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## Reflections of Isabella: Hermaphroditic Mirroring in *Mirtilla* and Giovan Battista Andreini's *Amor nello specchio*

Alexia Ferracuti

*mentre il mondo durerà, mentre staranno i secoli,  
mentre havran vita gli ordini e i tempi, ogni lingua,  
ogni grido risuonerà il celebre nome d'Isabella,  
specchio in vero d'onestà e tempio di dottrina*  
—Antonio Maria Spelta, 1602<sup>1</sup>

In 1601, Isabella Canali Andreini (1562-1604) became the only female member of Pavia's *Accademia degli Intenti* and published her collection of Petrarchan verse, entitled *Rime d'Isabella Andreini Padovana, comica gelosa*.<sup>2</sup> In the opening sonnet of her *Rime*, Andreini conflates her roles as poet and performer, warning her reader of the duplicitous naturalism permeating her theatrical and rhetorical talents:

S'Alcun fia mai, che i versi miei negletti  
Legga, non creda à questi finti ardori,  
Che ne le Scene imaginati amori  
Usa à trattar con non leali affetti

If ever there is anyone who reads  
These my neglected poems, don't believe  
In their feigned ardors; loves imagined in  
Their scenes I've handled with emotions false<sup>3</sup>

Isabella likens the pretense of her pronouncements as a love poet to the artificiality of her celebrated dramatic role as a romantic heroine or *innamorata*.<sup>4</sup> As if in the mode of a prologue to a play, Isabella introduces the performance about to ensue in the impending verses, which are voiced from both male and female perspectives. The fraudulence she claims to enact with her “finti ardori” is echoed in the next stanza, where she professes her deployment of “finti detti” to give life to her myriad of metamorphoses, going on to further underscore the artificiality of her

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Maria Spelta, *La curiosa et dilettevola aggiunta del Sig. Ant. Maria Spelta cittadino pavese all'Historia sua nella quale oltre la vaghezza di molte cose, che dall'Anno 1596 fino al 1603 s'intendono, sono anco componimenti arguti da' quali non poco gusto gli elevati spiriti potranno prendere* (Pavia: Bartoli, 1602), 169, as cited in Fabrizio Fiaschini, *L'“incessabil agitazione”: Giovan Battista Andreini tra professione teatrale, cultura letteraria e religione* (Pisa: Giardini Editori e Stampatori, 2007), 56.

<sup>2</sup> Isabella Andreini was a member of the *Accademia degli Intenti* from 1601 until her death in 1604 at age 42. On her induction into the society of the *Intenti*, see Fiaschini, *L'“incessabil agitazione”*, 55-62.

<sup>3</sup> Isabella Andreini, *Rime d'Isabella Andreini Padovana, comica gelosa* (Milan: Girolamo Bordone and Pietromartire Locarni, 1601), “Sonetto Primo,” 1-4. The translation, by James Wyatt Cook, is found in the bilingual edition of *Selected Poems of Isabella Andreini*, ed. Anne MacNeil (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 31.

<sup>4</sup> As Julie Campbell notes, by the end of the Cinquecento, Isabella was “on her way to the Renaissance equivalent of superstardom, and her cachet as an actress was inextricably combined with her associations with courtly, academic circles, illustrating the ways in which she embodied the fascination of the age with both the stage and academic discourse.” Julia Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe: A Cross-Cultural Approach* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 56.

vacillating passions with an anaphora that repeats the word “falsi”: “Talhor piangendo i *falsi* miei dolori, / Talhor cantando i *falsi* miei dilette” (When my false sorrows sometimes I bewail, / Or sometimes sing my spurious delights).<sup>5</sup>

If the problem presented in the octave of Andreini’s proemial sonnet involves her power to trick her audience into believing the veracity of her “Scene,” its sestet sets forth no apology for this potential deception. Rather, it confirms the notion that the poet’s persona is informed by her experience on the stage, asserting that

ne’ Teatri hor Donna, ed hora  
Huom fei rappresentando in vario stile  
Quanto volle insegnar Natura, ed Arte.

in theatres, in varied style,  
I now have played a woman, now a man,  
As Nature would instruct and Art as well.<sup>6</sup>

The *volta* in the sonnet involves a turn from describing Isabella’s art of simulation to explicitly revealing the performance of gender that it entails. Defining her theatrical virtuosity in hermaphroditic terms, the poet blurs the lines not only between “Donna” and “Huom,” but between “Natura” and “Arte”—punning on the very *arte* of improvisational comedy. Isabella thereby conflates her roles as “a woman” and as “a man” under the aegis of her singular skill, in turn emphasizing that all of her roles are equally feigned and emblematic of the “vario stile” she personified on the stage and that she now sets on the page. In this way, Isabella signals her ability to transcend conventions of signification in the realms of both text and performance.

Born Isabella Canali, Isabella Andreini was the codirector of the *Gelosi* troupe—the most prominent company of professional actors of its time—along with her husband Francesco, who became best known for his role as the proud but quixotic Capitano Spavento. Although Isabella’s androgyny in performance is extensively documented, this prefatory poem contains her only overt remarks regarding her theatrical profession published in her lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Given the disreputable standing of professional actresses in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, Andreini made it a point throughout her career to deliberately temper her renown as a virtuosic *comica* with her reputation as an erudite and canonically virtuous woman of letters.<sup>8</sup> This image would continue to be perpetuated long after Isabella’s death by her husband Francesco and her son Giovan Battista—not only for the sake of honoring her memory, but also with the intention of commemorating her extensive artistic contributions as well as of preserving their *arte*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Andreini, *Rime*, “Sonetto Primo,” 7-8, in *Selected Poems of Isabella Andreini*, 31; italics mine.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>7</sup> Valeria Finucci, “Isabella Andreini,” in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, ed. Gaetana Marrone (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1:39.

<sup>8</sup> Isabella’s use of her baptismal name as her stage name was an unusual choice that contributed to the creation of a seamless public persona. She worked tirelessly throughout her career to reach not simply fame, but respectability as a woman of the stage. See Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell’Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), as well as Richard Andrews, “Isabella Andreini and Others: Women on Stage in the Late Cinquecento,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (London: Legenda, 2005), 316-33.

<sup>9</sup> See Francesco Tessari, “Sotto il segno di Giano: la commedia dell’arte di Isabella e Francesco Andreini,” in *The Commedia dell’Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, ed. Christopher Cairns (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 1-33. See also Fiaschini, *L’“incessabil agitazione”*, 59, who describes Francesco’s “duplice intento di

Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654), as Francesco and Isabella's eldest child, was the only one of their progeny to pursue a career on the stage. After formative years spent performing with his parents' troupe in the late sixteenth century as a young *innamorato*, Giovan Battista went on in the early Seicento to form his own company, the *Fedeli*, of which he was to be both leading man and *capocomico*, eventually propelling himself to become one of the most significant European playwrights of his time. In the 1620s, he published a diverse array of formally innovative plays created for an enhanced theatrical experience. These plays were still influenced by the culture of their improvisational heritage, while pilfering the tropes of scripted comedy from the Cinquecento: however, they operated under the newfound potential for a more quintessentially spectacular performance, which could, in turn, enhance the manipulation of illusory appearances. As Jon Snyder has demonstrated, through their representation of "the fundamentally antimimetic aesthetic of the Baroque," Giovan Battista's plays from this period "dare to suggest that reality itself is representation and that the theater is a metaphor, rather than a mirror, of the real."<sup>10</sup> One of his plays from 1622, entitled *Amor nello specchio* (*Love in the Mirror*), makes the act of mirroring the central *conpetto* in a piece that features the female performances of desiring female characters whose erotically charged identities are not only mirrored, but hermaphroditically rendered, revealing, as I will argue in the present essay, Giovan Battista's adherence to a Baroque aesthetic as well as his creative indebtedness to the performative artistry of his prolific mother.

Part of Isabella Andreini's revolutionary cultural achievement was her ability to inscribe the boundlessness of her persona in the face of the unscripted confines of her sex. Years before the publication of her *Rime*, Isabella's first publication had been her pastoral play of 1588 entitled *Mirtilla*—the first play to be published in Europe by a professional actress, and the only script we have in her name. In part, *Mirtilla* serves as a parody of Torquato Tasso's pastoral *Aminta* (first staged in 1573), a play Isabella knew intimately, having previously played both the role of the eponymous male shepherd and that of the nymph Silvia.<sup>11</sup> In the first section of this essay, I will consider Isabella's androgynous persona in relation to the dramaturgical innovations in *Mirtilla* that humorously foreground the subversion of gender norms, destabilizing the patriarchally inscribed order of naturalistic representation, and thereby contextualizing her "hermaphroditic" art as not only performative and proto-feminist, but as part of a proto-Baroque problematization of a mimetic aesthetic. The dynamic female performances that Isabella features in *Mirtilla* showcase her trans-gender and "trans-genre" virtuosity, which, as I will argue later in this essay, inflects Giovan Battista's sexually ambiguous representation of female subjectivity in *Amor nello specchio*, specifically as reflected through the androgynous mirroring embodied by the play's feminized transfigurations of Narcissus and the Hermaphrodite. Although Giovan Battista's work, steeped in a Baroque aesthetic of *meraviglia*, represents a dramatic departure from the comedic principals governing his mother's more mimetically driven art, both *Mirtilla* and *Amor nello specchio* feature the virtuosic art of simulation epitomized in the performances of

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eternare la fama di Isabella e di raccoglierne l'invidiabile lascito in termini di continuità," adding that, based on the introduction provided by the editors Bordone and Locarno to the 1605 publication of the *Seconda Parte* of Isabella's *Rime*, "oltre alla figura di Francesco Andreini si intravede, dietro al progetto editoriale postumo in memoria di Isabella, anche la volontà di Giovan Battista" (Ibid., n. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Jon R. Snyder, "Publish (f)or Paris? G. B. Andreini in France," *Renaissance Drama* 36-37 (2010): 360.

<sup>11</sup> See Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender*, 60, following Ferdinando Taviani's analysis in "Bella d'Asia: Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l'immortalità," *Paragone* 35 (1984): 7-8. Based on references in Gherardo Borgogni's poetry to Isabella's performance, Taviani asserts that she played Aminta to Vittoria Piissimi's Silvia in addition to having played Silvia herself on other occasions.

re-figured and reconfigured female characters. Written for and played by women, these innovatively conceived female protagonists re-inhabit the master plots to which they allude and, through respective modes of mimicry and extended fetishistic play, transform the “mirror” of comedy by elevating theatre’s capacity for illusionistic metamorphosis.

### Genre and gender in *Mirtilla*

As a cofounding member of the famous *Gelosi* troupe, roles requiring transvestism were one of Isabella’s specialties, as evidenced perhaps most extensively by the *scenari* recorded by Flaminio Scala in his 1611 publication of *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* (*The Theatre of Representative Fables*). Scala’s text is innovatively comprised of fifty scenarios of improvisational comic theatre: organized into *Giornate* or “Days,”<sup>12</sup> it is devoid of written dialogue and features an all-star cast that includes Isabella’s husband Francesco, who also wrote a preface to the work.<sup>13</sup> In these *favole*, Isabella’s talent for transformation is made nowhere more evident than in her famous tour de force as a mad woman in Day 38, a reiteration of an improvised play which, with its performance in 1589, came to be acknowledged as the acme of her artistic achievement.<sup>14</sup> In effect, *La Pazzia d’Isabella* (*The Madness of Isabella*) was a piece that required Isabella to mimic all of the other comic characters in her troupe’s repertoire, both male and female. Isabella’s incredible range reverberates through the various roles she takes on in Scala’s scenarios, evident even simply from such titles as *La travagliata Isabella* (*Isabella in Trouble*, Day 15), *La gelosa Isabella* (*Isabella’s Jealousy*, Day 25), and *Isabella astrologa* (*Isabella the Astrologer*, Day 36), ultimately revealing the systematic effort to commemorate her “vario stile” as a performer. Sexual ambiguity surfaces as but one mode of expressing Isabella’s versatility: in Scala’s *favole*, she cross-dresses on no fewer than thirteen occasions, making her talent for transvestite roles something the author decidedly intended to signal to posterity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Scala’s organization of the scenarios into *giornate* recalls the structure of Boccaccio’s *novelle* in the *Decameron*. This division, according to Richard Andrews, “sent a clear signal to readers, almost a permission, to use the volume in the same way as they had used books of short stories.” See *The Commedia dell’Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios*, ed. and trans. Richard Andrews (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2008), xv.

<sup>13</sup> On the itinerancy of improvisational performance troupes between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Siro Ferrone, *Attori mercanti corsari: la commedia dell’arte in Europa tra Cinque e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993) and Roberto Tessari, “Il mercato delle maschere,” in *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo, 1: la nascita del teatro moderno Cinquecento-Seicento*, ed. Roberto Alonge and Guido Davico Bonino (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 119-91. For primary texts, see Ferruccio Marotti and Giovanna Romei, *La commedia dell’arte e la società barocca*, 2 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1991), and *Comici dell’arte: corrispondenze*, ed. Claudia Burattelli, Domenica Landolfi, and Anna Zinanni, 2 vols. (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Isabella gained renown for her act of *pazzia*, performed most famously with the *Gelosi* troupe at the wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christine of Lorraine in the spring of 1589 in Florence. Upon the request of the Grand Duke, Isabella performed *La Pazzia d’Isabella* (*The Madness of Isabella*) in contest with Vittoria Pisimi in her role as *La Cingana* (*The Gypsy*). See Anne MacNeil, “The Divine Madness of Isabella Andreini” in *Journal of Royal Musical Association* 120, no. 2 (1995): 195-215. As MacNeil underscores on p. 198, Isabella seems to have been the favorite of the two, given the lengthier description of her performance in the only firsthand account that remains of it in Giuseppe Pavoni’s *Diario* of 1589. See also Cesare Molinari, “L’altra faccia del 1589: Isabella Andreini e la sua ‘pazzia,’” in *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell’Europa del Cinquecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), 2:565-73.

<sup>15</sup> In the “mask” she created as “Isabella,” understood not as a literal mask, but as the role of the *innamorata* that would in unprecedented fashion be named *after* her (so familiar to early modern audiences was the character that she had created), Isabella became famous for her ability to take on different registers, speak in many tongues, and put on various disguises, including sexually ambiguous ones, as part of a given plot. See Andrews, *The Commedia dell’Arte of Flaminio Scala*, xxxiv.

Depicting herself hermaphroditically as a professional masquerader of both genders, Andreini's art of impersonation had the power of revealing the socially constructed traits traditionally associated with both men and women; indeed, Isabella's propensity for cross-dressing not only serves as a reminder of her talent for playing men's parts (whether in the first degree as "herself" or in the second degree as a masquerading "Isabella"), but also evinces her ability to mimic her own gender, as she managed to do with utmost success as an *innamorata* as well as via the social image she projected of herself in life—and that others continued to perpetuate after her death. The stability of her gendered identity, replete with the contemporarily sanctioned attributes of a virtuous, learned, and beautiful woman, was required if she was to be coherently canonized not only in history—replicated, like the image of her that appears on the commemorative medallion posthumously made in her honor (with the personified image of Fame portrayed on the opposite side)<sup>16</sup>—but also in life, allowing her to be socially accepted and celebrated for her contributions in a profession easily condemned, especially for women, in the post-Tridentine years, when the very appearance of actresses on the public stage violated official church doctrine.<sup>17</sup>

But even as her supposedly intimate self in her *Rime*, Isabella warns us that she is still acting a part—actually, many parts, as expected—so that the individual that lies behind her various roles is obscured, only recognizable through the numerous and unstable identities she feigns in the roles attributed to both her own and the opposite gender, whether on or off the stage.<sup>18</sup> Just as her pseudonym as a member of the *Accademia degli Intenti*, "Accesa," would suggest, she was always "on." Isabella's various projections of herself can therefore be conceived as if in a hall of mirrors, wherein the construction of femininity upholding her social image as the virtuous Isabella is as much a work of art as her androgynous self-fashioning on the stage is the examination of what is natural. As Isabella tells us in her opening *rima*, she has alternated between playing the woman's part and playing the man's—"hor Donna, ed hora / Huom fei rappresentando"—instructed in her impersonations of both genders by "Natura" as well as "Arte."

The art of impersonation Isabella epitomized in her theatrical dexterity, while representing a mimetic art as a kind of Aristotelian making, also touches on the limits of mimetic representation: insofar as her acting evokes the bending of nature toward art, her talent for impersonation foregrounds the very process by which nature is scrutinized in order to be imitated. At the same time, her careful articulation of a fluid persona showcases a post-mimetic

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<sup>16</sup> On the portraits of Isabella disseminated in her lifetime and after her death, see Ferdinando Taviani and Mirella Schino, *Il segreto della commedia dell'arte: la memoria delle compagnie italiane del XVI, XVII, XVIII secolo* (Florence: La Casa Usher, 2007), 33-34; Stefano Mazzoni, "La vita di Isabella," *Culture Teatrali* 10 (2004): 87-92; and Renzo Guardenti, "Attrici in effigie," *Culture Teatrali* 10 (2004): 55-72.

<sup>17</sup> Isabella's metamorphosing identity might also have served as a veiled indication of the necessary art of transformation in a time of increasingly hegemonic social restrictions. See Rosalind Kerr, "The Italian Actress and the Foundations of Early Modern European Theatre: Performing Female Sexual Identities on the Commedia dell'Arte Stage," *Early Theatre* 11, no. 2 (2008): 181-97, and Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 271.

<sup>18</sup> See Kathleen McGill, "Women and Performance: The Development of Improvisation by the Sixteenth-Century Commedia dell'Arte," *Theatre Journal* 43, no. 1 (1991): 59-69. The conflation of art and life as an essential aspect of the performative tradition now referred to as *commedia dell'arte* is also discussed by Taviani and Schino in *Il segreto della commedia dell'arte*. For a recent analysis that frames Isabella Andreini within the broader context of women as comedic performers in the history of theatre, see chapter one ("Isabella's Tricks") in Domnica Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution: Five Performers and the Lessons of Their Subversive Humor* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 27-68.

mode of creative experimentation that sought to conceal its ultimate referent and instead transparently disclose, in a conscious paradox, the artifice behind the extensive disguises at play in the performative act of representation. As Snyder has noted, in the place of mimesis, derived from the imitation of nature itself, “Baroque artists and writers instead called into question the necessity and even the possibility of mimesis, seeking to free art from the tyranny of rules by distorting—and even breaking—the mirror of nature.”<sup>19</sup> Though still operating within a mimetic mode of theatre that, especially in the comedic production of the late Cinquecento and its novel inclusion of female actresses, largely reflected and mimicked social norms and behaviors, Isabella’s poeticized sublimation of disguise presages the antimimetic propensity of the Baroque. The images Isabella reflects of herself are ever shifting—“finti” or “imaginati”—so that she perennially appears as if in a *mise-en-abîme*, recursively inhabiting characters who inhabit other characters, with each disguise presenting a new opportunity for transformation, often expressed in the form of gender-shifting.

One of Isabella’s most compelling explorations of sexual identity as “hor Donna, ed hora / Huom” is the one that emerges in her combined role as Aminta and Silvia in Tasso’s famous pastoral, as seen through her amalgamated embodiment of those roles in the part she writes for herself as Filli in *Mirtilla*. By the time she published *Mirtilla* in 1588, Isabella was praised and idolized by gentlemanly poets, including Tasso, whose *Aminta* afforded the actress yet another opportunity to display her talent for cross-dressing in the part of the play’s principal *innamorato*.<sup>20</sup> In revising *Aminta*, Andreini rewrites more than just her part. As an imitation of one of the great pastorals of its time,<sup>21</sup> her *Mirtilla* is dictated by a socially conscious and performance-driven comedic flair that seeks to sabotage the gender stereotypes at work in Tasso’s play through the innovation of female performance as the conduit of satirical critique.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Andreini uses her talent as a virtuosic *arte* performer to lambaste the sociosexual hierarchies at work in *Aminta*, in turn transcending the bounds of the pastoral genre in such a way that would blaze the path for hybrid forms of “comedic” drama like those composed by her son in the first decades of the seventeenth century.

The fact that *Mirtilla* represents one of Isabella’s major literary contributions—and her only dramatic publication—is especially interesting when we consider that it is a pastoral.<sup>23</sup> The

<sup>19</sup> See Jon R. Snyder, in his introduction to Giovan Battista Andreini’s *Love in the Mirror*, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: Iter Inc., 2009), 4. On the Baroque aesthetic, see also Snyder’s *L’estetica del Barocco* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), esp. 11-27 and 173-80, as well as his “*Mare magnum: The Arts in the Early Modern Age*,” in *The Oxford Short History of Italy, Vol. 4: Early Modern Italy 1550-1796*, ed. John A. Marino (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143-65.

<sup>20</sup> On the relationship between Tasso and Isabella, and the first performance of *Aminta*, believed to have taken place at the court of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara, see Taviani, “Bella d’Asia: Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l’immortalità,” *Paragone* 35 (1984): 3-76, as well as Rosalind Kerr, “The Imprint of Genius: Tasso’s Sonnet to Isabella Andreini,” *Quaderni d’Italianistica* 22, no. 2 (2001): 81-96. On Isabella Andreini’s roles in the Gelosi troupe vis-à-vis those of her fellow actress Vittoria Piissimi, see Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell’Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 61-66. See also K. M. Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy*, 2 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 1:261-69; Maria Galli Stampino, “Performance, Text, and Canon: The Case of *Aminta*,” *Romance Languages Annual* 9 (1998): 351-58; and Franco Piperno, “Nuovi documenti sulla prima rappresentazione dell’*Aminta*,” *Il castello di Elsinore* 13 (2000): 37-38.

<sup>21</sup> For the adaptations of *Aminta* in Europe and England, see the introduction by Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones in *Aminta: A Pastoral Play*, by Torquato Tasso (New York: Italica Press, 2000), xviii.

<sup>22</sup> On Isabella’s “intertextual debate” with Tasso, see Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender*, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Julie Campbell notes that as a pastoral, *Mirtilla* can be understood as “an amalgam of Andreini’s cultural interests—poetry, drama, classical mythology, music, literary theory, Platonic philosophy, and popular topics of debate that stem in part from the *questioni d’amore*,” but that it also represents “the voice of the Renaissance female

pastoral genre was regarded as the third or “other” genre after tragedy and comedy, and in the theatrically productive period between the Cinquecento and Seicento, it was viewed as an experimental genre that could incorporate the modes of both tragedy and comedy.<sup>24</sup> The hybridity represented by the genre of *Mirtilla*, in addition to being synonymous with Isabella’s artistic virtuosity, also reflects the generic versatility made imperative in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, when, as Rosalind Kerr notes, actresses were deemed to be “emblematic of everything that church officials feared about the ability of the theatre to undermine hegemonic Roman Catholic values.”<sup>25</sup> Paradoxically, while generic versatility was certainly understood as a strategy for adhering to social restrictions on theatrical representation, it also translated into a particularly conducive vehicle for those emerging actresses that could play a wide variety of generic registers, including the newly codified one of tragicomic or pastoral pathos.

Tasso’s *Aminta* had arguably elevated the status of the genre, as evidenced by the numerous pastoral dramas produced shortly after the performance of Tasso’s play in June 1573 before the Este court.<sup>26</sup> With *Mirtilla*, Isabella takes Tasso’s pastoral and propels it to the other end of the tragicomic spectrum. At heart, *Mirtilla* is a comedy dressed in pastoral clothing, and particularly humorous in the moments when it is overtly parodying some of the most dramatic moments in Tasso’s play. From a theatrical perspective, there is little action in *Aminta*, and the action that does exist is brought about by the potential for tragedy: when the Satyr’s attempted rape of the beautiful Silvia incites her admirer Aminta to action, it also spurs the dramatic force of the play with the threat of tragicomic violence by way of Aminta’s attempted suicide, maximizing the capacity of the genre to assimilate a tragicomic apparatus with its dramatic trajectory of unrequited love, injury, and conversion.

Unique to the pastoral genre was its association with a *locus amoenus*, the mythological other-worldliness of which could aspire to the depiction of a prelapsarian state. This allowed the pastoral to accommodate the overpowering influence of Love and of supernatural elements rather than that of their comedic counterparts, Fortune and fake magic, the latter of which almost always exposed itself as something political and contrived—a form of visual trickery as materially fabricated as the very costumes employed to bring about mistaken identity. However, the pastoral backdrop could also be manipulated to deconstruct itself. As Jane Tylus has argued, the appropriation of the pastoral mode in *Aminta* is not so straightforward, if Tasso was utilizing the utopian backdrop of the genre to stage his invective against the dissimulatory dynamics of courtly politics. According to Tylus, Tasso draws on the innocence identified with the pastoral genre in order to dismantle the notion of purity associated with its naturalistic setting, “insisting on the bad faith of mimetic desire and the essential opacity of the theatrical medium,” accordingly making *Aminta* a text “whose ‘celebratory’ intentions are severely qualified.”<sup>27</sup> If

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dramatist writing in response to the texts of her male contemporaries”: in *La Mirtilla: A Pastoral*, ed. and trans. Julia Campbell (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), xvi-xvii. See also Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105.

<sup>24</sup> See Robert Henke, *Pastoral Transformations: Italian Tragicomedies and Shakespeare’s Late Plays* (Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1997), and Lisa Sampson, *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy: The Making of a New Genre* (London: Legenda/Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Rosalind Kerr, “The Italian Actress,” 186. In her analysis, Kerr examines the church’s “fetishization of the theatre as demonically immoral,” and the ways in which it “became focalized on female performers,” particularly in the case of “graphic representations of sexual acts performed by actual female bodies” (Ibid., 185-86).

<sup>26</sup> By the time the first edition of *Aminta* was published in 1583, Tasso was already confined to the Hospital of St. Anne by his duke, Alfonso II.

<sup>27</sup> Jane Tylus, *Writing and Vulnerability in the Late Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 81.



taken in this vein, the cynical voyeurism and related misogyny embodied by Tirsi, Tasso's alter ego, reflects the corrupting influence of the court on the poet, making the play a diatribe directed not just against the court and the theatre, but also against himself: taken collectively, these are the culprits of artifice.<sup>28</sup>

If Tasso is insisting with *Aminta* on the inevitable mediation of performance as that which forsakes theatre's redemptive power, Isabella's *Mirtilla*—rather than acting as a radical revision of Tasso's play—seems to function as a consolatory parody seeking to vindicate theatre's uses through the recovery of the pastoral's female characters. Andreini reappropriates the purpose of dramatic mimesis through her playful examination and performative commandeering of mimetic devices—indeed, through mimicry itself. As Elin Diamond outlines in her proposal of a feminist mode of mimetic or realistic representation, “mimesis can be retheorized as a site of, and means of, feminist intervention,” in which the female body in performance “signals an interruption of signification itself,” ultimately unveiling that, “as praxis, the sign-referent model of mimesis can become excessive to itself, spilling into a mimicry that undermines the referent's authority.”<sup>29</sup> Put in another way, “Arte” is overtaking “Natura,” but it does so specifically by blurring the borders between the two. In this sense, Andreini's dramaturgical contribution lies in critiquing the coherence of mimetic representation through the empowering actions that she has her female characters carry out onstage, so that, unlike Tasso, the playwright is celebrating the artificial nature of dramatic representation for its ability to subvert patriarchal order through the dynamic mechanisms of comedic performance. Particularly in the bucolic framework of pastoral, festooned with the furnishings of a “natural” setting, Andreini's transposition of traditional signifiers<sup>30</sup>—specifically in relation to conventional understandings of gendered traits and behavior—becomes all the more indicative of a reversal of presupposed natural referents occupying the realm of sexual politics, making her physical mode of comedy in *Mirtilla* a vehicle for the materialization and “naturalization” of an innovatively philogynistic pastoral order.

In her play, not only does Isabella radically reverse some of the most sexually charged scenes of Tasso's pastoral, but she also stages them rather than having them simply be narrated by other characters—a form of mediated representation that recurs in *Aminta*. Such performance-oriented parody in *Mirtilla* emerges most saliently in Act III, scene ii, in a direct reversal of the satyr scene in Tasso's play, in which the Satyr, embodiment of animalistic lust, attempts to rape the nymph Silvia by tying her to a tree by her hair.<sup>31</sup> The misogyny of this scene in *Aminta* is not

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<sup>28</sup> As Tylus convincingly argues, “[b]y insisting on the unreliability of the mimetic process, Tasso exposes the duke's and his court's more appropriate desires [...] desires from which Tasso, as the authorized maker of such a mirror and as a character in his own play who counsels the ‘innocent’ shepherd Aminta to no less violent action than rape, is hardly free”: Tylus, *Writing and Vulnerability*, 84. According to Tylus, moreover, the traditionally naïve characters of pastoral typically associated in their Renaissance iterations with idealized reflections of the prince and his courtiers are transformed into models of corruption in Tasso's play, thus exposing the playwright's loss of innocence that results from the political appropriation of his poetic endeavors.

<sup>29</sup> Elin Diamond, “Mimesis, Mimicry, and the ‘True-Real,’” *Modern Drama* 32, no. 1 (1989): 62. Diamond adopts the terminology used by Luce Irigaray in her theory of mimesis as mimicry, as well as Julia Kristeva's reconceptualization of mimetic theory through the notion of the “true-real” of the hysterical body: see Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) and Julia Kristeva, “The True-Real,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 214-37.

<sup>30</sup> On the use of transposition in the function of comedy, see Henri Bergson, “Laughter” in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 141.

<sup>31</sup> For an analysis of the archetypal satyr scene in pastoral drama, see Meredith Ray, “La Castità Conquistata: The Function of the Satyr in Pastoral Drama,” *Romance Languages Annual* 9 (1998): 312-21.

limited to the Satyr: although the traditional rules of dramatic decorum ostensibly restrict the scene to one that is rhetorically rather than theatrically rendered, the episode is imbued with an aggressive eroticism that comes alive in Tirsi and Aminta's vicarious participation in the Satyr's attempted violation of the helpless nymph. Before Silvia is rescued, Tirsi lasciviously recounts how, beholding Silvia, still naked and bound to the tree, Aminta "rivolve / i cupidi occhi in quelle membra belle, / che, come suole tremolare il latte / ne' giunchi, si parean morbide e bianche" (raised his eyes / desiring, longing for those lovely limbs, / which seemed so soft and white, as milk is seen / to tremble gently in the rush-wove cups).<sup>32</sup>

In Andreini's rewriting of the scene, the nymph Filli—the role meant for Isabella herself—ties the Satyr to a tree by his beard.<sup>33</sup> For the sake of the female nymph's redemption, the traditional dictates of theatrical convention are overruled, and the transposition of the roles expected of the nymph and satyr are directly represented onstage. Like Tasso's Silvia, Filli faces the threat of the Satyr's unwanted advances; but by means of her wit, Filli deceives the Satyr by persuading him to believe that her desire for him mirrors his own. She proceeds to tie him to the proverbial tree by convincing him that she is afraid that he will smother her in the heat of passion, cunningly reassuring him with the promise of eventual sexual enjoyment:

*Satiro:* Non stringer così forte.  
*Filli:* Datti pace  
 e soffri per un poco:  
 perché quanto più stretto  
 ti lego, tanto più sicuramente  
 ti bacierò dipoi.

*Satyr:* Don't tie me so tightly!  
*Filli:* Calm down,  
 and suffer for a moment:  
 because the more tightly  
 I tie you, the more safely  
 I will then kiss you.<sup>34</sup>

The high degree of physicality dramatically rendered in this erotically charged exchange is accentuated by the way the stage directions are integrated into the very dialogue of the scene, transferring a significant portion of the episode's artistry from the rhetorical to the somatic plane. The physical aggression Filli inflicts on the Satyr continues to escalate, until she is tugging his beard and pinching his breasts:

*Filli:* Eccomi ferma; ma tu non ti muovere;  
 acciò ch'io possa darti mille baci:  
 o corna mie, voi mi feristi il core.

<sup>32</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Aminta*, III.i.73-76, in the bilingual edition of *Aminta: A Pastoral Play*, ed. and trans. Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones (New York: Italica Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Campbell points out that Isabella's role as Filli in the pastoral allowed her to distance her own persona from any association with the courtesan that she may have been trained to be earlier in life: see Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender*, 57.

<sup>34</sup> Isabella Andreini, *Mirtilla*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1995), III.ii.1397-1401. Unless otherwise noted, translations of this play-text are from the Campbell edition of *La Mirtilla* (cf. n. 23).

*Satiro*: Ohimè non far sì forte; non mi torcere  
il collo, ohimè, da ver, che mi fai male.  
*Filli*: Perdonami, cor mio, ch'io non credeva  
di farti male; oh che mammelle morbide!  
*Satiro*: Non pizzicar sì forte, ohimè, non fare.

*Filli*: All right, I'll stop, but you mustn't move,  
so that I can give you a thousand kisses!  
O my horns, you have wounded my heart!  
*Satyr*: Oh me! Don't pull so hard! Don't twist  
my neck! Oh me, truly, you are hurting me!  
*Filli*: Pardon me, my heart, I didn't mean  
to hurt you. Oh what soft breasts!  
*Satyr*: Don't pinch so hard! Hey, stop it!<sup>35</sup>

In the mask of *Filli*, *Isabella* not only verbally relates but also physically performs her rebuttal to the narration delivered by *Tirsi* (the part associated with *Tasso* himself), as the *Satyr*'s breasts are feminized in their objectification and subsequent association with *Silvia*'s: "oh che mammelle morbide!" The scene is imbued with the inventiveness *Isabella* brings from the repertoire of physical gestures associated with contemporary improvisational comedy, and thanks to the incongruity it presents in the image of the vulnerable and maltreated *Satyr*, is one of the funniest and most memorable in the play.

Rather than simply saving the nymph *Silvia*, *Isabella*, in the part of *Filli*, puts both the *Satyr* in *Silvia*'s place and *Silvia* in the *Satyr*'s, essentially negating any need for an external male figure like *Aminta* to come to her aid. In fact, *Filli* doubles as *Isabella*'s incarnation of *Aminta*: especially when we consider that the actress would have been recognized by her contemporaries as having previously played the titular character in *Tasso*'s play, we might understand her performance as *Filli* in conversation with her previous impersonations in *Aminta*, thus allowing *Isabella-as-Filli* to represent both a second *Aminta* (as *Silvia*'s rescuer) and a second *Silvia* (as the nymph saved from the *Satyr*). Understood as both *Aminta* and *Silvia* (in her role as *Filli*), *Isabella*—a character inhabiting other characters—once again defines her theatrical artistry in terms of hermaphroditic versatility.

*Isabella*'s pastiche of *Tasso*'s *satyr* scene in *Aminta* is all the more powerful given its onstage representation, for the audience is made to experience *Filli*'s verbal and physical conquest of the *Satyr*. Through mimicry, *Isabella-Filli* reinhabits the stock *satyr* scene in order to re-enact and reverse the mode of fetishization at work in *Aminta*'s characterization of *Silvia*. She thereby reveals the violence motivating it by inviting the audience to witness her perversion of the art of seduction as mechanized through dramatic parody. Rather than having the sublimation of the female figure rendered in the mystification of the mind's eye, *Isabella* presents the antithetical apparition of a *Satyr*, a caricature of masculinity, physically visible before the audience in the subjugated pose of a defenseless nymph—positioned in such a vulnerable manner so as to be subsequently manipulated, quite literally, by a woman. In addition to being humorous, the scene introduces an ethically relevant archetype of a woman poaching a traditionally masculine role in order to rescue herself with the power of her own wit.

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<sup>35</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, III.ii.1436-1445.

The poetry of desire expected of pastoral is thus reduced to a technology of gestures that can be broken down, reappropriated, and distorted—their individuation the result of the satirical dismantling of the hierarchical power structures expected between the sexes. Challenging the mode of lyric with the power of comedic representation, Isabella Andreini does nothing less than render a tableau vivant that, through a feminized lens, comprehensively distorts the Petrarchan blazon put forth for the pleasure of male consumption in *Aminta*'s description of Silvia, effectively adopting mimicry as a form of satirical critique capable of breaking the coherence of mimetic representation.<sup>36</sup>

### Metamorphosing Narcissus

The comedically subversive eye that the actress-poet-playwright brings to *Mirtilla*, and that often plays on gender norms, is made all the more evident in the overt parody of the Ovidian myth of Narcissus brought forth in its dramatic representation of the nymph Ardelia. As a chaste follower of Diana, Ardelia is immune to the professions of love expressed by her admirer, Uranio. As Julie Campbell notes, the female Narcissus whom we see personified in Ardelia can also be read as the transgressively real figuration of the objectified woman of Petrarchan and Neoplatonic love come to life. Such character development not only creates a strong role for the female performer playing her, but also manifests the manner in which Isabella “provides her audience a singularly humorous glimpse of what the traditionally silent, chaste, and obedient Renaissance beloved might be like, provided a voice and the agency to interact with her admirers.”<sup>37</sup>

Tasso had already made a female Narcissus out of Silvia in his play, but the important innovation in *Mirtilla* involves the same dramaturgical revision as in the satyr scene: rather than being relayed to the audience in the third person, Ardelia's scene of self-conscious narcissism is one that the audience is allowed to witness firsthand as it unfolds in time and space. In Act IV, scene iv, we find Ardelia transfixed before her reflection, composing an adoring blazon of her mirrored image. The scene culminates, as in the myth, in the recognition of the image in the water as her own reflection:

troppo a quest'occhi piaccion gli occhi miei,  
e 'l proprio viso e 'l proprio seno e troppo,  
ah finalmente, a me medesma piaccio

Too much these eyes please my eyes,  
this face, this breast, too much;  
in the end, I love myself!<sup>38</sup>

By the end of her monologue, Ardelia affirms that she is aware of imitating “Narciso infelice,” making the Ovidian myth an unconcealed intertext.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Irigaray on the female performer's impetus to mimic mimesis for the sake of recuperating “the place of her exploitation by discourse”: Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 76. See also Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Campbell, *La Mirtilla*, xviii. According to Campbell, “this scene especially provides a subversively wicked and witty interpretation of how narcissistic the stereotypical beloved might prove to be, if that paragon described in male-authored poetry were more fully developed as a character” (Ibid., xxi).

<sup>38</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, IV.iv.2576-78.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., IV.iv.2602.

In *Aminta*, Silvia's narcissism is just as pronounced as Ardelia's, but with the telling difference that it is recounted in the third person by the nymph Dafne:

sovra essa un lago limpido e tranquillo  
tutta pendente, in atto che *parea*  
vagheggiar se medesma e 'nsieme insieme  
chieder consiglio a l'acque in qual maniera  
dispor dovesse in su la fronte i crini,  
e sovra i crini il velo e sovra 'l velo  
i fior che tenea in grembo

she pendant stood above the limpid lake's  
smooth calm and *seemed* to take delight in her  
reflection—at the self same time she seemed  
to ask the water counsel in what way  
she should arrange her hair about her face  
and on her hair the veil, and on the veil  
the flowers she held<sup>40</sup>

The layers of ornamentation enumerated in Dafne's description of Silvia's reflective episode reveal the conceit tainting the female subject's emergent self-consciousness.<sup>41</sup> However, Dafne's cynicism throughout the play might cast a shadow on the accuracy of her depiction of Silvia's vanity, which in turn raises the question of the extent to which Silvia, whose innocence is repeatedly acknowledged, is victimized throughout the play as a result of the characters' (and the audience's) reliance on appearances.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, Isabella's characterization of the narcissistic nymph puts the act of looking itself directly on display. As playwright, she allows the audience to see and hear the female subject onstage, freeing her from the reliance on the "seeming" ("parea") of mediated discourse and the related potential for misrepresentation. This act of expropriation is again made possible through the humorous vein of comedic performance, which elucidates the materiality of the scene as it unfolds in time and space, with the additional theatrical benefit of creating dramatic suspense. Isabella brings to life the corporeality of Ardelia's episode by making the nymph's tears a physical impediment to her contemplation of her watery self-image, allowing the register of the scene to oscillate unpredictably as the character turns from the lyrical mode of self-reflection to

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<sup>40</sup> Tasso, *Aminta*, II.ii.38-44; italics mine.

<sup>41</sup> The term "ornamento" appears directly in the lines following the passage cited above, as Dafne goes on to interpret the smile gracing Silvia's face, envisioning the nymph's delight through the fabrication of a self-congratulatory speech with herself in II.ii.50-53.

<sup>42</sup> Understood in this light, Dafne's gaze is reminiscent of Tirsi's, whose embodiment as the bitter Tasso echoes an early lyric the poet wrote to his chaste mistress, in which he imagines his lady mesmerized by the image that he is simultaneously enjoying: see Tasso's *Aminta e Rime*, ed. Francesco Flora (Turin: Ricciardi, 1976), 1:95-96, as cited in Tylus, *Writing and Vulnerability*, 84: "parea fra sè dir:—Ben veggio aperta / l'alta mia gloria e di che dolci sguardi / questa rara bellezza accenda il foco." ([S]he seems to be saying to herself, how well now do I see / my great glory and rare beauty / that kindles the fire with such sweet glances). Like Silvia, the beloved lady is imagined in conversation with herself through the lens of an admiring mediator, whose erotically charged perspective undermines the veracity of the poetically envisioned act of mirroring, cloaking it instead in the veil of fantasy.

the comedically practical positioning of her body, which she adjusts so as to maintain the desired perspective vis-à-vis her reflected image:

ahimè, ahimè che per maggior mia doglia,  
mentre piango il mio male, il pianto istesso  
è del mio mal ministro,  
poiché turbando l'acqua  
mi toglie il goder di me medesma.  
Voglio dunque partirmi  
per dar tempo a quest'onde che ritornino  
tranquille come prima, ond'io di nuovo  
possa goder di rimirar me stessa.

Alas, alas! [I see] that for my great suffering,  
while I cry over my misfortune, the weeping itself  
is the cause of my distress—  
because disturbing the water  
deprives me of the pleasure of myself!  
I must, therefore, leave  
to give this wave time to become as  
tranquil as at first, so that I again  
may enjoy gazing at myself!<sup>43</sup>

The playwright seems to belittle Ardelia's predicament while simultaneously rendering her as a sympathetic figure, whose frustrated physical maneuvers are juxtaposed with her rhetorically hyperbolic distress. Rather than being poeticized, Ardelia's suffering is materialized into tears that in turn obstruct her vision, making it a paradigmatic example of the kind of carnivalesque laughter Mikhail Bakhtin famously describes wherein a transference occurs from all that is "elevated, spiritual, ideal, and abstract" onto "the material and corporal plane."<sup>44</sup> It is the very comedy of the scene that makes it a powerful *reductio ad absurdum* of the Narcissus archetype.

On a metatheatrical level, Ardelia's failure to coherently see her reflection raises the question of whether theatrical mimesis can ever proceed without interruption or further transformation, for the scene encapsulates the constant movement inherent to the art of performance, and the multiplicity of perspectives such motion implies. Ardelia's understanding is that she must control her involuntary tears in order to make her image stay still, and subsequently be enjoyed. This puts the agency of the female beholder in a problematic position, and might serve as a subtle allusion to the manipulation Isabella herself had to enforce and undergo in securing and proliferating the persona she reflected to the world, which in turn, she would describe in her poetry as something of a mirage, brought about by "finti ardori," "finti detti."

The fixated perspective represented by Narcissus is thus undermined by the playwright in the erotically charged and comedically inspired parody of the myth represented in Ardelia's scene. Isabella also problematizes the familiarly Petrarchan tropes about female beauty and its effects on its beholder, whether male or female, making her exposure of Ardelia's vanity a mordant

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<sup>43</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, IV.iv.2586-94.

<sup>44</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 29.

derision democratically directed at both genders: as the conflation of the lover and the beloved, Ardelia appropriates the discourse of the male lover and also literalizes the dynamic of the doubly objectified female beloved epitomized in Neoplatonic debates on love, the themes of which fueled the content of much of the dialogue written for *innamorati*.<sup>45</sup> In ridiculing Ardelia's vanity, Isabella's characterization of the nymph exposes the conceivable psychological implications of such excessive idolization, while putting into play the stagnant point of view it represents.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, this implied mockery of the narcissistic nymph might be masking the proto-feminist insinuation of having Ardelia appropriate the typically masculinized rhetoric of the beholder, momentarily undoing the expected dynamic between a male lover and female beloved. Even if only for a fleeting part of the play's action, Ardelia's scene of self-recognition functions as a representation of the nymph's awakening to love by way of autoerotic desire, which, in fragmenting the subjectivity and objectivity of the same figure, can be understood along homoerotic lines that cut out male participation entirely, as both the subject and object of fetishization are feminized.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps to temper the transgressive nature of such social commentary, Isabella manages to veil it in the idealized context of the pastoral genre, and to nearly override it with Ardelia's union to Uranio by the play's end. Nonetheless, by highlighting the autonomy involved in Ardelia's desirous invocation of her own image, the nymph's re-embodiment of the Narcissus myth challenges the ethical implications of the stereotypes derived from canonically upheld discourses on love, as it brings to life the subjectivity of the conventionally objectified female beloved, who recognizes and subsequently expropriates the power of her own desirability from the archetypally male beholder.

Lest such erotic hubris risk the allowance of Ardelia's complete negation of the male gaze, it is important to note that, already in the prologue, the figure of Amore—understood as both Love and Cupid—announces in his conversation with his mother Venus his aim to punish Ardelia for the very fact that she loves no one but herself. Amore vows to make the proud nymph repent for her temerity, given that “con gran dolore e meraviglia, / e bestemmiar e dispreggiar sentimmi / da [...] una ninfa che si chiama Ardelia” (with great sorrow and astonishment, / I heard myself blasphemed and scorned, / by [...] a nymph called Ardelia).<sup>48</sup> Love's revenge, manifested in the subsequent anguish Ardelia suffers as a result of her sexual self-consciousness, becomes humorous thanks to Isabella's artistic decision to have the nymph recount her experience in the

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<sup>45</sup> Andreini's representation of Ardelia's narcissism might be commenting on the vanity that results from the dual objectification of the female beloved, object of both her own and her lover's admiration. Another interpretation of the Neoplatonic understanding of love might suggest instead that it reflects the detrimental ramifications of the potential narcissism enacted in the psyche of the male lover, whose admiration of his beloved's *imago* functions primarily to bring his own self-image into focus. On the insertion and appropriation of women in Neoplatonic dialogues in the Renaissance, see Janet Smarr, *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> The destructive dynamics of such specularly defined desire are at stake in a poem Tylus pinpoints, written by Tasso after *Aminta*, in which the poet reclaims his voice as Tirsi in order once again to invoke the mimetic imagery of his pastoral and the merciless narcissism of his beloved, summoning his “ninfa selvaggia e fera” to use him as her watery reflection so that she might bear witness to her own cruelty: “Spero fontana divenir di pianto: / allora in me vedrete / quanto voi bella e quanto cruda sete.” (I hope to become a fountain from weeping; so that you will see in me / how beautiful and cruel you really are): Tasso, *Aminta e Rime*, 1:168, as cited in Tylus, *Writing and Vulnerability*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> Maria Luisa Doglio interprets Ardelia's narcissistic episode as a manifestation of lesbian desire that speaks to Ardelia's self-sufficiency as a heroine who is not in need of a male hero (Doglio, *Mirtilla*, 14).

<sup>48</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, Prologue, 143-50.

first person: by so doing, the playwright externalizes the character's gradual awareness of her predicament, outdoing Tasso's tragicomic narrative tone through the implementation of comedic gesticulation and thereby raising the capacity for comedic entertainment derived from dramatic mimesis. And even though Ardelia, like Silvia, articulates the fatalistic desire that her desperate love end in death as it did for "Narciso infelice," she, unlike the doomed mythological figure (and unlike Silvia), is able to walk away from the pool at the end of the scene, letting such hyperbole melt into the upcoming denouement of the play.

Ardelia's amorous inclination is definitively normalized in Act V when her suitor Uranio, after observing the "strana meraviglia" that is her self-love, finally succeeds in persuading her to surrender to his affections instead, with the understanding that this will give her a way to continue loving herself (once again playing on the dynamic rendered in the Neoplatonic delineation of love).<sup>49</sup> Uranio's persuasive speech, inflected with Petrarchan tropes, leads to a *lieto fine* that relies on patriarchal closure, despite the fact that Isabella very effectively ruptures this rhetoric in the course of the play. Ultimately, positioned within the comprehensive arc of the action in *Mirtilla*, Ardelia's narcissism is portrayed as a cautionary tale: the nymph's mirroring leads to self-knowledge—and almost to death—until Uranio saves her from replicating Narcissus' fatal end by redirecting her amatory gaze from herself to him, so that, by the final act, Ardelia is swayed to promising herself to him resolutely: "Ora mi toglio al falso e al ver mi dono: / amare il corpo voglio e non più l'ombra" (Now I free myself from falsehood, and I give myself to truth: / I desire to love a body and no more a shadow).<sup>50</sup>

In sum, the exploration of gender relations in *Mirtilla* is significant, but still restricted by certain notable parameters: the play commences with the prologue's moralistic suggestion that the arrogance of Ardelia's deviant passion merits retribution for its defiance of heterosexually reciprocated love and concludes with the marital union of three shepherd-nymph couples making offerings of thanksgiving at the temple of Venus. All subversions included in the play's action are subsumed into the force of order that is engendered by Amore. And so, while Isabella Andreini certainly informs her pastoral with a theatrically driven and often satirical vision enlivened by transgressively dynamic female performances, she also offers in *Mirtilla* an expression of dramatic harmony that complies with established heteronormative conventions. In the end, even Filli is coupled with the shepherd Igilio (V.iii), despite the promise made at the end of her singing contest in the middle of the play with Mirtilla (III.v), in which the two women resolve to hold their own bond of female friendship above their mutual infatuation with Uranio. Just as Amore's true form was often described as being accompanied by the torch of Hymen, the god of marriage, Isabella's portrayal of Filli readily associates the actress with her image as respectable wife and mother in life—an impression she strove to cultivate in a time of vehement anti-theatrical prejudice directed especially against female performers. After her premature death—itsself potentially the consequence of Isabella's commitment to the contradictory roles she inhabited in life—the defense of the tenuous theatrical profession and the multifaceted memory of Isabella continued to inspire the cause of *arte's* most prominent figures, not least among whom was her son Giovan Battista.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., V.v.1840. By the final act, as Doglio notes, "L'atmosfera di turbamento, di passione lesbica, di amore impossibile e doloroso si dissolve" (Ibid., 14).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., V.v.2905-6.

<sup>51</sup> I wish to thank the first anonymous reader for *California Italian Studies* for raising this valid point.



## Love's mirrors in *Amor nello specchio*

Giovan Battista Andreini was one of the most ingenious and prolific playwrights and *capocomici* of his time, striving from the onset of his theatrical career to elevate and transform Italian comic theatre while infusing it with an increasingly accentuated antimimetic aesthetic. In his lifetime, as Snyder has noted, Giovan Battista sought to advance “the social and cultural status of the comic actor,” legitimizing the cultural production of what Snyder productively calls “the actor-intellectual”—understood, much like his mother, Isabella, as a “strikingly modern figure [...] who would be able to serve as an interface between official Counter-Reformation culture and the far less legitimate world of the stage, especially the comic stage.”<sup>52</sup> With his *Fedeli* troupe, which continued to benefit from the patronage of the Medici historically bestowed on the Andreini family, Giovan Battista maintained his parents’ polytropic theatrical endeavors and extended Isabella’s predilection for gender play and captivating female characters into a new age of theatre, responding to the expanding parameters of Baroque representation through his accentuation and magnification of comedy’s transformative devices.

In his play *Amor nello specchio*, performed in Paris and published in 1622, the *specchio* (mirror) serves as the central conceit by which Giovan Battista ruptures comedy’s capacity for authentic representation and all of the social conventions with which it was associated.<sup>53</sup> Specifically, the mirror becomes the fulcrum of transformation in the dramatic action that centers on the erotic relationship between two women, Florinda and Lidia,<sup>54</sup> played respectively by the playwright’s wife, Virginia Ramponi, and his lover (and later second wife), Virginia Rotari.<sup>55</sup> Onstage, Giovan Battista himself appears in an unmistakably secondary role under his usual *innamorato* pseudonym, Lelio, cast here as one of Florinda’s spurned suitors.<sup>56</sup> The mirror’s additional association with “Amor” connects its supposed mimetic function with its transformative capacities, so that, rather than affirming the premise of the *specchio* as a tool for accurately replicating the natural world, *Amor nello specchio* represents “Love” as a transgressive influence. Love’s mirror thus becomes both a fetish and a fetishizing force, dictated

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<sup>52</sup> See Snyder, “Publish (f)or Paris,” 371. For more on the influence of the *arte* tradition on Giovan Battista Andreini, see Vittorio Tranquilli, *La regola e la trasgressione: dalla commedia dell’arte al Don Giovanni attraverso Giovan Battista Andreini* (Rome: Aracne, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> The only performance of *Amor nello specchio* was almost certainly staged in Paris in 1622. See Giovan Battista Andreini, *Love in the Mirror*, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: Iter Inc., 2009), 7 n. 9.

<sup>54</sup> The amorous rapport between two female characters was not unprecedented in the Cinquecento canon of comedy. But Andreini’s female protagonists, in addition to the significant fact that they are being played by women, also, as Snyder states in his introduction, “break openly with the great sex comedies of the sixteenth century” where “women may fall in love with women, but because of disguise and deceit the erotic bond between these earlier female characters is always seen as a comic error to be corrected by the end of the play” (Ibid., 1). Notable examples of comedies that feature female-female desire are the anonymously authored *Venexiana* (c. 1536), where no cross-dressing is required in the infatuation that occurs between the female characters; Alessandro Piccolomini’s *Alessandro* (1544); and Nicolò Secchi’s *Inganni* (1547). See Laura Giannetti, “‘Ma che potrà succedermi se io donna amo una Donna’: Female-Female Desire in Italian Renaissance Comedy,” *Renaissance Drama* 36-37 (2010): 99-125.

<sup>55</sup> On the centrality of the virtuosic performances of Virginia Ramponi and Virginia Rotari in the play, see Piermarco Vescovo, “Narciso, Psiche, e Marte ‘mestrato’: una lettura di *Amor nello specchio* di Giovan Battista Andreini,” *Lettere italiane* 56, no. 1 (2004): 50-80; and Id., “Virginia Ramponi e Virginia Rotari nello specchio di Giovan Battista Andreini,” in *Donne e teatro*, ed. Daria Perocco (Venice: Ca’ Foscari, 2004), 41-58.

<sup>56</sup> As Snyder points out in “Publish (f)or Paris,” “Andreini the author, rather than Andreini the actor, is the true protagonist of the 1622 Paris plays” (361).

by the visual deception inherent to the erotically motivated gaze, and capable of reflecting a sequence of ever-changing reconfigurations.

This mirror conceit already comes alive in the dedication to François de Bassompierre,<sup>57</sup> where Giovan Battista's *captatio benevolentiae* blatantly draws on the analogy between Bassompierre and Narcissus.<sup>58</sup>

Allo specchio di gentilezza cavallieresca, allo specchio d'interpido valor guerriero, allo specchio di virtù pellegrina, oggi s'appresenta questo AMOR NELLO SPECCHIO, commedia amorosissima.

[...] intendendomi che questo AMOR NELLO SPECCHIO sia quello nel quale ella stessa mirandosi, così n'ha invaghito Amore, che non solo si compiace di star nel suo volto, ma di soggiornar lieto colà dentro, dove la bella immagine sua alcuna volta si trasfonde rimirandosi.

E ben certo ella è tale, che non solo ha dato occasione ad infiniti pittori di colorarla in mille tele, ma ad Amore d'inciderla in mille e mille cuori.

Narciso si specchiò nel fonte e s'invaghì follemente di sé stesso. Eccellenza Vostra Signoria Illustrissima, specchiandosi nel fonte della gloria, saggiamente conobbe come amando sé medesimo far si debba divenir immortalmente glorioso.

To you—the mirror of chivalric courtesy, the mirror of intrepid warrior valor, and the mirror of remarkable virtue—I present today my LOVE IN THE MIRROR.

[...] I understand this LOVE IN THE MIRROR to be that same mirror in which you, gazing at yourself, have made Cupid so infatuated that not only is he pleased to become one with your face but to dwell happily there: sometimes, when you look at yourself, his handsome image is infused with yours.

And certainly this is so. For this same image has not only given an infinite number of painters the occasion to paint it on a thousand canvases, but has given Cupid himself the occasion to engrave it in thousands and thousands of hearts.

Narcissus saw his image reflected in a spring and fell wildly in love with himself. Your Most Illustrious Lordship, seeing himself mirrored in the spring of glory and loving what he saw there, wisely knew what to do to become immortally glorious.<sup>59</sup>

Referring overtly to Narcissus, this dedication involves a conceit on conceit. In his appeal to Bassompierre, Giovan Battista initiates a verbal game that exponentially multiplies available references in a way that invokes a greater sense of spectacle, metaleptically comparing the “mirror” of his comedy with the figurative one belonging to his patron. With this dedication, the playwright is also foreshadowing the work's narcissistic *prima donna* with his characterization

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<sup>57</sup> François de Bassompierre (1579-1646) was “one of France's most important and wealthiest nobles under Henry IV and Louis XIII. He was a notorious rake as well as a renowned soldier, and his *Journal de ma vie* confirms that he took part in the theatrical festivities at Carnival in Paris in 1622”: Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 222 n. ii.

<sup>58</sup> Giovan Battista Andreini makes a similar use of the mirror trope in the dedication to his *Li due Lelii simili* (1622). See Maurizio Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994), 195 n. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Giovan Battista Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, Dedication (38-39). All citations and translations of Giovan Battista Andreini's *Amor nello specchio* refer to the dual-language edition of *Love in the Mirror* (cf. n. 52). Citations refer to act and scene numbers, and parenthetically to the page numbers of Snyder's edition.

of his dedicatee, effectively rendering a hermaphroditic reflection by casting both the male Bassompierre and the female Florinda in Cupid's orb.

As was the case with Tasso's Silvia and Isabella's Ardelia, Florinda is a self-consciously narcissistic figure, enamored of her own reflection and unabashed in her contempt for men.<sup>60</sup> Unlike Ardelia, who laughably struggles to get the water of the pond to remain still enough to enjoy her reflected image for any duration of time, Florinda lyrically establishes herself as a new Narcissus with two extended monologues in which we find her venerating her reflection at length in a controlled, domestic setting. In Act I, she begins by addressing "Amor," that prime mover of pastoral—once more understood as both Love and Cupid, especially given the figure's personification here:<sup>61</sup> "tutto raccolto in te stesso, in maestà sovrana sedendo, abbi eletto per tuo seggio, per tua reggia, questo piccolo specchio" (all intent upon yourself and enthroned in sovereign majesty, you have chosen this little mirror for your seat, indeed for your palace).<sup>62</sup> If Cupid controlled the actions of the characters in Isabella's *Mirtilla*, here it is the female protagonist who seems to dictate Love's whereabouts, as Florinda proclaims, "saggia discorrendo dico che mi fai credere, in questo vetro mirando, che quant'hai di buono Amore, tutto qui dentro in bel compendio s'accolga" (speaking prudently I say that you make me believe, by looking in this glass, that whatever good there is in you, god of Love, may be found wholly gathered within).<sup>63</sup>

Florinda's pronouncement already hints at the rupture of the usual patriarchal order expected in the genres of both pastoral and comedy. Her encomium eventually escalates into song:<sup>64</sup> "O vetro non vetro, ma sfera dove si raggira Amore" (O glass that is not glass, but a sphere wherein Cupid revolves)—where the anaphora of "O vetro non vetro" admits to the illusion of specularity that makes for the erotic paradox rhetorically informing the entire play.<sup>65</sup> Florinda's characterization of the "vetro" can be further understood metatheatrically with regard to the "specchio" of Giovan Battista's comedy—the definition of which still enjoyed its association with its famous Ciceronian definition as *imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*. Here the playwright ventriloquizes through his protagonist the definition of his new conceptualization of comedy as less of a mirror and more of a "sfera," which, as Snyder puts it, "recirculated and recycled an encyclopedic repertory of mythologies, ancient and early modern texts, epigrams and commonplaces, providing an inexhaustible supply of thematic material."<sup>66</sup> Captured in these terms, this "comedy" clearly transcends traditional dramatic categories by mixing a comedic apparatus with iconographic elements derived from the pastoral genre, in a

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<sup>60</sup> Florinda's narcissism is here also understood as an aspect of a certain genre of character known as the *ingrata*—a kind of Renaissance femme fatale—in which Virginia Ramponi specialized. See Emily Wilbourne, "Amor nello specchio (1622): Mirroring, Masturbation, and Same-Sex Love," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 13 (2009): 56. Virginia Ramponi had played other *ingrate* in her career, most notably in Claudio Monteverdi's *Ballo delle ingrate*, performed in Mantua in 1608. One of Florinda's suitors, Guerindo, even calls her an *ingrata* in the play's opening scene—"questa ingrata Florinda" [the ungrateful Florinda]—before she even appears onstage.

<sup>61</sup> Earlier in her monologue, I.iii (54-55), Florinda refers to "Amor" with "O fanciullo amoroso," making her reference to "Love" as "Cupid" explicit. See Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 35-36.

<sup>62</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio* I.iii (52-53).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* (52-55).

<sup>64</sup> Wilbourne analyzes the layout of the play-text of *Amor nello specchio* and its typographic distinction between at least three modes of linguistic communication, including songs that are visually and rhythmically distinct compared to the rest of the prose. Wilbourne, "Amor nello specchio (1622)," 58-59.

<sup>65</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, I.iii (54-55).

<sup>66</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 21.

kind of inversion of *Mirtilla* as a comedy-by-way-of-pastoral: by choosing “questo piccolo specchio,” the forces of Love and of pastoral are invited in *Amor nello specchio* to take over the framework of comedy and its recognizable signifiers as their “reggia.”

With Cupid’s presence—and vanity—having been acknowledged, Florinda turns her attention to Narcissus, to whom she compares herself directly:

Ben assai più di te gloriosa è la mia sorte, o innamorato Narciso, poiché s’alla limpida fonte specchiandoti t’invaghisti, onde te stesso amasti, t’amasti perché bello, t’insuperbisti perché vago in te stesso credevi d’essere face di mille cuori, strale di mille petti; ma io sola di me medesima vaga, per apprezzar me stessa, ciascuno disprezzo.

Much more glorious than yours is my fate, o enamored Narcissus, for if at the clear spring you were attracted to yourself, gazing at your own reflection, and thus you came to love yourself, and loved yourself because of your beauty, and you grew proud because, desiring yourself, you thought that you were the light of a thousand hearts and the arrow in a thousand breasts. I instead desire only myself and, to esteem myself, I despise all others.<sup>67</sup>

Reversing the fate of the doomed boy in Ovid’s myth, whose self-knowledge is fatally merged with the moment of his death, Florinda expresses satisfaction in the complicit act of her self-adoration, as preordained by Cupid’s participatory presence. Insinuating that Narcissus’s vanity surfaced from the knowledge that so many others adored him, she, by contrast, is content in being her only admirer. In fact, Florinda seems to imply, quite consciously, that she desires herself because, in superlative terms, she is the one best able to (“ma io sola di me medesima vaga, per apprezzar me stessa, ciascuno disprezzo”). Florinda’s *vanitas* is thus understood as a vital and transgressively confident mode of self-sufficiency, given that she has cognizantly decided to “despise all others” as a way to better direct love toward herself: she does not display the *narcor* implicit in Ovid’s myth, but rather, adores herself idolatrously while understanding her image to be her reflection. And unlike Ardelia’s narcissism in *Mirtilla*, Florinda’s is sanctioned by Amore, and will not be corrected through a redirection of her affections to a male lover—not even at the end of the play.

The female-focused fantasy represented by Florinda and Lidia is not limited to their mirrored love for each other, but extends to the independence with which they are endowed onstage, unconstrained throughout the course of the play,<sup>68</sup> so that the playwright is consciously breaking the rules of verisimilitude and decorum associated with the *commedia erudita* of the Cinquecento, including such influential and pioneering plays as Bibbiena’s *Calandra* and the Intronati’s *Ingannati*, where female characters (played by male actors), in the name of dramatic verisimilitude, were still made to don male disguises in order to abide by legal codes and social practices—as well as simply to protect themselves from being violated.<sup>69</sup> *Amor nello specchio* is

<sup>67</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, I.iii (54-55).

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 1, 21.

<sup>69</sup> On the restraints female characters had to abide by onstage in accordance with the theatrical rules of verisimilitude and decorum, see Jane Tylus, “Women at the Windows: Commedia dell’Arte and Theatrical Practice in Early Modern Italy,” *Theater Journal* 49 (1997): 323-42, and Elizabeth S. Cohen, “Evolving the History of Women in Early Modern Italy: Subordination and Agency,” in *Spain and Italy: Politics, Society and Religion 1500-1700*, ed. Thomas J. Dandeleit and John A. Marino (Boston: Brill, 2007), 325-54.

therefore less a mirror of women's early modern condition and more like a fairy tale (another seventeenth-century genre), informed by pastoral elements like those manipulated in *Mirtilla*, and even the potential for magic.<sup>70</sup>

As was also the case in *Mirtilla*, *Amor nello specchio* is a vehicle for spectacular female performances. In fact, though published in G.B. Andreini's name, the play is perhaps better thought of as a collaborative effort shared with his two leading actresses, especially when we consider the virtuosity expected from their performances.<sup>71</sup> Much of the skill manifested in such performances was musical: indeed, by this time music was integrated within the main action of the play, prominently put on display with musically talented actresses rather than being relegated to *intermedi* or intervals between acts.<sup>72</sup> As a *capocomico* working well into the Seicento, Giovan Battista was also writing for the theatre in a time that required a greater degree of spectacle by way of heightened scenographic effect that could appeal more extensively to the senses. Such theatrical endeavors demanded—along with the dimension added by the augmented presence of women onstage—a performance space that could accommodate intricate multimedia and technically advanced equipment, of which mirrors were in this case certainly an element.<sup>73</sup>

Here, even beyond its physical presence in performance, the mirror serves as the play's conceit, suggesting that what it reflects is already informed by an element that cannot be perceived, and that by its very definition deceives us. *Amor nello specchio* features a *specchio* whose connotations reach far beyond its function as an optical device for viewing that which cannot be seen with the naked eye. In the vein of Marino's metaleptic poetics, which directed contemporary literary currents toward a profoundly antimimetic aesthetic, the mirror conceit becomes not just a metaphor, but, as Snyder posits, "a metaphor for metaphor, the uncontrollable proliferation of signs, images, and figures—leading to doubling upon doubling, ad infinitum—that defines the Baroque aesthetic as one of radical ungrounding."<sup>74</sup> Especially in the context of making theatre, Giovan Battista had the chance "to reach beyond the Italian comic tradition, of which he was an acknowledged master, in order to explore the very limits of the art form."<sup>75</sup> His artistic operation, in this sense, is informed by his background in improvisational comedy, and can also be likened to the imitative mode of the playwrights of the Cinquecento in their revisiting of Terentian and Plautine plays, and their subsequent extrapolation of the stock characters represented in these literary antecedents. Similarly, the Paris plays dissect the recognizable pieces of comedies from the Cinquecento—thereby also disrupting the very notion of their recognizability—with the significant difference that the playwright reiterates them in ways that amplify their dizzying, virtuosic effects. His revival of the established genres of theatre was thus driven by a quasi-anatomical interest in methodically cutting them up to study their parts so as to bring them back to life in ways that augmented their potential for illusionism and artifice.

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<sup>70</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 12, 22. See also his "Mare magnum: The Arts in the Early Modern Age," 161.

<sup>71</sup> Wilbourne specifically makes the case that the contribution of Giovan Battista Andreini's first wife, Virginia Ramponi (to whom she refers as Virginia Andreini), especially in her musical performance in the role of Florinda, is significant but overshadowed by the play's creative attribution to her husband, making the question of the play's authorship problematic: see Wilbourne, "Amor nello specchio (1622)," 55. See also Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 11, who draws on a similar claim regarding Giovan Battista Andreini from MacNeil, *Music and Women*, 165.

<sup>72</sup> On the music in Andreini's plays, see MacNeil, *Music and Women*, 163-84, and John S. Powell, *Music and Theatre in France, 1600-1680* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 167-70.

<sup>73</sup> See Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, ed. and trans. Richard Crangle (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 6-19.

<sup>74</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 18. See also his "Mare magnum: the Arts in the Early Modern Age," esp. 157-65.

<sup>75</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 16.

Giovan Battista's propensity for intensified illusion was inevitable in an age that privileged a heightened aesthetic of *meraviglia* that could further challenge the limits of human perception in unprecedented forms of spectacle. The antimimetic strain of his theatrical oeuvre essentially problematizes the relationship between truth and representation, a perennially central issue especially in the art of making theatre. As was the case with Isabella's forthright admission regarding her radical art of disguise, her son's emphasis on the depth of illusion possible through theatre did not seek to eliminate the notion of truth: rather, it sought out truth more than ever by pointing to the veil that always exists as a barrier to knowledge. As William Egginton remarks, Baroque theatricality illustrates the problem of modernity as founded upon the presupposition that we can only know truth through a veil, so that "truth is defined as the adequation of our knowledge to the world thus veiled," meaning that "truth will always be corrupted by appearances."<sup>76</sup> According to Egginton, the paradox of the "theatre of truth" in the Baroque is that, precisely because truth is the goal of Baroque inquiry, it theatricalizes the truth "by incessantly demonstrating that truth can only ever be an effect of the appearance from which we seek to free it."<sup>77</sup> The mirror can therefore only be reflected askew, and nature revealed in its innate duplicity, making it an unreliable referent.<sup>78</sup> G.B. Andreini's elaboration on the trope of theatre as a *specchio*, here and in his theoretical works (such as in his treatise from 1625 entitled *Lo specchio*), can be seen precisely through this lens, whereby artifice is actually endowed with the ability to mitigate the threat of deceit, solving illusion with illusion.<sup>79</sup>

## Reflections of Echo

Such correspondence of reflective and corrective illusions is at play in the varying metamorphoses enacted in Florinda's mirror, where the protagonist's narcissism, even if never entirely reversed, eventually evolves into a more generative kind of love as it is redirected to a figure beyond Florinda herself. As we saw already in Act I, scene iii, Florinda prefigures her transcendence of Narcissus's fate with the sense of fulfillment she expresses in being the sole admirer of her mirrored image. In Act II, scene i, as part of a second lengthy monologue on the theme of self-adoration, Florinda also verbally resuscitates Echo along with Narcissus, reuniting them in her reflection:

novella Eco amorosa, non in antro, ma in questo specchio sta nascosto colui ch'al  
moto solo delle mie labbra, senza pur udir picciolo suono di voci risponde, e che  
'l vero io discorra, imagine bella.

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<sup>76</sup> William Egginton, *Theater of Truth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> See William Egginton, "Of Baroque Holes and Baroque Folds," in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*, ed. Luis Martín-Estudillo and Nicholas Spadaccini (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 68.

<sup>79</sup> Giovan Battista Andreini credits his comedies with the defense of truth in his *Prologo in dialogo fra Momo e la Verità* (Ferrara: Vittorio Baldini, 1612), included in Marotti and Romei, *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*, 2:473-88. For a comparison of the mirror trope in *Amor nello specchio* and the very different connotation with which Andreini imbues the *specchio* in *La Maddalena* (1617), as well as in his own theoretical writings defending the theatre in *Lo specchio della commedia* (1625), see Maurizio Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994), 165-97. On Giovan Battista Andreini's devout works and plays written later in life, see Fiaschini, *L'"incessabil agitazione,"* and Silvia Carandini and Luciano Mariti, *Don Giovanni o l'estrema avventura del teatro: Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra di Giovan Battista Andreini* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003).

New amorous Echo, not in a cave, but in this mirror is hidden he, who at the movement alone of my lips, without hearing even the smallest sound of my voice, at my speeches he responds, such that truly we converse, beautiful image.<sup>80</sup>

Florinda thus juxtaposes her own discovery of her image in the mirror to the figure of Echo discovering the beautiful Narcissus. Already having established her sense of amorous agency in the first act, here Florinda embodies both figures of Ovid's myth in a revisionary *lieto fine*. As Emily Wilbourne puts it, "[i]f Florinda outdoes Narcissus, she also outdoes Echo, combining the female voice with a deliberate misappropriation of the male gaze."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, rather than wasting away like the dual figures in Ovid's myth, "in performance, Florinda's body, or, better, Virginia Andreini's body, was forcefully present in all its recalcitrant materiality: self-centered, somatic, and sexually explicit."<sup>82</sup> And the only death she experiences is a willed one—the orgasmic gratification alluded to through metaphor and voice, reconstituting Echo through song (for which Echo is the very personification),<sup>83</sup> and rising, she says, like the phoenix from the ashes of her burning desire only to die once more.<sup>84</sup>

Florinda's invocation of Echo comes immediately after Lelio, one of her suitors—played by Giovan Battista under his usual *innamorato* pseudonym—reprimands the virago-like figure for her overzealous autonomy. Florinda rebukes Lelio's opprobrium, stating that she wishes to preserve her honor, understood also as her virginity,<sup>85</sup> which she conflates with her sense of immortality, saying,

Ha così ben sue radici nell'animo mio l'immortalità, che debbo acquistarmi col mezzo dell'onore, che non trovo oggetto da elleger per amante altro che l'onore. Voi, che siete nemico di questo, mi dovete fuggire come troppo amica i' di lui.

Immortality—which I must obtain through honor—has sunk its roots so deeply into my heart and mind that I can find no object to choose as my lover other than honor itself. You are the enemy of all this, and thus should flee me because I already have a lover.<sup>86</sup>

Given the association between Echo and fame, Florinda's declaration is also implying that she is able to write herself into immortality.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, if Echo, as Florinda, is replacing the role Lelio vies to have as her lover, then Florinda mindfully imposes a gender reversal in her

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<sup>80</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, II.i. For this passage, the translation is that provided by Wilbourne, "*Amor nello specchio* (1622)," 59.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> See Adriana Cavarero, "Echo; or, On Resonance," in *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 165-72.

<sup>84</sup> As Wilbourne notes regarding this scene, "Florinda exploits a metaphor beloved of madrigal writers to celebrate a willing 'death,' or orgasm." Wilbourne, "*Amor nello specchio* (1622)," 57.

<sup>85</sup> In this same scene, II.i (88-89), Florinda utters, in what is possibly a song, "se amar Florinda dovesse, la verginità così cara ad ognora illesa conservar vorrebbe" (If I, Florinda, must love, then I would like to love someone who could keep me always as a lover without any suspicions).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* (86-89).

<sup>87</sup> See Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia*, 167.

attribution of Echo as the female lover,<sup>88</sup> inscribing herself as a new Echo even at the very end of the monologue, telling Echo—that is, herself—“andiamo, gridando: ‘Io amo, io amo!’” (Let us go together, crying: “I love, I love!”).<sup>89</sup> Therefore, having established herself as both Narcissus, the *male* beloved, and Echo, the *female* lover, Florinda not only overturns the assignment of gender roles stipulated by conventional Neoplatonic prescriptions of love, but—through synesthetic means—also casts herself once more as a hermaphroditic figure.<sup>90</sup>

It is only when Florinda catches a glimpse of Lidia in her mirror (II.vi) that she transfers her affections to another, although her vision deceives her—for, again, the mirror duplicates the subject before it while simultaneously metamorphosing it: upon first seeing Lidia in the mirror, Florinda mistakes her for a very beautiful and melancholy youth. Only upon direct confrontation does she recognize Lidia as a woman (III.i), a fact which Lidia announces to her straightforwardly: “Donna io sono” (I am a woman).<sup>91</sup> In the same scene, Lidia also confesses to Florinda, again forthrightly, that she is lovesick for a man named Silvio, thus proclaiming, “Amante sono” (I am a lover).<sup>92</sup> As a *donna-amante*, Lidia already mirrors Florinda here. Florinda proceeds to discourage Lidia from pursuing her amorous desires, but Lidia persistently defends the virtue of Amore, until Florinda is so overcome with emotion from Lidia’s speech that she swoons into her arms. Once she awakens, her newly directed affections are reciprocated by Lidia, and the two exchange vows: “diamoci la fede adunque di disprezzar tutti gli uomini e di noi sole far amorosa stima” (Let’s promise one another that we’ll despise all men and love only each other).<sup>93</sup> The mirror is thus portrayed as a medium that redirects Florinda’s affections—and that subsequently reflects that desire back as Florinda becomes the object of Lidia’s love: Florinda’s “love in the mirror” is metamorphosed into the vision of Lidia, and for Lidia, into that of Florinda.<sup>94</sup> As mirroring reflections of love, Florinda and Lidia are thus conceptualized in a kind of infinite regress, situated like facing mirrors reflecting a figure whose likeness is proliferated in a chain of identical images that eventually disappear from view.

Compared with his mother’s *Mirtilla*, Giovan Battista seems to essentially extract and escalate that sense of “meraviglia” repeatedly used to describe Ardelia’s narcissism, and to conflate it with the archetype of female friendship established between Filli and Mirtilla. As in *Amor nello specchio*, the female protagonists of *Mirtilla* exchange vows in the central act of the play, each nymph promising to choose each other’s friendship over their mutual love for Uranio, or in the reflexive terminology of Filli’s vow, “prometto / d’amar Mirtilla al par di me medesima” (I promise / to love Mirtilla the same as myself).<sup>95</sup> Yet in *Amor nello specchio* the bond between the two women turns from friendship to reciprocated desire, infusing the notion of loving “me medesima” (a phrase repeated also by *Mirtilla*’s Ardelia) with a decidedly homoerotic valence. Instead, as we saw in *Mirtilla*, Filli and Mirtilla are paired off with the shepherds Tirsi and Igitio

<sup>88</sup> For differing views on the ambiguity of the masculine and feminine pronouns from which Florinda alternates in this monologue, see Wilbourne, “*Amor nello specchio* (1622),” 60, and Vescovo, “Narciso, Psiche, e Marte,” 54.

<sup>89</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, II.i (90-91).

<sup>90</sup> In the words of Rebaudengo, “[l]o specchio di Florinda assume un’identità sessuale ermafroditica per la congiunzione dei due protagonisti del mito di Narciso, lo stesso Narciso, appunto, e la ninfa Eco, formando una speculare sinestesia dell’immagine e del suono riflessi”: Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia*, 167.

<sup>91</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, III.i (112-13).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. (114-15).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. (120-21).

<sup>94</sup> See Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia*, 170.

<sup>95</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, III.v.1811-12.



in a closure typical of the heteronormative marriage expected as an end to both the genres of Renaissance pastoral and comedy. By contrast, the male characters in *Amor nello specchio* are rejected wholesale, and with them, the bawdy sexual desire they embody (and that often drives the plot of Italian Renaissance comedy), for the women's male suitors are relegated from the main action of the play to the inferior status of farcical diversion, collectively defeated in their attempts to win over the women for the rest of Act III. Even when they resort to the power of magic with the aid of the wizard Arfasat, their amorous efforts are thwarted, making their futile endeavor one of the most genuinely comedic elements in the play.

The eroticization of female friendship in *Amor nello specchio* makes the bond between the play's female protagonists one that entirely dismisses the patriarchal order that repeatedly seeks to impose itself on them. Instead, the women's socially transgressive relationship is resolved with the invention of a hermaphroditic character played by one of these same women, whose sexually ambiguous presence performs maleness outwardly, impersonating the role as a way to negate the need for an actual male husband: indeed, the appearance of Lidia's long-lost twin brother, Eugenio, an "ermafrodito"—also played by Virginia Rotari—makes even the final resolution to *Amor nello specchio* more of an aperture than a closure. Therefore, even if the Narcissus plot in *Amor nello specchio* goes from being potentially destructive to productive (as was ostensibly the case with the subplot of *Mirtilla's* Ardelia), it only does so by the transgressive means of a love that is secured between women with a reliance on a sexually ambiguous husband set to wed the female protagonist.

The *deus ex machina* appearance of Eugenio, who emerges in Act IV, is an obvious homage to the comedy of errors typical of Renaissance comedy, and specifically, to the twin motif in such well-known plays as Bibbiena's *Calandra* (with Santilla and Lidio) and the *Intronati's Ingannati* (with Lelia and Fabrizio). The casting decision to have Virginia Rotari double as both Lidia and Eugenio echoes the one made in *Gl'Ingannati*, in which the same actor innovatively played both the male and female twin, only with the significant reversals here of having a woman play both parts and of fetishistically turning the male twin into a hermaphrodite—the personified *concetto* of the very trope of sexually different twins.<sup>96</sup>

The twin trope is a recurring one in Giovan Battista's oeuvre, revealing how the theme of mirroring is very closely linked in the playwright's mind to the use of *gemelli*.<sup>97</sup> Other plays written around the same period in which the playwright features twins are *Li due Lelii simili* (1622), where the two Lelios give the play its title; *La Centaura* (1622), where he doubles the double, featuring two pairs of twins in two Lelios and two Florindas; *La Turca* (1624), featuring the male twin Florindo and the female twin Florinda; and *I due baci* (1634), a pastoral comedy featuring the twins Foresto and Silbonio.<sup>98</sup> The twin trope, representing multiplication as an expression of potential inauthenticity, also transcends the incorporation of literal twins in the broader conceptualization of doubling, as in his *Le due comedie in comedia* (1623), where it takes on characteristically metatheatrical nuances in the representation of two competing plays—each performed by different troupes—within the play.<sup>99</sup> In short, Giovan Battista's re-elaboration of the twin trope seems to be motivated by the desire to exhaust every possible combination that can be dramaturgically invented using twins, and at the same time, serves as commentary on

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<sup>96</sup> See Richard Andrews, "Gli Ingannati as a Text for Performance," *Italian Studies* 37 (1982): 26-48, esp. 36.

<sup>97</sup> On the use of twins in Andreini's plays, see Angela Guidotti, *Specchiati sembianti: il tema dei gemelli nella letteratura* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1992), 129-33.

<sup>98</sup> See Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia*, 171.

<sup>99</sup> For a complete inventory of Giovan Battista Andreini's works, see Carandini and Mariti, *Don Giovanni*, 50-57.

growing theatrical concerns in the Baroque that trade the value of mimetic representation for that of intensified, multiplied states of metamorphosis and *meraviglia*.

In addition to personifying the amalgamation of opposite-sexed twins, Eugenio represents the reflection corresponding to Florinda's Narcissus. As Snyder remarks, "the mirror and Eugenio's body 'mirror' one another, in a dizzying play of reflections, or *mise-en-abîme*, of the very sort favored by Andreini's artistic temperament."<sup>100</sup> The enactment of hermaphroditic mirroring goes even further, for Florinda's mirror is inhabited by both Narcissus and Echo, so that Florinda's reflection is already hermaphroditically rendered: the fact that she falls in love with another hermaphrodite, Eugenio, thus fulfills her prerequisite of loving a reflection of herself, while playfully recalling the expectation of marital union as a resolution to comedy, only to break it wide open. By taking Eugenio as her "hermaphrodite husband, who both is and is not his sister Lidia," Florinda abandons her vow of chastity, but without fully forgoing her loyalty to Lidia.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, like *Mirtilla*'s Ardelia, who accepts Uranio's love after he persuades her "che me godendo, goderai te stessa" (that by taking pleasure in me, you will take pleasure in yourself),<sup>102</sup> Florinda's amorous pursuits can still be understood in the vein of self-love: all three are variations on the theme of visual mirroring, identifiable first in the relationship between Florinda with herself, then Florinda with another woman, and finally Florinda with a man who looks like—and was played by—that same "other" woman dressed as a man.

Believing Eugenio to be her lover Lidia in disguise, Florinda seduces the "hermaphrodite" in the play's final act. There are many precedents in Italian comedy for such a scene of seduction due to misrecognition, but these, according to rules of decorum, tended to happen offstage: this is perhaps the first time such a scene takes place before the spectators, and what's more, with a seductress knowingly seeking to beguile another woman, albeit one dressed as a man.<sup>103</sup> The various paradoxical veils of identity are precisely what make the scene dynamic, offering an image that is titillatingly subversive, vacillating in its symmetry. What is not acted out onstage, but rather left to the imagination, is the very conversation in which Eugenio reveals himself to be a hermaphrodite, intimating to Florinda once they are alone in bed, "[s]appiate mia signora, come io non son donna come voi, ma sono, se giamai l'udiste nominare, un ermafrodito, cioè sono più uomo che donna" ([k]now, then, madam, that I am not a woman like you, but am [if you've ever heard the term before] a hermaphrodite, that is to say, I am more man than woman).<sup>104</sup>

Florinda relates this moment of revelation to the audience of her fellow citizens onstage—for in typical Baroque fashion, there is an onstage audience that mirrors the crowd of spectators. Narrating her moment of anagnorisis, Florinda verifies "che tutt'uomo egli era" (that he was all man),<sup>105</sup> playfully overturning what the audience patently knows to be false, and with it, the very premise of recognition as an actual turning point informing the verisimilitude provided by the dramatic apparatus. As much as the staging of an audience would seem to provide a social

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<sup>100</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 27.

<sup>101</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 29.

<sup>102</sup> Andreini, *Mirtilla*, V.v.2863.

<sup>103</sup> On the agnition of Eugenio's hermaphroditism as a rewriting of Fulvia's discovery of Santilla's true sex in *Gl'ingannati*, see Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 214 n. 59.

<sup>104</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, V.vii (204-5).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

endorsement of Eugenio's pivotal role in the play's plot<sup>106</sup>—thereby presenting “him” as the virile character able to offer heteronormative closure to the play—Florinda's rhetorical construction of Eugenio's masculinity is undercut by the fact that “he” is played by a woman, and that Eugenio is therefore Lidia's reflection (thus also reversing the classic trope in Renaissance comedy, as depicted in *La calandra* and *Gl'ingannati*, of the female twin as a replica of her male twin).

The contradictory emphases on Eugenio's femininity, represented especially in visual terms, and the character's masculinity, which is verbally fabricated, thematize the fundamental instability of the hermaphroditic twin's sexual identity, and in turn, make the audience doubt the reliability of their own sensorial perception. Andreini “elides and collapses categories” through the figuration of Eugenio, whose body is thus rendered with amplification and ambivalence, both inherent to the Baroque aesthetic.<sup>107</sup> Even the term “ermafrodito” is treated as something between neologism and profanity—only uttered in indirect discourse, and prefaced with a warning as to its incomprehensibility: “se giamai l'udiste nominare, un ermafrodito.”

In Act IV, scene v, the character Orimberto takes Eugenio for a girl, echoing, as Snyder notes, the myth of Hermaphroditus, especially as portrayed in ancient art, where “the youth is sometimes shown being assaulted by a satyr, who mistakes him for a female.”<sup>108</sup> Such a reading of Orimberto's misrecognition of Eugenio offers yet another gloss on Filli's scene in *Mirtilla* with the Satyr: the Satyr “mistakes” Filli for a stereotypically helpless damsel in distress, only to discover that her wit and strength go beyond those expected of a woman, allowing us to understand Filli's—and therefore Isabella's—“hermaphroditic” qualities in theatrically and socially empowering terms. Here, too, of course, the body we see onstage in the part of Eugenio is that of Virginia Rotari, a fact which in turn negates the possibility of an anagnorisis scene between the twins, since the whole precept of recognizing things as they are is discarded and replaced with the pleasure experienced in the perception of ambiguity.<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, the erotic magnetism Eugenio's hermaphroditism represents seems to reside in the invitation to bask in the figure's sexual unintelligibility. In Act V, scene vii, multiple characters remark on Eugenio's physical appeal, reviving the notion of the hermaphrodite as a paradigm of beauty.<sup>110</sup> The performance of hermaphroditism becomes symbolic of a superhuman allure, recalling a statement made by the Third Vatican Mythographer in the Middle Ages: “[i]t is no wonder [...] that deities are thought to be of both sexes. In fact, they are *incorporeal*, and to be seen they take on the body that they want.”<sup>111</sup> At the same time, Giovan Battista unveils for us the theatrical “machinery” at work, making it obvious that the so-called “ermafrodito” embodies the twins as well as the transformative capacities of the female actress who plays Eugenio, thus overdetermining the figure's sexual ambiguity as a metatheatrical tribute to the actress's versatility as well as to the comedic modes of doubling. In other words, the enhanced

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<sup>106</sup> As Wilbourne notes, unlike Florinda's proclamations of autoerotic or homoerotic desire, “the onstage crowd legitimizes her desire for Eugenio through their act of witness and reception”: Wilbourne, “*Amor nello specchio* (1622),” 65.

<sup>107</sup> Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 28.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 n. 47.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> On how the hermaphrodite was positively and pejoratively appropriated in political, scientific, and religious contexts, particularly in early modern France, see Kathleen Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>111</sup> Third Vatican Mythographer, *On the Gods of the Pagan Nations and Their Allegories*, in *The Vatican Mythographers*, trans. Ronald E. Pepin (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 303; italics mine.

theatricalization of indecipherable sexual identity presented in the play reveals the human body as the ultimate technology used to push the limits of what is human. *Amor nello specchio* thus elliptically honors the game of mirrors enacted by Isabella's performance in art and in life, itself a *mise-en-abîme* that refracted virtually endless permutations through her many disguises, never quite revealing the identity of the artist beneath them, but rather, the supreme virtuosity of her persona.

Giovan Battista's slanted mirror in *Amor nello specchio* makes his play only obliquely comedic, for in its embrace of artifice, he gives us something new at which to marvel, offering an unanticipated kind of harmony with the effects of a referent that spirals deeper and deeper, until it is the kaleidoscopic effect itself that captures the imagination. In the face of such metamorphic reflections, the feeling provoked in the audience is not one of recognition and catharsis, but of defamiliarization and astonishment. In their first sexual encounter, before Eugenio's hermaphroditic identity is revealed to Florinda in the act of undressing, Eugenio already prefigures the transition—indeed, also the performative one being made by Rotari—from Lidia to Eugenio, saying to Florinda, “[s]ignora, son Lidia femmina, Eugenio maschio, Amor vestito, spogliato, tutto quello che vuole, andiamo a letto” ([m]y lady, I'm the woman named Lidia, the man called Eugenio; I'm Cupid, dressed or undressed; I'll be anything you like, but let's go to bed),<sup>112</sup> in turn echoing Isabella's self-identification as “hor Donna, ed hora / Huom,” a player at the service of her public's imagination. Albeit in a new world of spectacle that epistemologically calls into question the very possibility of an authentic referent, Isabella can be glimpsed in both Lidia-Eugenio and Florinda, each of whom mirrors her body so as to engender, in god-like fashion, variations of her own likeness for herself and for others to see. And yet, the duplication of these female protagonists seems to also admit to the singularity of that “specchio in vero d'onestà e tempio di dottrina”—an anamorphic figure that has not simply reflected the natural world, but altered it, just as Echo's words repeat, changing their meaning as they are uttered. With the hermaphroditic apparitions of *Amor nello specchio*, Giovan Battista proffers a synesthetic ode that summons the spectral image of that face whose reflection he hopes will be the one to mesmerize him in that most ethereal vision “un giorno [...] / lassù”: as a spectator in a celestial theatre, it is only then that he imagines seeing her, “Ivi o madre in mirare il tuo bel volto.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, V.v (196-97).

<sup>113</sup> (one day [...] / up above [...] / There, o mother, gazing at your beautiful face.) Giovan Battista Andreini, *Il pianto d'Apollò: Rime funebri in morte d'Isabella Andreini Comica Gelosa, & Accademica Intenta* (Milan: Girolamo Bordonì and Pietro Martire Locarni, 1606), 29, as cited in Raubadengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia*, 26. The translation is that of Snyder, *Love in the Mirror*, 13.

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