccolta Vinciana*, fasc.XIX, *cit.*
[20] LANDUCCI, *op. cit.*, *sub anno*.

12575 (Fig.5), and to see in 12574 a knight of the *grandissima cavalleria a cavallo*.

But when we come to the *Pointing Lady*, which is identical in style and even in mood to these drawings, we are troubled by the presence of a landscape. The figure does belong to the landscape, into which she is pointing, and therefore its identification as a masquerader is questionable. Neither can the landscape be interpreted as a stage setting. There is nothing artificial in it. On the contrary, it suggests an atmosphere of mist and breeze that is only equalled by Dante's description of the rustling grove around the river of Lethe. Yet the drawing does not have the miniature-like quality of an illustration. Its suggestion of monumental scale well applies to an actual size portrait, or even to the detail of a large mural, which would include the space into which the figure is pointing. It is useless to attempt fancy interpretations of the subject, but it may be said that the figure might have been destined for some allegorical *tableaux* of the kind that was becoming fashionable at the beginning of the sixteenth century on the occasion of the triumphal entries of princes into cities, a kind of propaganda posters *ante litteram*, which was reviving a usage of the triumphs of antiquity, as echoed by Mantegna's *Triumph of Caesar*. Similar pictures, usually large size monochromes, were destined to be taken down and destroyed soon after they had served their purpose. There is a detailed description of them in the chronicle of Bernardino Arluno, which is an account of the entrance of Louis XII into Milan in 1507.[21] On the basis of this description one of the first biographers of Leonardo, Baldassare Oltrocchi, suggested that Leonardo himself had been the organizer of the festive apparatus. The purpose of the drawings would then explain their peculiar character: they are highly finished, with careful indication of the drapery, because they were to be reproduced in large format by a team of assistants. When we look at the deluge series we get the same feeling of images suitable to be blown up to the size of a large hoarding on a highway.

We are then prepared for the next question: is the relation of the *Pointing Lady* to the deluge series only one of style? It is the sort of question one can answer only with other questions. But first we have to take a closer look at the style of the drawings.

Both the flaming hair and the fluttering drapery of the majestic lady describe involved curves in the air which resemble that of smoke, as in some of the deluge drawings, especially those done in black chalk.[22] The broken, evocative touch of the chalk, as Sir Kenneth Clark describes it, not only conveys the impression of a fleeting image that materializes in a smile, but it is capable of revealing the presence of air currents in the most effective and logical way, as in a diagram of lines of force. A detail properly cut out of the drapery of the *Pointing Lady* could be transferred into the deluge series.

The dancing maidens at Venice, which appeared to be so fittingly related to the *Pointing Lady* by way of Dante, have the same turbulence of drapery, and the drawing itself has the flavour of an antique mural. I wonder now, whether around 1515 Leonardo may have had some reasons for looking back at allegorical compositions that had been done in Milan at the time of the Sforza, such as the murals which had been painted in a certain passage of the Sforza castle and which are now known only through the records of Cesariano and the Anonimo Morelliano. Cesariano in his 1521 edition of Vitruvius writes as follows:

'*Etiam si vede pincto lo enigma di Lodovico Sfortia soto la archicustodia del castello di Iove: quale indica come diressemo Ieraglipho: post malum semper sequitur bonum & converso: vel post lungum tempus dies una serena venit: seu post tenebras spero lucem &c. Perchè ivi è dipinto uno tempo nimboso & di maxima procella: & poco distante da epso le turme che ballano: iocundano & festeggiano soto lo tempo sereno: quale cose appareno potere essere.*'[23]

The Anonimo Morelliano specifies that the architecture of the passage was by Bramante:

'*. . . Ivi la strada subterranea dalle mura della rocca insino alla controscarpa e più oltra, sotto el fosso, fu fatta fare dal Signor Lodovico a Bramante Architetto. Ivi la pittura a fresco, sotto la guardia, degli uomini che ballano al sereno, con un nembo in aere poco discosto che significa Post malum bonum, et post tenebras spero lucem fu fatta fare dal Signor Lodovico a (sic)*'.[24]

It is possible then that the allegory had political implications, and that Leonardo himself had something to do with it, since one of his notes for allegorical compositions referring to the political manœuvres of Lodovico Sforza towards his nephew Galeazzo seems to imply the presence of stormy weather: *Galeazzo tra tempo tranquillo e fuggita di fortuna.*[25] I cannot refrain from asking whether Medici politics around 1515 in relation with French politics had been the occasion for Leonardo to prepare some 'hoardings' of propaganda, inspired by his experience of twenty years before. If so, there would hardly have been a more fitting figure of 'commentator' than the *Pointing Lady*.

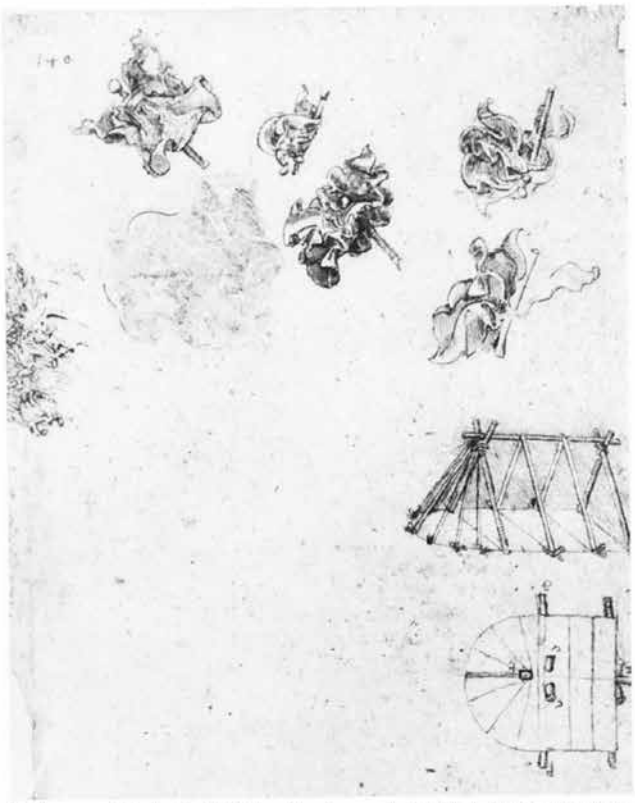
[21] Excerpts of Arluno's chronicles are given by Baldassare Oltrocchi in his *Memorie* under the year 1507. See S. RITTER: *Baldassare Oltrocchi e le sue memorie storiche su la vita di Leonardo da Vinci*, Rome [1925].

[22] In a preliminary study for the series, Codex Atlanticus 79 *recto*-c (mentioned above, in note 7), Leonardo's pupil, Francesco Melzi, wrote several notes from Leonardo's dictation. One of them suggests a device for observing the movement of air currents: 'In order to see the swirling movements of the wind within the air, have a tube made out of a reed and put cotton well compressed at one end of it; and from the other end blow smoke through it. The smoke, coming out of the tube, will show how wind whirls in the air.'

[23] VITRUVIUS: *De architectura*, Como [1521], Lib.VII, cap.5, c.118v.

[24] J. MORELLI ed.: *Notizia d'opere di disegno della prima metà del secolo XVI esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia, scritta da un anonimo di quel tempo . . .*, Bassano [1800], p.39.

[25] MS. H, fol.98 *recto*. It is probable that an echo of Savonarola's prophesies had reached Leonardo in Milan at a time when the descent of Charles VIII was feared in Florence as a 'new deluge'. I wonder whether the mysterious item '*tempio di Salomone*' in Leonardo's list of books in the newly discovered MS. at Madrid (*cf.* THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, vol.CX, p. 86[No.87]), has anything to do with Savonarola. Cf. *Sermone su Aggeo* (Ognissanti 1494) quoted by A. CHASTEL: *Arte e Umanesimo a Firenze*, Turin [1964], pp.404–5. The theme of the *Ira Domini* and *Misericordia Dei* was to be interpreted by Botticelli in his *Crucifixion* (Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts), according to Savonarola's sermon of 13th January 1495: '*una croce nera sopra la Babilonia Roma, nella quale croce era scritto:* Ira Domini; *e quivi sopra pioveva spade, coltelli, lancie e ogni arme e grandine e sassi con tempesta e folgore mirabili e grandissime, con un tempo oscurissimo e tenebroso . . . un'altra croce d'oro che aggiugneva dal cielo infino alla terra sopra Ierusalem, nella quale era scritto:* Misericordia Dei, *e quivi era un tempo sereno, limpidissimo e chiaro.*'



6. *Fragment of studies for the 'Deluge'*, by Leonardo da Vinci. Codex Atlanticus, fol.317 *recto*-a. (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.)

7. *Study for the Deluge*, by Leonardo da Vinci. (Royal Library, Windsor Castle No.12401.) *Reproduced by Gracious Permission of H.M. the Queen.*

8. Copy of the '*Pointing Lady*', attributed to Francesco Melzi. (Uffizi, Florence, Santarelli Collection No.8953.)

9. '*Het Pelsken*', by Peter Paul Rubens. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.)

## THE 'POINTING LADY'

I am well aware that my theory is far-fetched, and I am prepared to be told that the magnificent series of the deluge drawings can be interpreted only as an expression of Leonardo's scientific mind. All one is allowed to do is to consider them from the religious or psychoanalytic points of view. An interpretation as a political symbol would be out of place, contrary to the romantic image of an ageing Leonardo, which is so deep set in our minds. I must confess that I was extremely relieved when I heard Professor Gombrich's daring theory that the deluge drawings may have been thought of as an idea for the Sistine chapel, that is, the wall which was to be taken up by Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.[26] After all, Giulio Romano's *Fall of the Giants* at Mantua may be a distant echo of Leonardo's intentions. But it is still in Leonardo's drawings that we can look for an explanation. There is a sheet in the Codex Atlanticus of identical paper and media as the deluge series at Windsor, folio 317 *recto*-a (Fig.6). It is indeed a sheet that originally belonged to the series: unfortunately it has been cut up, and only a small scene of a deluge is still visible next to the left margin. Opposite to it is the drawing of a tent, and above are six drawings in black chalk (five of which have been inked in) of curious casts of drapery, some sort of banners with a short staff and an elaborate top resembling a sceptre. These inexplicable images, which have the gracefulness of botanical specimens, are again the counterparts of Leonardo's involvement with the study of air and water currents. They are the objects – similar to the ceremonial banners of the palio – which he takes as an excuse to show the materialization of the lines of energy in the wind. In fact, he makes such lines visible with a curiously deliberate slowness as in the drapery of the *Pointing Lady*. But are these drawings nothing else except an exercise in scientific illustration? One of the deluge drawings, No.12401 (Fig.7), shows the sky full of these strange objects. They have become huge banners twirling in a stormy sky among the loops of rain. In the foreground is a castle and outbuildings, built apparently on arcades in an enclosed bay, and torrents of water threaten to sweep it away. The storm advances with the sinister darkness of an apocalypse, yet the wooded hills to the left of the bay seem unaffected by it. The presence of such banners represented on a gigantic scale leaves no doubt that the deluge series has an allegorical meaning. Giant figures, and figures in the clouds, appear in other related drawings, such as the celebrated *pazzia bestialissima*, 12332, and the large hurricane, 12376.

So we are back to the foreground of an imaginary picture, to the standing figure which had introduced us into it. 'A puff of wind has blown away the mist, and revealed this goddess, as stately as an elm, as subtle as a gothic Virgin,' says Sir Kenneth Clark. The amplitude of her forms are emphasized as in a symbol of the generative forces of Nature. She is Leda with the body of the Virgin in the Burlington House cartoon. The light falls perpendicularly on her face and becomes the glow of the smile of the Louvre *St John*. The drapery has the softness of the veils of *Mona Lisa*. She has bent her right arm to hold an extremity of the drapery placed over it, and to press with the hand another extremity of that drapery higher up on the opposite shoulder – the only way of using one arm to prevent drapery from becoming the property of wind. The other arm is therefore free to extend away, in an eloquent gesture. The figure has the grace and the flexion of an archer. No mannerist painter could have invented a more flattering pose for Diane de Poitiers. And yet something of it has filtered down into the highly sophisticated *Sabina Poppaea* at Geneva, whose drapery is reduced to a cobweb.

The classical origin of the motif is obvious, and we have seen that it would be too long, and perhaps useless, to trace the history of its descendance and migrations. Leonardo has made it an image of its own, with the freshness of a motif invented anew. It is therefore reasonable to expect that it had some response.

The *Pointing Lady* was among the Leonardo drawings treasured by his pupil and inheritor, Francesco Melzi, and therefore much admired throughout the sixteenth century. Sir Kenneth Clark has shown how skilfully Melzi could copy some of Leonardo's most spectacular drawings, especially horses and caricatures, perhaps with the purpose of complementing his own collection or for the purpose of replacing those drawings that he could have given away. Melzi's early drawing in the Ambrosiana signed and dated 1510, when he was just about nineteen, gives the exact measure of his ability, and a precious indication of his style.[27] It is a style that closely reflects the neatness of the highly finished drawings of Leonardo's late period, around 1510–1513. These must have been the formative years of Melzi as an artist, so it becomes easy to recognize his performances as an imitator of Leonardo. I have therefore no hesitation in recognizing Melzi's touch in the beautiful red chalk drawing in the Uffizi (Fig.8), which reproduces the *Pointing Lady* with much delicacy and understanding of the drapery.[28] The drawing, hitherto unpublished and apparently dismissed as a vulgar imitation, is an exceptional document because it dates from a time when the Windsor drawing was still intact, splendid in all its freshness. It is in fact through Melzi's copy that we can read the curves of the sweeping movement of the drapery. What appears to be in the Leonardo drawing a blurred turbulence of folds, in which only the imagination can now supply the logic of a definition of lines of force, is spelt out in the copy as in a piece of sculpture and shows that the original must have been somewhat rubbed. Melzi has produced a most delicate image, with a beauty of its own, but what a difference when compared to the original! The body is no longer tense and alluring, vibrating as a flashing image. It has become the rosy pulp of a ripe fruit, soft and neat but with no flavour. Imitation has subdued inspiration.

But if the *Pointing Lady* was for Melzi a miracle of technical mastery to be taken as a model, for Rubens it could be only an inspiration. I am referring to the celebrated *Het Pelsken* at Vienna (Fig.9). The wife of the painter stands in a pose

[26] Lecture at the Leonardo Congress in Los Angeles, May 1966.

[27] Reproduced in my edition of Leonardo's *Libro A*, pl.13. See the new edition of Sir Kenneth Clark's catalogue, pp.xvii–xix.

[28] Gabinetto delle Stampe e dei Disegni, Uffizi, Florence. Drawing in the Santarelli collection (No.8953S).

which is reminiscent of that of the *Pointing Lady*, her arms engaged in holding a large fur coat over her soft nudity, the head turned to a front view and invested by full light. Only the ghost of a smile is passing over her lips and is lighting up the intensity of her dark eyes.[29]

We know that Rubens saw the volume of the Leonardo drawings now at Windsor in the house of Pompeo Leoni at Milan at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and had the opportunity of studying it. A report by Roger de Piles of 1699 speaks of Rubens's great interest in Leonardo's anatomical studies, the studies on the human figure and the horse and physiognomy, of which Rubens had made a compilation which is unfortunately lost.[30] So he must have given more than a glance at the *Pointing Lady*, which he was to divest of her mythical allure and turn into the fleshy charm of an affectionate image.

[29] J. S. HELD: 'Rubens's "Het Pelsken" ', in *Essays in the History of Art presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London [1967], pp.188–192, points out that the lady is represented out-of-doors. This is shown by the vague forms on the right of a fountain with water gushing from a lion's mouth, and by the horizontal streaks of light which seem to indicate a sky on the left. Among the several interpretations of the portrait, Dr Held includes that of H. G. EVERS (*Peter Paul Rubens*, Munich [1942], pp.451ff), who finds in the picture something comparable to the feminine '*Zauber*' and '*Unergründlichkeit*' of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.

[30] ROGER DE PILES: *Abrégé de la vie des Peintres*, Paris [1699], p.168, quoted by CLARK, *op. cit.*, p.x. G. P. BELLORI: *Le Vite . . .*, Rome [1672], p.300, mentions the same book, but without reference to Leonardo. Bellori also speaks of Rubens's method of collecting models for inspiration, especially in Italy (*Nel comporre poi se ne seruiua di motiuo e ne arricchiua li suoi componimenti*), and concludes that whenever Rubens followed models *li alteraua tanto con la sua maniera, che non lasciaua di esse forma, ò vestigio per riconoscerle.*

*Het Pelsken* must have been painted well after 1630 (Rubens married Hélène Fourment in December 1630, when she was sixteen years old), thus at least thirty years after he could have seen the *Pointing Lady* in the Leoni volume at Milan. The pose is characteristic of some of Leonardo's figures. It is reminiscent of the heroic stance of a warrier for the *Battle of Anghiari* in a drawing at Windsor (No.12640; compare the related anatomical detail also at Windsor, No.19032 *verso*). It appears again in a few 'doodles' on a sheet of studies for the *Battle of Anghiari* at Turin, and in the small figures for emblems in the Windsor drawing 12700 *verso* (now dated *c.*1509), some of which recall the pose of the *Pointing Lady*. The abdomen arched forward to counteract the thrust of the legs has an enticing quality that well applies to a female figure. Rubens replaces tension with softness, but the sinuous line remains.