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Ties that Bind: Women and Friendship in Early Modern Italy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Italian

by

Adriana Laura Guarro

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ties that Bind: Women and Friendship in Early Modern Italy

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Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Andrea Moudarres, Co-Chair

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This dissertation is a comparative study of literary texts authored by sixteenth-century Italian women that treat female friendship across the genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry. The primary works under consideration include the correspondence between Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526) and Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), the lyric poems authored by women in Lodovico Domenichi's anthology *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (1559), and Margherita Sarrocchi's heroic poem the *Scanderbeide* (1623). In addition to the long-standing classical and Christian notions of friendship that held strong in Renaissance Italy, the genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry each had a distinct and mostly male literary tradition of friendship. The literary works in this study reveal the various ways early modern Italian women contributed to their respective genres, and moreover, to larger cultural discourses on friendship by inserting the female perspective and experience. Their writings not only illuminate their

understandings and interpretations of female bonds but also demonstrate their use of writing to initiate and maintain friendships with other women.

Chapter 1 looks at women's epistolary prose through the correspondence between two princesses who were sisters-in-law, Elisabetta Gonzaga, the duchess of Urbino, and Isabella d'Este, marchesa of Mantua. Focusing primarily on letters exchanged during the beginning years of their friendship, I show how the two noblewomen relied on letter writing to express and reciprocate sentiments of intimacy. Chapter 2 on the *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne*, the first all-female lyric anthology edited by Lodovico Domenichi, analyzes the friendship poems—sonnet exchanges between women to celebrate and form literary friendships and single-authored lyric that depict women's bonds—present in the collection. Looking at these two types of lyric in tandem, I argue that Petrarchism authorized women's expressions and representations of female friendship. Chapter 3 focuses on the heroic poem of Margherita Sarrocchi (1560–1617). Drawing from her classical and Renaissance predecessors who in their heroic poems depict and highlight friendships between male warriors, Sarrocchi revises the tradition by portraying and celebrating the bond that develops between two of the poem's female protagonists, Rosmonda and Silveria.

While much has been explored with respect to male friendship in Italian Renaissance literature, the topic of female friendship has remained mostly untouched. With this study, I therefore address this need to uncover women's discourses on friendship by providing alternative perspectives and new insights on a subject that was traditionally understood in male terms.

The dissertation of Adriana Laura Guarro is approved.

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INTRODUCTION

Midway through their two-day stay in the Venetian countryside, the eight female interlocutors of Moderata Fonte's dialogue *Il merito delle donne* engage in conversation to discuss how women's inclination to love is superior to that of men, especially with regard to women's natural and greater disposition to friendship. Corinna, the intellectual poet of the group states, "ma che ci inclinano maggiormente, perché siamo soggetti più disposti per natura alla pietà, et all'amore. Così si vede anco nelle altre amicitie, che una donna presto se amicherà con un'altra, e mantenirà meglio l'amore, che non fanno gli huomini tra essi."[1] Lucretia, pondering her own ability to make friends agrees, noting the strong, yet chaste attraction she feels upon meeting other women in public spaces such as church or parties, spurring her to strike up conversations with them and start a friendship. The discussion then turns philosophical as the women, citing Plato, Aristotle, Plautus, and Cicero, express their respective opinions on what constitutes a sound, perfect friendship. In these pages, not only does the Venetian author insert women into a tradition that has excluded them as a group since antiquity but she also asserts that women make better friends than men, a clearly protofeminist take on the subject.

Fonte's dialogue is just one example from early modern Italian literature that showcases women's intellectual formation on a topic that since the classical age was dominated by male voices and experiences. Her text contributes to the larger literary tradition on amity, but more importantly, forms part of another group of texts that distinctly explore the nature and experience of female friendship, an area that scholarship has largely overlooked. As the title of this study suggests, "Ties that Bind: Women and Friendship in Early Modern Italy," I aim to navigate this uncharted territory of women's friendship with a particular focus on the early modern period in Italy.

[1] Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne: ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de gli uomini* (Venice: Domenico Imberti, 1600), 66.

"Ties that Bind" is a comparative study of literary texts from major Renaissance genres that describe and treat moments of female friendship to explore representations of the role and value of female *amicizia* in women's lives. While I also examine texts by male writers, I focus primarily on a corpus of works written by sixteenth-century women in the three genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry. The primary works under consideration include the correspondence between Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526) and Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), the lyric poems authored by women in Lodovico Domenichi's anthology *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (1559), and Margherita Sarrocchi's heroic poem the *Scanderbeide* (1623). These texts allow me to consider how writing opened a space for women authors in which they could represent, reflect upon, and in some cases, even cultivate various types of friendships with other women.

The goals of this study are threefold. First, I trace women's discourses on friendship in order to provide alternative perspectives on a topic that has been traditionally understood in male terms due to the masculine rhetoric that has directed its discussion from the classical period onward. To do so, I engage with classical male notions of friendship and their Christian reinterpretations in medieval and Renaissance Italy and seek to discern how much these notions have (or have not) influenced the style, theme, and rhetoric of the works under consideration in this study. Second, I demonstrate how these early modern Italian women writers innovate the literary traditions of friendship within their respective genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry as a way to provide new insights into larger cultural conversations surrounding *amicizia* in early modern Italy. Third and finally, probing various literary genres opens the possibility of better understanding of female friendship as a historical reality in early modern Italy. Some of the texts examined in this study include correspondence and sonnets that were in fact exchanged between women. Such sources highlight the historical practices of communication that women utilized to give and reciprocate sentiments of intimacy. However, literary texts can also project concrete historical

evidence if they are analyzed within a framework that connects them to larger cultural discourses, historical practices, and shared thoughts of the period.

The topic of friendship has grown in importance in literary and historical research for the insight it provides into the networks and social ties operating beyond the family, or as an extension of it. Through such networks, personal, political, economic, and cultural ties were established and enacted in any number of power relations. The dynamics of friendship in general, and female friendship in particular, offer a heretofore largely overlooked means of more fully engaging with early modern culture. The following three critical questions help shape my analysis of the texts I examine in this study: How do depictions of female friendship fit into the wider discussion of friendship in early modern Italy? How do these texts reflect historical examples of female friendship? How do the three genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry each lend themselves to discourses of women's friendship? In answering these questions, I argue that women had a keen awareness of the literary conventions of their respective genres, and in turn took advantage of these traditions to begin and deepen their friendships with other women, as well as to articulate their understandings of same-sex affectional relationships. In writing the female perspective and experience, these women carved out a place for themselves in a culture and society that privileged men, which in turn allowed them to contribute to and shape larger cultural discourses on early modern friendship.

Within Italian studies, there have been few scholarly works that have focused on early modern female friendship, resulting in little information about its prevalence, extent, or influence during the period.[2] Though the 1990s and early 2000s saw a developing trend in literary studies that

[2] For instance note Ulrich Langer's claim that "exemplary female friendship in French and Italian literature before the seventeenth century and in moral philosophy is highly infrequent." *Perfect Friendship: Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1994), 117.

examined friendship in the Italian Renaissance, these works strictly concern male friendship. For instance, both Reginald Hyatte and Ulrich Langer examine the early modern obsession with the classical ideal of *amicitia perfecta* (perfect friendship) as found in works by Boccaccio and Leon Battista Alberti. Dale V. Kent, John Najemy, and Michael Rocke instead explore lived experiences of friendship, turning their attention to Florence to trace the civic, political, and homosexual implications of male bonds.[3] These studies are important to be sure, for they both analyze practices of men's same-sex affectional ties while also outlining early modern intellectual thought about friendship. Nevertheless, alone they paint an incomplete portrait of early modern friendship and its diverse interpretations and experiences.

Though it is not extensive, there has been some scholarly work done on women's friendship in early modern Italy. Concentrating on the early Renaissance, Diana Robin and Amyrose McCue Gill have demonstrated the way women humanists implement the classical language of *amicitia* in letters to female friends.[4] Virginia Cox has also noted a subgenre of "female *amicitia*" in women's

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[3] See Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994); Langer, *Perfect Friendship*; Dale V. Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*, Bernard Berenson Lectures on the Italian Renaissance (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); John M Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Carolyn James and Bill Kent, "Renaissance Friendships: Traditional Truths, New and Dissenting Voices," in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (New York: Routledge, 2014), 111–64. For works on early modern male friendship outside of Italy see Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994); Wendy Olmsted, *The Imperfect Friends: Emotion and Rhetoric in Sidney, Milton, and Their Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Marc Schachter, *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship: From Classical Antiquity to Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2016); Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[4] Moreover, Robin details the ways in which fifteenth-century humanist Laura Cereta blends female experience with the conventional humanist trope of *amicitia*, a topic of discussion primarily reserved for the male writing sphere. Adding to Robin's analysis, McCue Gill argues that Cereta's successful demonstration of *amicitia* language in letters written to her female friends proves that women not only understood the ideals of perfect friendship imagined by Aristotle and Cicero, but also enjoyed them. See Amyrose McCue Gill, "Fraught Relations in the Letters of Laura Cereta: Marriage, Friendship, and Humanist Epistolarity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2009): 1098–1129; Diana Robin, "Translator's Introduction," in *Collected Letters*

poetry that was emerging and developing during the sixteenth century, a topic I amply treat in the second chapter.[5] Additionally, several studies have been conducted on women's participation in cross-sex friendships with men both within and outside the confines of marital relationships. Such scholarship has shown that while men and women outside the bounds of marriage typically engaged in spiritual friendship—a platonic bond with the aim of bringing the friends closer to God—husbands and wives adopted and practiced tenets of friendship within their spousal bonds.[6] Outside of Italian studies however, scholars like Penelope Anderson, Amanda Herbert, and Marianne Legault have published monographic studies on female friendship in early modern England and France; they rightly reject the view of ancient philosophers who believed that women could not participate in the bonds of perfect or true friendship, and instead show how early modern women drew on classical and Christian ideals in their practice of these relationships.[7] While the above

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of a Renaissance Feminist, by Laura Cereta, ed. and trans. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3–19.

[5] Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 115.

[6] For instance, see the following for discussions on Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo's spiritual friendship Abigail Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 67–100; Sarah Rolfe Prodan, *Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 109–20. On friendship within the bond of marriage see Carolyn James, "Friendship and Dynastic Marriage," *Literature and History* 17 (2008): 4–18; Amyrose McCue Gill, "Vera Amicizia: Conjugal Friendship in the Italian Renaissance" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

[7] Penelope Anderson, *Friendship's Shadows: Women's Friendship and the Politics of Betrayal in England, 1640–1705* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Amanda E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Marianne Legault, *Female Intimacies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). Anderson examines women writers in seventeenth-century Britain who not only appropriated the classical language of *amicitia*, but also used it to engage in public life through their writings. Herbert similarly looks to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, analyzing women's correspondence, household accounts, recipe books, autobiographies, spiritual journals, personal diaries, and literary compositions to trace the variety of ways alliances and friendships were forged between elite women. Finally, Legault addresses representations of female intimacies in seventeenth-century French texts, uncovering not only instances of female friendship but also cases of same-sex female desire. For more on female friendship in early modern Britain and France see Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, eds., *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

scholarship has laid out the preliminary groundwork for studying women's bonds in early modern Italy, no monographic study concerning female amity in the Italian context has been written.[8] By focusing on Italy, "Ties that Bind" therefore expands on previous scholarship in order to recover this piece of women's history and to enter into larger scholarly debates in Renaissance studies regarding women, their writing, and constructions of gender in early modern society.

The relationship between gender and genre is also key to this study. Growing secondary literature on early modern Italian women's writing has shown the impact of women's literary production in the Renaissance, as writing served as a mode for women to articulate their opinions, promote their intellectual capabilities, self-fashion their identities, and most importantly, establish their space within a literary culture that was primarily reserved for men. In *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance*, Meredith Ray examines published epistolary representations of women (both authentic and impersonated) to demonstrate how these depictions acted as "a studied performance of pervasive ideas about gender as well as genre, a form of self-fashioning that variously reflected, manipulated, and subverted cultural and literary conventions regarding femininity and masculinity."[9] The edited volume *Strong Voices Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy* contains sixteen essays, with ten focusing on Italy, and addresses the fraught relationship women writers had with their various national canons. While women participated in movements like Humanism and Petrarchism, they still had to negotiate their roles within these

[8] Female friendship within the Renaissance Italian context has also not been featured in more general edited volumes on early modern friendship. See Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson, eds., *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Amyrose McCue Gill and Sarah Rolfe Prodan, eds., *Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014). For an edited volume on the political implications of female alliances in early modern England see Christina Luckyj and Niamh J. O'Leary, eds., *The Politics of Female Alliance in Early Modern England* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

[9] Meredith K. Ray, *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 31.

spheres by demonstrating their knowledge of rhetoric, linguistic style, and high register. This study also adds to this area of scholarship; by analyzing women's participation in the genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry, I uncover the ways in which several women in early modern Italy contributed to the literary scene by writing on the topic of friendship.

In what follows, I lay out the methodological and organizational approach of this study to better foreground the types of analysis I use to study women's friendship in early modern Italy. I then provide a brief introduction to the literary history of friendship in classical texts and their medieval and Renaissance reinterpretations. Such an overview serves to illustrate the roots of the friendship tradition in the Western world, providing us with a common framework to help us understand the models of friendship women writers borrowed, adapted, and changed in their writings.

I. Methodology and Organization

Though friendship is a universal experience, it is also one that is determined by various social factors including class, race, age, and gender. Because the overarching goal of this study is to chart how women's mentality about friendship took form alongside their experiences with same-sex female bonds in early modern Italian society, how gender—"the social understanding of what it means to be male or female"—shaped women's notions and practices of friendship is a primary concern of mine.[10] The fact that friendship in the early modern period was universalized as a male experience from the classical era onward despite evidence of its existence also among women has rendered it impossible for us to fully comprehend the extent of relations women had with others. Additionally, as Virginia Cox and Chiara Ferrari outline in the introduction to their book *Verso una storia di genere della letteratura italiana,* in comparison to other fields in the anglophone world, such as

[10] Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 7.

English literature and comparative literature, Italian studies has lagged in exploring the full potential of gender as an analytical tool. This omission includes viewing literary production by early modern women through the prism of female friendship.[11] The combination of the long tradition of androcentric discourse on friendship and the gap in scholarship on women's bonds in early modern Italy has therefore left us with a fragmentary picture of women's everyday lives in terms of their gender relations, behavior, and more generally speaking, their overall cultural production in Renaissance Italy.

My work here then is a recovery study, much in the same vein as Penelope Anderson's, Amanda Herbert's, and Marianne Legault's respective studies on female friendship in early modern Britain and France. Anderson questions scholars who have only understood friendship in male terms, arguing that in doing so they limit the possibility of envisioning female resistance to the exclusively male tradition, which in turn "makes us less able to see the different ways in which women used the discourse of friendship to participate in public life."[12] Legault agrees, asking "following this near-complete silence around intimate relationships between women, are we to understand that women themselves have never written about female friendship, nor about the emotions they have felt towards one another?"[13] Herbert, too, conveys the urgency of her study, arguing that historical sources depicting early modern women's friendship in Britain have received too little attention.[14] Sharing the same critical outlook as these scholars, I analyze the texts in this

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[11] Virginia Cox and Chiara Ferrari, "Introduzione: Verso Una Storia Di Genere Della Letteratura Italiana," in *Verso Una Storia Di Genere Della Letteratura Italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 8–9. In the case of women's bonds, as mentioned earlier while have been at least three monographic studies on female friendship in early modern Britain, there haven't been any sole study that examines this topic in the Italian context.

[12] Penelope Anderson, "The Absent Female Friend: Recent Studies in Early Modern Women's Friendship," *Literature Compass* 7, no. 4 (2010): 246.

[13] Legault, *Female Intimacies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, 30.

[14] Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain*, 5.

study through the following critical ideas: women's agency in writing about friendship, women's intellectual and literary contributions to early modern discourses of friendship, and women's lived experiences of friendship. Though the link between same-sex desire and friendship is not a primary focus on this study, I do at times unpack the boundaries of same-sex love and female friendship in my analysis.[15] For instance, in the chapter on lyric poetry, I acknowledge the evident erotic tone present in women's sonnet exchanges, examining their repackaging of conventional Petrarchan amorous language to create a sense of female solidarity.

The social, historical, and political implications of the theme of friendship also make this topic one that naturally lends itself to interdisciplinary interpretation. Since the element of female friendship in the texts I consider spans several genres, I apply a multi-genre approach to determine how lyric poetry, epistolary writing, and heroic poetry reflect or shape the kinds of friendships women historically experienced in Renaissance Italy. Though I primarily rely on methods of literary analysis, I also view the texts in question through a historical lens. New Historicism is particularly relevant, as expressed in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, where he argues,

> the written word is self-consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, structures of power. We do not have direct access to these figures or their shared culture, but the operative condition of all human understanding—of the speech of our contemporaries as well as of the writings of the dead—is that we have indirect access or at

[15] As Lewis Seifert and Rebecca Wilkin note "queer approaches to friendship resist categorical interpretations of friendship discourse—i.e., as either erotic or non-erotic—revealing instead tensions within it." "Introduction: Men and Women Making Friends in Early Modern France," in *Men and Women Making Friends in Early Modern France*, ed. Lewis C. Seifert and Rebecca M. Wilkin (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 4–5. In Italian studies no monographic study has looked at lesbianism or the relationship between same-sex female desire and women's friendship in Renaissance Italy. For discussions of these topics in the British context see Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1774* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981); Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

least that we experience our constructions as the lived equivalent of such access.[16]

As Greenblatt explains, written texts allow us indirect access into the social and cultural atmosphere of a given period, as fictional and non-fictional works evidently echo and express social anxieties, cultural norms, and shared attitudes. This historical foregrounding provides a common platform for each of the genres I study; the correspondence between Elisabetta Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este, the lyric poems by female authors that appear in Domenichi's anthology, and the heroic poem of Margherita Sarrocchi then serve as my case studies.

To this end, each chapter includes an overview discussion of the way in which each genre responded to cultural or social discourses of gender. My analysis privileges the role gender plays within and outside the texts and genres in order to unveil women's shared and diverse perspectives, practices, and experiences of friendship. I therefore consider the historical constructions of gender in the genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry and women's participation in these literary traditions where works by male voices reigned. Each chapter begins with a general discussion of the genre, including its history, influences, unique characteristics, and most importantly, the tradition of friendship within each of these genres. A brief overview of the (predominantly male) canonical authors of each genre is incorporated into these introductions to provide more context. Thus, we may ultimately determine the degree to which the female authors in question experimented with, revised, or contributed to the traditional practices of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry. This process allows me to establish a small selection of women's writing on female friendship, which represents a portion of a larger literary corpus on the topic of friendship itself, while also commenting on women's contributions to the history of the genres they were practicing. I continue with a brief biography on each author in question, incorporating other works she may have

[16] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 7.

written into my analysis before initiating a close reading of the specific text evidencing female friendship.

The following research questions guide me in my analysis of these genres: Why were these genres particularly important in Renaissance culture? What were the conventional constructions of gender at work in these genres? How did they communicate the cultural discourses of the period with regard to friendship? Why were these particular genres the most representative of female friendship in early modern Italy? How did they differ from one another in their treatment of the topic?

In terms of organization, this study follows chronological order and is divided into three chapters, each devoted to one of the three genres of lyric poetry, epistolary writing, and heroic poetry in chronological order by author. Through original archival research and analysis, the first chapter examines women's epistolary prose through the correspondence between two princesses who were sisters-in-law, Elisabetta Gonzaga, the duchess of Urbino, and Isabella d'Este, marchesa of Mantua. I argue that especially during the early years of their friendship, the two women used the letter as a vehicle for intimacy, implementing Ciceronian language as a mode to give and reciprocate affection. Using letters as a medium to alleviate geographical distance, to advance in-person contact, and to console and give gifts, the princesses understood letter writing as a way bridge both the geographical and temporal distance that separated them, which enhanced their sense of closeness. Furthermore, I contend that letter writing opened a communal channel for Isabella and Elisabetta to share reciprocal feelings and personal experiences on topics that pertained exclusively to women, like that of childbirth.

The second chapter, on lyric poetry, focuses on the women poets featured in Lodovico Domenichi's *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (1559), the first all-female collection of poetry in early modern Italy, which features sonnet exchanges and single-authored poems by fifty-

three women from different cities, professions, backgrounds, and religions. By analyzing how the sonnet exchanges and single-authored lyric poems in the *Rime diverse* present assorted fragments of female intimacy, I demonstrate how Petrarchism authorized early modern visions of women's friendship. While I examine how various sonnet exchanges function to construct and celebrate literary female friendships, I also trace the ways women turn to lyric to mourn the death of their female friends. Finally, I show how these friendship poems work together in an edited lyric anthology to create the image of a close-knit literary female community on the page.

The subject of chapter 3 is the heroic poem of Margherita Sarrocchi (1560–1617), the *Scanderbeide* (1623), the first to give prominence to a female friendship in a genre that primarily celebrated male friendship. I therefore compare the renditions of male and female friendship from classical and Renaissance heroic poems with Sarrocchi's depiction of friendship between her two women warriors, Silveria and Rosmonda. While canonical Italian Renaissance heroic poems suggest that female friendship either exists in relation to a male love interest or causes strife and envy between women, Sarrocchi revises her predecessors to demonstrate that women's friendships form on their own and can coexist with a heterosexual love story.

II. Classical and Christian Ideals of Friendship

Any discourse on friendship in early modern Italy was indebted to the ethical and political discourses of male thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, as well as to Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Plato's *Lysis* and *Symposium* are common starting points in tracing the philosophical origins of classical friendship, but most scholars would agree that Aristotle was the first to formulate a complete theory of friendship in Book VIII and Book IX of his *Nicomachean Ethics* in 350 BC.[17] In these two books, Aristotle sings high praise for *philia*, the Greek

[17] Therefore, I begin my overview with Aristotle and not Plato, but Aristotle did take some of his ideas about friendship from Plato. More specifically, as H. H. Joachim explains, "Aristotle formulates his own theory of the types of friendship by starting from (and rendering more precise) popular views, and particularly the vides

term for "friendship" whose sense contains a wider meaning than our modern understanding of the word.[18] According to Aristotle, friendship is "a virtue or it involves virtue" and "is most necessary for our life [...] for no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods."[19] Additionally, friendship in Aristotle's view is necessary for the overall betterment of the *polis* (public) and for those who wish to lead a morally sound life. Like many authors to follow, Aristotle understands friendship as a political function, serving as a primary foundational element of society that holds communities together. In other words, a man's friendships are intrinsically related to his civic duties.

In the *Ethics*, Aristotle classifies three different types of friendship: utilitarian friendship, pleasurable friendship, and perfect friendship. These forms of friendship are arranged in a hierarchical order, with utilitarian friendship at the lowest end of the stratum and perfect friendship at the highest. Evident from its name, utilitarian friendship is grounded in the idea that one cares for a friend simply because of their usefulness. Utilitarian friendship easily dissolves; as soon as one friend receives what they need from the relationship, the union ends. Similarly, pleasurable friendship describes the enjoyable feelings the relationship engenders in both its participants. Though Aristotle views these bonds to be better than utilitarian ones, they still dissipate as easily, since perceptions and tastes of the two parties involved can change, exhibiting why such bonds are

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of Plato's *Lysis*." *Aristotle, the Nicomachean Ethics: A Commentary*, ed. D.A. Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 251.

[18] Whereas in contemporary English, we understand "friendship" to refer to the relationship with a close companion, *philia* for the ancient Greeks includes family members and acquaintances. As Drik Baltzy and Nick Eliopoulos argue, "though *philia* encompasses many relationships, our evidence from the ancient Greek philosophers looks at it from fewer viewpoints that one might like," namely as a friendly relationship between men. "The Classical Ideals of Friendship," in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

[19] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 1155a4–5.

much more common among youth.

In contrast, *teleia philia* (complete or perfect friendship)—the classification to which Aristotle devotes the greatest consideration—is exceptional and rare. Perfect friendship is founded in goodness and virtue, not utility or pleasure; this ideal bond is defined as the union of two good, virtuous people, who "wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own right."[20] Most importantly, the two perfect friends must be equals: "Moreover, in loving their friend they love what is good for themselves; for when a good person becomes a friend he becomes a good for his friend. Each of them loves what is good for himself, and repays in equal measure the wish and the pleasantness of his friend; for friendship is said to be equality. And this is true above all in the friendship of good people."[21] Thus, friends in a perfect friendship spend a substantial amount of time together and share the principle of self-love, the means to achieving great happiness and perfection in life.[22] Because of its unique qualities that make it difficult to attain, the bond of perfect friendship can transcend the mortality of one or both friends.

For the most part, Aristotle excludes women from perfect friendship, but he does so indirectly. While Aristotle does not address female friendship, he does include women in his discussions of marital bonds and parent-child relationships. Within these two types of relations, women can enter a relationship that closely resembles that of a perfect friendship.[23] According to the

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[20] Aristotle, 1156b8–10.

[21] Aristotle, 1157b34–1158a2.

[22] As Hyatte notes on the relationship between self-love and true friendship, "the excellent friend sees in his nearly equal partner an alter ego, a mirror of his own virtue and a source of self-knowledge […] as he watches his partner improve through his beneficent assistance, he sees the reflection of his own self-betterment, of his increased virtue." *The Arts of Friendship*, 18.

[23] The discussion about the relationship between husband and wife occurs in the section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that details unequal friendships, a category which also includes the relationships between ruler and subject, and parent and child. He later discusses marital bonds once again in chapters nine to eleven of Book VIII.

Greek philosopher, the husband-wife bond is inherently unequal because man is naturally superior to woman in virtue, meaning that he, as the superior, deserves and merits greater affection from his wife, the inferior. Nevertheless, in this system, a type of equality can occur between the two parties, though the process requires women to recognize their inferiority and make up for it. While certainly not ideal for women, Aristotle does outline a way for men and women to obtain a quasi-perfect friendship: "In all the friendships that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance, the better person [the husband in this case], and the more beneficial, and each of the others likewise, must be loved more than he loves; for when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved in a way, and this seems to be proper to friendship."[24] In the end, though utility and pleasure are found in the friendship shared between spouses due to their desire to procreate and the enjoyment they derive from each other, their relationship may also be comprised of "friendship for virtue, if they are decent," for each spouse "has a proper virtue, and this will be a source of enjoyment for them."[25] Thus, Aristotle potentially views the bond between husband and wife as more elevated than he originally imagined, as this bond can encompass a perfect friendship in addition to those based on utility and pleasure. Overall, Aristotle's treatment of friendship includes more possibilities for women than the treatises of later authors like Cicero.[26] This is not to say that Aristotle equates men to women, but rather that he acknowledges the participation of women in relationships that have similar characteristics to the three classifications of friendship

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[24] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1158b25–9.

[25] Aristotle, VIII.12: 24–6.

[26] Aristotle also details the relationship between a mother and her child in Book VIII of *Ethics*. Ann Ward contends that his description of the relationship a woman has with her child also bears similarities to his definition of perfect friendship. Her argument is intriguing, as it lays out another line of thinking about friendship, one in which women are considered capable of achieving perfect friendships in Aristotelean thought: "the friendship a mother has for her child is, like the friendship between good men, rooted in the development of self and thus the enhancement of activity and life." "Mothering and the Sacrifice of Self: Women and Friendship in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Thirdspace* 7, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 43.

outlined above.

This brief discussion of Aristotle's reflections on friendships in the *Ethics* summarizes his most far-reaching ideas, including those that tangibly provoked further deliberation. Aristotelian ideas on friendship were reproduced and reinterpreted in the writings of both Cicero and Seneca, Roman authors who lived some three centuries after Aristotle and had a profound influence on Renaissance thought.[27] Both authors use Aristotle's arguments about friendship as a point of departure to develop their own positions. Unlike the Greek term *philia*, a term whose definition has been a bone of contention among scholars for many years, the Latin, *amicitia*, which derives from the verb *amare* (to love), specifically denotes a bond between friends.[28] Many Roman thinkers wrote about *amicitia* in treatises, letters, and dialogues. Along with Aristotle's *Ethics*, Cicero's *De amicitia* was one of the most widely read classical works on friendship after the twelfth century.[29] Written as a dialogue that adopts a male-to-male conversational structure, Cicero's treatise portrays friendship in a personal manner by depicting a fictionalized perfect friendship shared between two male characters, Scipio Africanus and Gaius Laelius. Ultimately, this work grounds friendship in loss, as Laelius, the character with the largest speaking role, reminisces about the close bond he shared with his recently deceased friend Scipio.

Though Cicero never names any of the Greek philosophers, he borrows many ideas on friendship, especially perfect friendship—what Cicero calls *amicitia perfecta*—from Aristotle, as well as from other famous Greek thinkers such as Theophrastus and Panaetius. Like Aristotle, Cicero

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[27] See Amanda Wilcox, *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

[28] However, *amicitia* also had a range of meanings. As Peter Brunt argues, "from the constant intimacy and goodwill of virtuous or at least like-minded men to the courtesy that etiquette normally enjoined on gentlemen, it covers every degree of genuinely or overtly amicable relation." *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 391.

[29] Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 15.

maintains that friendship is inevitably linked to an ethical system grounded in virtue in which men desire goodness and happiness. *Amicitia perfecta* may only exist among good men who are self-sufficient and drawn to one another because of their similarity and love of goodness. The idea that friends share similarities, which stems from Aristotle, is pushed even further in Cicero who famously refers to the perfect friend as the *alter idem,* or other self, a concept that would later be central to humanist writings on friendship. The crucial difference between Aristotle and Cicero is that while they both believe the friend should never ask the other to commit an evil deed, Cicero links this idea to the state. That is, a friend should never ask the other to betray the state; the state comes before friendship, exhibiting Cicero's strong sense of patriotism to the Roman Republic.[30] Additionally, though Aristotle does not necessarily exclude women in his discussion of perfect friendship, Cicero makes it clear that the perfect friendship he imagines can only occur between men. He mentions women only once in his whole treatise, stating that due to their helplessness, women seek friendship as a means of shelter: "helpless women, more than men, seek its [friendship's] shelter, the poor more than the rich, and the unfortunate more than those who are accounted fortunate."[31] Unlike Aristotle, Cicero conceives of friendship strictly as a male relationship, made evident by his omission of male-female bonds in *De amicitia*.

Christian ideals of friendship that took root during late antiquity and into the Middle Ages drew from classical philosophy, but they underwent one major modification: they were reconfigured to be compatible with Christian ethics and doctrine. Until 1246 when Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of

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[30] Furthermore, Cicero lived during a time of political and civil instability, in which he could not rule out the possibility that a friend could demand a dangerous and disreputable deed from the other. Filippa Modesto, *Dante's Idea of Friendship: The Transformation of a Classical Concept* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 49.

[31] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 157. "[E]x eo fieri ut muliercuale magis amicitiarum praesidia quaerant quam viri, et inopes quam opulenti, et calamitosi quam ei" (Cicero, 156).

Lincoln, translated the *Ethics* into Latin—which included a translation of an original Greek commentary—that was then disseminated throughout Europe, Christian thinkers were introduced to Aristotle's ideas on friendship as they were filtered through Cicero in *De amicitia* and *De officis*.[32] Inspired by their faith, biblical readings, and experiences in community life, Christian theologians began to discern "which ideas and expressions stemming from the pre-Christian philosophies of friendship might prove capable of being retained, and even infused with new life and new meaning."[33] Such ideas later spread to monastic circles in the Middle Ages, showing the practical application of these theories to spiritual communities.[34] The writings of Augustine (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) most prominently evince the infusion of Christian thought into classical ideals of friendship.[35]

In the *Confessions*, Augustine details his own personal experiences of friendship and includes extended philosophical reflections on the nature of these bonds. Though heavily influenced by Cicero's *De amicitia*, Augustine finds an incompleteness in the Roman orator's definition of perfect friendship.[36] Such a realization occurs when the Christian theologian reminisces on his

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[32] Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 16.

[33] James McEvoy, "The Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages: Hermeneutics, Contextualization and the Transmission and Reception of Ancient Texts and Ideas, from c. AD 350 to c. 1500," in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 19.

[34] For friendship in medieval monastic communities see Adele M Fiske, *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition* (Cuernavaca: Centro intercultural de documentacion, 1970); Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[35] Other prominent Christian thinkers who wrote on friendship include Ambrose, Jerome, and Boethius from late antiquity, and Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx and Boncompagno da Signa from the medieval period. See Constant J. Mews and Neville Chiavaroli, "The Latin West," in *Friendship*, ed. Barbara Caine (New York: Routledge, 2014), 73–110.

[36] For an extended discussion on Augustine's attempt to distance himself from Cicero's ideals of friendship see C. Stephen Jaeger, "Friendship of Mutual Perfecting in Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 185–200.

insurmountable grief suffered after the death of a dear childhood friend, who remains unnamed in the text. In reflecting on this experience, Augustine writes that though the two shared everything and their souls were intertwined, ultimately their love for each other was misdirected because they were not united in the Christian faith. Their friendship did not lead them to God: "But he was not yet such a friend to me then as he became afterward: although even then it was not true friendship, which can only really exist when you cement it between those who hold fast to you by means of the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us."[37] Here, Augustine maintains that the Holy Spirit, who is God, acts as the source and binding agent of all human friendships. Thus, no friendship is complete without God's presence, an idea that dismantles the classical belief that friends love each other for their shared benevolence and inherent good qualities. In drawing from another experience—his lifelong bond with Alypius—Augustine also determines that friendship has a crucial importance to one's spiritual journey. With Alypius, Augustine experiences many trials and tribulations (which are detailed throughout the text), but together they find divine inspiration, specifically through reading and sharing interpretations of Romans 14:1, the experience of which leads to their respective conversions.[38] In contrast to the relationship shared with his unnamed friend, Augustine and Alypius' union is true because it is grounded in their mutual love for God, a quality that strengthens both their faith and friendship. Augustine believed friendships to be "expressions of divine love with each of the partners," which

[37] Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. Carolyn J. B. Hammond, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 143. "[S]ed nondum erat sic amicus, quamquam ne tunc quidem sic, uti est vera amicitia, quia non est vera nisi cum eam tu agglutinas inter haerentes tibi caritate diffusa in cordibus nostris per spiritim sanctum, qui datus est nobis" (Augustine IV. 4).

[38] Alypius converts moments after Augustine when Augustine shows his friend a passage from Romans 14:1 that inspired his conversion, to which Alypius confesses his experiencing of a similar divine calling when reading a different part of that same passage. After their conversions, the two, along with Augustine's son Adeodatus, are baptized together in Milan. See Books VIII, IX, and XII of Augustine, *Confessions*.

unite them to God's love and bring about their salvation.[39]

Writing later in the thirteenth century, Aquinas expanded ideas of Christian friendship by revisiting the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a text he became familiar with through in-class study.[40] Aquinas' main revision to the *Ethics* included his argument that humans could achieve friendship with God, a notion Aristotle found to be impossible due to the inherent inequality of status and power between humans and deities.[41] To do this, in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas introduces the theological virtue of *caritas* (charity)—the mutual love and communion shared between God and human—into his notion of friendship. As Daniel Schwartz writes, "friendship provides, for Aquinas, the paradigm through which the theological virtue of charity can be best conceptualized."[42] Aquinas, moreover, equates *caritas* to friendship, using God's speech from John 15:15 to make this connection: "on the other hand the Lord's words, *No longer will I call you servants but my friends,* can be explained only in terms of charity, which, therefore, is friendship."[43] He contends that while charity cannot be found in Aristotelian formulations of friendship—subtly indicating the failings of classical pagan thought—

[39] McEvoy, "The Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages: Hermeneutics, Contextualization and the Transmission and Reception of Ancient Texts and Ideas, from c. AD 350 to c. 1500," 33.

[40] Grossesteste's translation of the *Ethics* had reached Aquinas, who studied the text in school, an experience he details in his autobiography. McEvoy, 27.

[41] Aquinas does discuss qualities of interhuman friendship, however his ideas on the topic are mostly reiterations of Aristotelian philosophy. In contrast, his findings on friendship between humans and God are novel. For Aquinas on human friendship see Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–21.

[42] Schwartz, 5. While Aquinas was not the first to link *caritas* to friendship, his reconfiguring of the theological virtue within an Aristotelian framework marked a new approach to the topic. For medieval Christian considerations on the relationship between *amicitia* and *caritas* see Modesto, *Dante's Idea of Friendship: The Transformation of a Classical Concept*, 66–7.

[43] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. R. J. Batten, vol. 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7. "Sed Contra est quod Joan. Dicitur, *jam non dicam vos servos, sed amicos meos*. Sed hoc non dicebatur eis nisi ratione caritatis. Ergo caritas est amicitia" (Aquinas, 2a2ae.23.1).

caritas defines the essence of Christian friendship, which permits one's ascension to God.[44] Ultimately, this union helps prepare one for the afterlife, a place where the perfect communion between God and human can be fully restored since the fall of man.

In Augustine's and Aquinas' respective philosophies, friendship achieves a transcendent quality, acting both as a medium to unite humans with one another and to bond them to God. In theory, Christian doctrine was more accommodating to women's participation in friendship than classical ideals. Women could technically partake in spiritual friendships on the condition that they remain chaste, limiting spiritual friendship to women who refused marriage and entered the convent. While, theoretically speaking, Christian friendship places women on equal footing with men, in practice, the equality breaks down because "one often encounters traditional distrust of sexuality that makes *amicitia christiana* between a religious man and woman seem much more of an intellectual and literary construct than a reality."[45] Nevertheless, unlike classical writers that explicitly exclude women as a group in their theories of friendship, Christian writers do not.

These classical and Christian conceptions of friendship persisted in medieval and Renaissance Italy as renewed interest in antiquity spurred new readings and interpretations on the topic.[46] Many Italian authors in the early modern age intertwined the above theories of friendship

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[44] However, Aquinas does agree with Aristotle in the idea that a friendship must be rooted in similitude, like-mindedness, and reciprocity. He writes, "yet goodwill alone is not enough for friendship for this requires a mutual loving; it is only with a friend that a friend is friendly. But such reciprocal good will be based on something in common." Aquinas, 34:7. "Sed nec benevolentia sufficit ad rationem amicitiae, sed requiritur quaedam mutua amatio, quia amicus esr amico amicus. Talis autem mutua benevolentia fundatur super aliqua communicatione" (Aquinas, 2a2ae.23.1).

[45] Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 51. Constant Mews and Neville Chiavaroli also explain that between late antiquity and the medieval period, friendships between men and women were considered suspect since women were mainly viewed as "idealized objects of love." Mews and Chiavaroli, "The Latin West," 73.

[46] After Grosseteste's Latin edition of Aristotle's *Ethics*, other Latin translations of the text soon followed. As Eugenio Refini explains, "France played a significant role in the dissemination of Aristotle's moral works, mostly thanks to Nicole Oresme, whose translations were carried out at the behest of King Charles V between 1369 and 1377." "'Aristotile in parlare materno': Vernacular Readings of the *Ethics* in the Quattrocentro," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16, no. 1/2 (2013): 314. In 1417, Leonardo Bruni

with ideas of their own in a diverse range of texts, revealing "a preoccupation with and yearning for the inherited ideals and the wish to manipulate and/or actualize the reciprocity presupposed in classical and medieval models."[47] For instance, in a story set at the end of the Roman Republic, Boccaccio depicts the perfect friendship between Tito and Gisippo in 10.8 of the *Decameron*. Here, notions of virtuous friendship within the *brigata* serve to help the friends overcome the perils of Fortune.[48] Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) dedicated the fourth and final book of *I libri della famiglia*, appropriately titled *De amicitia*, to friendship.[49] In this book, Piero Alberti, one of the family elders, displays his knowledge of Aristotle by using the Greek philosopher's three categories of friendship to define his three personal relationships with the Duke of Milan, the King of Naples, and the Pope. Discussions that then ensue include tactics for procuring friendships, dissolving friendships, and handling cases of enmity.[50] The Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) wrote about spiritual friendship in Latin missives addressed to his male friends. Borrowing

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translated the Aristotelian work, hoping to update the Latin of Grosseteste, and in the mid-fourteenth century, a complete edition of the *Ethics* was made available in Italian by Antonio Colombella and Bernardo Nuti. The popularity of Cicero's works also endured in Quattrocento Italy. His texts were foundational in humanistic studies, featuring prominently in the Latin curriculum of new schools, such as those opened by Guarino da Verona in Ferrara and Vittorino da Feltre in Mantua. Additionally, the first books printed in Italy were Cicero's philosophical works, with *the De officiis, De amicitia and De senectute* as the most popular, texts that were then translated into the vernacular by humanists. To date, we know of 300 incunabula of Cicero from this time, including 64 editions of *De officiis*, 64 of *De senectute* and *De amicitia*, and 69 of *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. David Marsh, "Cicero in the Renaissance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 308, 313. See also Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

[47] Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson, "Introduction: The Emergence of Discourses: Early Modern Friendship," in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1.

[48] See Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 137–63; Victoria Kirkham, "The Classic Bond of Friendship in Boccaccio's Tito and Gisippo (*Decameron* 10.8)," in *The Classics in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1990), 223–35; McCue Gill, "Vera Amicizia: Conjugal Friendship in the Italian Renaissance," 58–92.

[49] The first three books were completed by 1434, while the fourth book was finished in 1437.

[50] See Amyrose McCue Gill, "Rereading *I libri della famiglia*: Leon Battista Alberti on Marriage, *Amicizia*, and Conjugal Friendship," *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011).

from both the classical and Christian traditions, he found that the purpose of friendship was to unite men in their love of God.[51] While this list constitutes only a small portion of Italian early modern writers who treated the topic, I amply discuss other authors from the period whose writings on friendship were pertinent to each of the genres under discussion in this study; each chapter includes a discussion of friendship within the Italian Renaissance literary traditions of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry. Nevertheless, as we will see, women in early modern Italy utilize these classical or Christian frameworks of friendship in their letters, lyric, and heroic poems in new ways, expanding the repertoire of expressive possibilities on friendship in each of the genres examined in the ensuing chapters.

[51] James and Kent, "Renaissance Friendships: Traditional Truths, New and Dissenting Voices," 139.

CHAPTER 1. THE FRIENDSHIP LETTERS OF ELISABETTA GONZAGA AND ISABELLA D'ESTE

The correspondence between Elisabetta Gonzaga (1471–1526), duchess of Urbino, and Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), marchesa of Mantua, provides insight into the ways noblewomen expressed and shared feelings of intimacy as a foundation of friendship. Indeed, since antiquity the letter has acted as an important medium through which the context of friendship has assumed increasing importance. Not only did letter writing aid in preserving and sustaining close relationships through the sending and receiving of missives—that is, the reciprocal practice of correspondence—but it also acted as a popular literary form through which classical and humanist writers reflected on the nature and role of *amicitia* in everyday life.

The first half of this chapter begins with an overview of the history of epistolary writing in the Renaissance, highlighting courtly women's engagement with letter writing and the expression of intimacy as a prevalent epistolary mode. My aim here is to survey the letter as a fluid literary form with multiple traditions and purposes that can, and sometimes do, intersect. Then, in the second half of this chapter, I turn specifically to Elisabetta and Isabella. I first trace their upbringings and backgrounds, and end with an analysis of select exchanges from their correspondence. Understanding epistolary writing as both a practice and a literary genre, I examine Elisabetta's and Isabella's use of letter writing to keep each other close and the modes through which they communicate and reciprocate intimacy during the early years of their friendship, specifically between the years 1490 and 1496.

I. The Letter in Renaissance Italy

Letter writing in medieval and Renaissance Europe flourished for reasons literary and non-literary, as a practice that supported the networks of merchants, bankers, bureaucrats, and other professionals, while also acting as a favored literary genre among humanists and vernacular authors. Leaving aside the mercantile letters that helped produce the economic boom of medieval and early

modern Italy, my focus here is on letters produced for publication between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. I then move to a discussion on non-published letters. Letters fashioned or edited for publication began with the Latin humanist letter, which evolved to produce a vernacular tradition that, though it was indebted to Ciceronian and humanist models, veered toward more accessible, less philosophical themes.[1] Petrarch's monumental discovery of Cicero's letters in 1345 and subsequent publication of his *Rerum familiarum libri* in Latin inaugurated the humanist tradition, paving the way for others like Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), and Poliziano (1454–1494) to follow his example.[2] Humanist letters, written in Latin, provided essay-like contemplations on moral philosophy and politics with constructed arguments on a wide range of themes such as virtue, fortune, and friendship. In writing on these topics, authors used letter writing to promote and circulate humanist ideas while also proving their skills as writers.

The decision to write in Latin over the vernacular was part of a century-long debate in the Quattrocento about which Italian humanists were split. While some like Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1407–1457) found spoken vernaculars to be inferior to written Latin, which was considered superior because of its fixed grammatical rules, others like Leon Battista Alberti believed in the power of an elevated *volgare*.[3] By the turn of the sixteenth century, this conversation transformed into one about

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[1] Claudio Guillén refers to the humanist letter as the "neo-Latin prose letter" and the vernacular letter as the "prose letter in vulgar tongue." "Notes toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter," in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 71–72.

[2] Like their male humanist counterparts, women humanists in fifteenth-century Italy began composing familiar letterbooks as well. Three notable Italian women who did so were Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466), Cassandra Fedele (1465–1558), and Laura Cereta (1469–1499). Following the example of Petrarch and classical authors, these three women attained fame through the way in which they represented themselves in their familiar letters. Ray, *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance*, 20.

[3] Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Milan: Tascibili Bompiani, 2007), 241; Letizia Panizza, "The Quattrocentro," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 152–53.

which vernacular was the best to standardize. The publication of the Venetian Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1525 signified a watershed moment in this dispute. He contended that authors should adopt Tuscan as the literary language and use the Italian found in the prose and poetry of Boccaccio and Petrarch, writers who were living over a hundred years earlier.[4] Though he received push back from non-Tuscans and Tuscans alike, such as Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), one of Bembo's motives was to establish a vernacular for the print industry; printers could encourage the Tuscan vernacular, which would in turn produce books that could be marketed to literate Italians. The Tuscan Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), newly transplanted to Venice, published his first volume of Italian letters *Primo libro de le lettere* in 1538. The letters he published were versions of actual letters and were conversational in nature; though his choice of writing in the vernacular was not explicitly tied to the *questione della lingua*, these published letters still endorsed and solidified a notion of Italian as a language worthy of publication, which in turn garnered more participation from writers of diverse backgrounds.[5] Aretino's six volumes of letters were groundbreaking for they "offered highly crafted versions of ostensibly private correspondence to a public eager to listen in on the conversations of celebrities."[6] Many authors imitated Aretino, utilizing vernacular letters as a medium for their own self-representation and self-promotion.[7]

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[4] Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 61.

[5] Guillén, "Notes toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter," 92.

[6] Deanna Shemek, "Letter Writing and Epistolary Culture," Oxford Bibliographies Online: Renaissance and Reformation, 2013, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0194.xml?rskey=nhKCrm&result=3&q=epistolary+culture&print#firstMatch. Because of their appeal to the public, Raffaele Morabito describes Aretino's letters as "un genere che potrebbe definirsi 'di consumo.'" *Lettere e letteratura: Studi sull'epistolografia volgare in Italia* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2001), 25.

[7] Ray, *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance*, 4. Many considered Aretino's familiar letters as a new reinvented genre. In many respects, Aretino along with the "pre-Aretinian" female epistolary writers (such as the Nogarola, Fedele, and Cereta) paved the way for later sixteenth-century women writers to enter into the public discourse through letter writing. As Ray writes, "among this virtual flood of letter writers

In contrast to letters curated for publication, the missives of Elisabetta Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este, like those of merchants and chancelleries, are directed to single addressees and did not anticipate wide circulation. The princesses' letters existed first and foremost as a means of communication between sender and recipient, with no intention of being shared among a wider public. While there has been much debate over the extent to which letters not intended for publication are "literary," this dichotomy between the literary and the non-literary cannot be maintained. As Amyrose McCue Gill argues, "letters are decidedly persuasive and rhetorical (as is, one could argue, all writing) rather than engaged in representing a historical 'truth' […] the epistle is a literary form in which authorial intent, audience and historical context are of particular relevance."[8] Whether letters were meant for wide circulation or not, they were carefully crafted with a specific style, goal, or intention in mind, and therefore "exhibit regular formal features of a genre."[9] For instance, some Renaissance writers of letters received a humanist education, and depending on the extent of their instruction, were most likely well versed in works by classical authors who privileged the art of rhetoric. Some probably even studied letter writing manuals to teach them to write in a persuasive, erudite, and clear manner.[10]

[that came after the publication of Aretino's letters] were a number of women, who brought to the genre a wide range of female experience, from discussions of marriage, motherhood, sexuality, and virtue to reflections on the challenges of being a woman writer." 4.

[8] McCue Gill, "Vera Amicizia: Conjugal Friendship in the Italian Renaissance," 134.

[9] Deanna Shemek, "In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire," in *Phaethon's Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, ed. Deanna Shemek and Dennis Looney (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 279. Furthermore, Giles Constable writes the that the worth of letters as historical documents "must always be evaluated in the light of their literary character." *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 12.

[10] For as Najemy claims, "manuals on letter writing began as relatively modest treatises that provided a few definitions, outlined the main types or categories of letters, and either supplied some examples for imitation or gave advice about matters of usage, diction, and style." *Between Friends*, 42. One of the most influential letter writing manuals in and outside of Italy was Agostino Dati's *Elegantiolae* (1470). This manual saw roughly fifty-six printings by 1500. Cecil H. Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity: Letters and Letter Collections," in

Even given this distinction between published and unpublished letters, the various traditions of Renaissance letter should not be understood as "watertight compartments" because their uses and styles often blend together.[11] Indeed, John Najemy argues that "private, vernacular letters could sometimes share the literary elegance or pretension of a humanist letter, and the same was certainly true of many of the diplomatic letters written by humanist chancellors."[12] Consciously or not, Elisabetta and Isabella combined various traditions, styles, and uses, even though their letters were meant mainly for the eyes of their recipients. Their friendship letters form part of courtly women's extensive engagement with letter writing in Renaissance Italy and also exhibit an understanding of intimacy as an epistolary mode that dates back to Cicero. As the next sections illustrate, as noblewomen, Elisabetta and Isabella had some training in the formal practices of epistolary writing, like the *ars dictaminis* (the art of dictation, also known as the *ars dictandi*); at the same time, their exchanges, though in the vernacular, reveal similar notions of intimacy to those that classical and humanist authors imagined and communicated in their own letters.[13]

A. Women's Letter Writing in the Courts of Renaissance Italy

Elisabetta's and Isabella's letters form part of a larger corpus of women's writing in early modern Italy that, as Judith Bryce writes, "provided the principal vehicle in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for women's introduction into the world of written communication."[14] Letter

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Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 47.

[11] Najemy, *Between Friends*, 10.

[12] Najemy, 18.

[13] Arguing similarly, Deanna Shemek writes "Isabella's letters might best be seen as a blend of the personalized, sometimes intimate humanist style with medieval generic efficiency." "Introduction," in *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, by Isabella d'Este, ed. and trans. Deanna Shemek (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017), 14.

[14] Judith Bryce, "Introduction," in *Letters to Her Sons (1447–1470)* (Toronto: Iter Academic Press, 2016), 3. For more on women's unpublished letters during the early modern period see Adriana Chemello, ed., *Alla lettera. Teorie e pratiche epistolari dai Greci al Novecento* (Milan: Angelo Guerini, 1998); Karen Cherewatuk and

writing was one of the few types of writing in which women were allowed to engage, broadly speaking, and afforded them more access to the public sphere.[15] As James Daybell argues, for middle-class and elite women who had "familial responsibilities and obligations imposed by marriage and motherhood," the letter allowed them to "operate beyond the confines of the narrowly defined household or domestic sphere."[16] Everyday letter writing was also more available to women than other literary forms like legal writing or bookkeeping, which were tasks typically delegated to men.[17] These reasons alone make studying surviving letters an invaluable tool for uncovering women's far-reaching networks and discerning their day-to-day activities, including some of the more intimate details of their personal lives.

Of course, this chapter focuses on two aristocratic women: Elisabetta was a duchess, and Isabella was a marchesa. Elisabetta and Isabella followed the standard trajectory of courtly women in early modern Italy. They were each born into influential, ruling families and married into other powerful families where they assumed their titles.[18] Being a duchess or marchesa came with great political and diplomatic responsibilities. She was expected to offer advice and council to her male

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Ulrike Weithaus, eds., *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); James Daybell, ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1400–1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Maria Luisa Doglio, *L'arte delle lettere. Idea e pratica della scrittura epistolare tra Quattro e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

[15] P. Renée Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Costanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 140.

[16] Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1400–1700*, 11.

[17] Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Costanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy," 140.

[18] As Louisa Mattozzi so clearly explains, "to become a duchess, of course, one must first marry a duke. Most wives of dukes were daughters of other rulers; the children of rulers almost exclusively married their own kind. A future duchess, therefore, was most certainly the daughter of a count, marchese, duke, or king." "The Feminine Art of Politics and Diplomacy: The Role of Duchesses in Early Modern Italy" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2004), 32.

consort or act as co-regent when he was away, being sure however never to overstep his authority.[19] Moreover, women like Elisabetta and Isabella in important positions corresponded in order to perform administrative familial duties like gathering and reporting news, conducting administrative business, and keeping in contact with family, friends, and allies.[20]

As Louisa Mattozzi maintains, it is exactly through the letter that aristocratic women assumed great cultural and political importance: "letter-writing allowed female nobles who were barred from council meetings and official ducal offices to exercise influence."[21] For example, when male consorts were away at war, since many of them served as mercenary soldiers, their female counterparts maintained the status of the court by inviting artists, authors, and intellectuals to commission literary and artistic works.[22] To do this, courtly women frequently communicated with their clients via the letter, through which many patron-client relationships were established. Another way noblewomen exerted influence was the use of the letter as a means to gather news from friends, family, and allies. Their dynastic connections were highly valued, and through these networks, aristocratic women acted as gatekeepers and disseminators of important, classified information. When princes traveled away from their home courts for diplomatic or military reasons, they relied

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[19] Evelyn Welch, "Women as Patrons and Clients in the Courts of Quattrocento Italy," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), 19.

[20] Sarah Cockram, "Epistolary Masks: Self-Presentation and Dissimulation in the Letters of Isabella d'Este," *Italian Studies* 64, no. 1 (2009): 23. It should be noted however, that this responsibility extended into the middle classes as well; for example many women from patrician and merchant families were also expected to correspond through letters. See Ann Crabb, "'If I Could Write': Margherita Datini and Letter Writing, 1385–1410," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 1170–1206; Megan Moran, "Female Letter Writing and the Preservation of Family Memory in Early Modern Italy," *Early Modern Women* 6 (Fall 2011): 195–201.

[21] Mattozzi, "The Feminine Art of Politics and Diplomacy: The Role of Duchesses in Early Modern Italy," 92.

[22] For example, Shemek explains that since Isabella was married to Francesco, a mercenary soldier prince, she as marchesa "bore primary responsibility for maintaining a conspicuous Gonzaga presence at court." Deanna Shemek, "Isabella d'Este and the Properties of Persuasion," in *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion*, ed. Ann Crabb and Jane Couchman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 109.

on their wives to collect, analyze, and share any news they deemed significant; they trusted them as much as their advisors or political allies.[23] Collecting news was crucial to a state's survival: accurate intelligence could help a state defend itself before an unpredicted attack or could reveal information regarding alliances, resources, and military successes and failures of other city-states. Moreover, noblewomen also used the letter to secure dynastic power either by forging influential marital alliances for their children or continuing a healthy relationship between their natal and home courts. As Amyrose McCue Gill explains with respect to Isabella's role of securing suitable nuptial arrangements for her children, "it was particularly vital that the spouses obtained for the next generation of Gonzagas should be exemplary, and that the bonds between the couple and between the families involved should enable the most productive of relations from the perspective of future heirs and state alliance."[24] By working within the bounds of their epistolary networks, aristocratic women were effectively able to exercise their own cultural and political power.

Because of the expectation and responsibility to engage in frequent letter writing, Elisabetta and Isabella, like other noblewomen, were taught at a young age how to read and write in the vernacular. This specific kind of training most likely came in addition to their humanist education as it ensured they would be prepared to manage the large undertaking of correspondence required of their future posts.[25] However, a courtly woman's mastery of the epistolary genre and training varied

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[23] Megan Moran also notes that this was a common practice among the wives of Italian merchants; while the men were away for business, they too expected their wives to notify them of any pertinent information. "Female Letter Writing and the Preservation of Family Memory in Early Modern Italy," 197. See also Christina Antenhofer, "Letters Across the Borders: Strategies of Communication in an Italian-German Renaissance Correspondence," in *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 103–22; Adriana Chemello, "Il codice epistolare femminile," in *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia*, ed. Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Viella, 1999), 3–42.

[24] McCue Gill, "Vera Amicizia: Conjugal Friendship in the Italian Renaissance," 197.

[25] Mattozzi, "The Feminine Art of Politics and Diplomacy: The Role of Duchesses in Early Modern Italy," 36.

on a case by case basis. Elisabetta and Isabella, for example, probably attained more training than others who may have lacked well-known tutors or family chancelleries.[26] With regards to the general format of the letter, noblewomen were taught a loosened version of *ars dictaminis*, a medieval practice of letter writing which consisted of rhetorical strategies applied to epistolary form.[27] The *ars dictaminis* was founded in public oratory and thus prescribed a five-part structure that reflected the contents of a carefully crafted and performed speech: *salutatio* (the greeting), *exordium* (the introduction that often features a proverb), *narratio* (the subject matter), *petitio* (the request, if there was one), and *conclusio* (the conclusion).[28] As Jane Couchman notes, the nobility "used a highly formalized version of the *ars dictaminis*, making use of hierarchical language."[29] For example, the *ars dictaminis* required standard forms of address according to the sender's and recipient's social class. This explains the use of addresses like "Illustrissima" or "Excellentissima" found in most of Elisabetta and Isabella's exchanges. The amount of formal language in a letter depended on to whom it was being sent, as missives were carefully constructed with their recipients in mind. In the letters that Elisabetta and Isabella exchanged, they blended conventional, formal language with affectionate expressions.

The *ars dictaminis* prescribed the basic outline of a letter, but it was a necessity that writers personalize its contents. Like the Gonzagas, many elite families had chancelleries who acted as personal advisors and aided them in handling the enormous output of their correspondence.

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[26] Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Costanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy," 141. Baernstein explains that Isabella's mastery of the epistolary genre made her an exceptional case, comparing her with Geronima Colonna (d.1587) who stood on the other side of this spectrum as she did not employ conventions of the genre like dating, salutations, or correct word to space alignment. Therefore, Baernstein concludes that noblewomen's epistolary expertise most likely fell somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

[27] Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, "Introduction: Form and Persuasion in Women's Letters, 1400–1700," in *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400–1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 6; Shemek, "Introduction," 14.

[28] William Michael Purcell, *Ars Poetriae: Rhetorical and Grammatical Invention at the Margin of Literacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 42; Shemek, "Introduction," 14.

[29] Couchman and Crabb, "Introduction: Form and Persuasion in Women's Letters, 1400–1700," 8.

Though most noblewomen dictated their letters to scribes, the written content still reflected the thoughts and voice of their author.[30] The mechanics of writing letters were tedious and time-consuming, especially if engaging in daily correspondence; it was therefore considered "beneath the dignity of nobles and unnecessary for most laywomen."[31] At the same time, the sending of autograph letters was deemed a sign of respect and intimacy. As Shemek explains, "personally written letters were charged with special meaning, because they implicitly conveyed not only the sender's corporeal contact but also the physical effort that went into producing them."[32] For the most part however, nobles avoided writing letters in their own hand, using instead their chancellery secretaries to facilitate the writing process.

Scholars like Karen Cherewatuk and Jane Couchman have noted how medieval and Renaissance women alike often adapted formal conventions of letter writing to fit their own needs and intentions. As with all literary genres, the parameters of letter writing—such as the rules that dictate the *ars dictaminis* or the commonplaces found in humanist letters—were largely established by male thinkers and practitioners. Women therefore based their epistolary practice on these conventions, but at the same time subverted and expanded on them to make the letter their own.[33] For example, medieval women like Hildegard of Bingen, Héloïse, and Christine de Pizan "transform[ed] the rules of the *ars dictaminis* to suit their needs as female authors."[34] Renaissance women, too, adapted the epistolary genre for their own needs. Costanza Colonna, for instance, fused

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[30] Ann Crabb argues that the intervention of a scribe on the contents of a letter varied. Some authors expected an exact transcription of their dictation, while others may have been open to having a scribe provide ideas in written form. "'If I Could Write': Margherita Datini and Letter Writing, 1385–1410," 1176.

[31] Crabb, 1176.

[32] Shemek, "Introduction," 11.

[33] Couchman and Crabb, "Introduction: Form and Persuasion in Women's Letters, 1400–1700," 7.

[34] Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Weithaus, "Introduction," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Weithaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 13.

together the elements of the *ars dictaminis* with the literary style and format of humanist letters.[35] The missives of Elisabetta and Isabella work similarly. Shemek describes Isabella's letters as a mix of "the personalized, sometimes intimate humanist style with medieval generic efficiency," while Carolyn James explains how the Gonzagas' missives differ from regular chancery writing because of "the way they blend domestic conversations with matters of state."[36] With respect to Elisabetta and Isabella's specific exchanges, and the focus of this study on female friendship the question then becomes, how did they make friendship letters their own? That is, how did they personally communicate and reciprocate intimacy to each other in their correspondence? To answer these questions in my analysis of the princesses' letters, the next section traces Cicero's and Petrarch's intimate style in order to tease out common threads of epistolary intimacy in two of their respective works, *Ad Atticum* and *Rerum familiarum libri*., as relevant models for the cultivation of friendship through letter writing. Though neither Isabella nor Elisabetta seems to have owned personal copies of either text, the Estense library had both texts when Isabella lived there as a child and the Montefeltro library in Urbino, Elisabetta's eventual home, possessed a copy of *Ad Atticum*.[37] Additionally, inventory records from 1540 show that Isabella had Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares* in her *studiolo*, an unsurprising fact considering that Jacopo Gallino, the marchesa's tutor as a child, praised her for

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[35] Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Costanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy," 145.

[36] Shemek, "Introduction," 14; Carolyn James, "Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga, 1490–1519," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2012): 325.

[37] Giulio Bertoni, *La biblioteca estense e la coltura ferrarese ai tempi del Duca Ercole (1471–1505)* (Turin: Loescher, 1903), 240; Heinz Hofmann, "Literary Culture at the Court of Urbino during the Reign of Federico Da Montefelto," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 57 (2008): 19n77. Additionally, the Estense library owned copies of Cicero's *De Amicitia* and Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, two other significant texts that helped shape classical and Renaissance ideals about friendship. An inventory done at the Gonzaga court in 1407 reveals that their library also had these two abovementioned texts, meaning that Elisabetta could have had access to them growing up. Pia Girolla, "La biblioteca di Francesco Gonzaga secondo l'inventario del 1407," *Atti e memorie della* R. *Accademia Virgiliana* 14–16 (1923): 62, 70.

having Cicero's orations memorized by heart.[38] While Cicero's and Petrarch's letters often served different purposes from those of Elisabetta and Isabella, nevertheless, their missives can help us understand intimacy as a modeled literary, epistolary mode that was accessible to a number of diverse writers.

B. Evoking Intimacy in Renaissance Letter Writing from Cicero to Petrarch

From antiquity to the Renaissance, epistolary writing was closely linked to the theme of friendship. Inspired by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De Amicitia*, Renaissance humanists were infatuated with friendship's philosophical underpinnings, and so it became a favored topic in their letterbooks. Apart from their theoretical meditations however, existed an equal desire to communicate ideas intimately, or as they put it, in a "familiar" style, so as to represent the contents of their letters as though they existed as real, live conversations between friends.

The most important reference point for friendship as both a theme and a practice in the epistolary genre is evidently Cicero. As both a "theorist and practitioner of friendship," Cicero contemplated notions of ideal friendship in his treatise, *De Amicitia*, and exhibited the intimacy of his close bond with his dearest friend, Atticus, in his letter book *Ad Atticum*.[39] *Ad Atticum* is one of four collections of Cicero's correspondence and, along with the *Epistulae ad familiares*, is one of the largest; his other two smaller letter collections include *Ad Quintum fratrem* and *Ad Brutum*.[40] Together, these collections contain 861 letters, making up the largest body of correspondence that survives in Latin

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[38] Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven: Yale, 2004), 273; Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier, *La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, ed. Simone Albonico (Milan: Sylvestre Bonnard, 2005), 4.

[39] Constant J. Mews, "Cicero on Friendship," in *Friendship*, ed. Barbara Caine (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2009), 65.

[40] More specifically, there are sixteen books to Atticus, three to his brother Quintus, three to Marcus Junius Brutus, and sixteen to and from a variety of men of high stature, to his wife, and freedman. Craig A. Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 219.

from classical antiquity.[41] The missives in all four letter books were mainly written during the last twenty-five years of Cicero's life from 68 to 43 BC. Though Cicero's letters were addressed to specific persons, they were subject to circulation among a small audience, for it was not unusual for letters to be shared among close friends and family in classical Rome.[42] His letters offer a private view into his personal relationships, but also display his public persona, hinting at a sense of self-fashioning immediately evident in his writing. This aspect of letters as self-fashioning, in addition to the fact that these four collections were published after Cicero's death by his freedman, M. Tullius Tiro, have led most scholars to agree that Cicero intended these letters for publication.[43] Taken as a whole, these letters are significant for they unveil the tightly-knit nature of homosocial bonds in ancient Rome.

As Catharine Edwards explains, Cicero's correspondence comprises many types of letters in various registers.[44] For example, there are letters of recommendation and those of consultation. There are also letters written to family members in an informal register and others addressed to aristocrats like Lentulus Spinther and Appius Pulcher, composed in a more elaborate style. However, Cicero's letters to Atticus come across as some of the most personal, suggesting why they became

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[41] Mews, "Cicero on Friendship," 65.

[42] Catharine Edwards, "Epistolography," in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 273.

[43] Translator and commentator D.R. Shackleton Bailey contends that Cicero did not plan to have his letters published, while Catharine Edwards and Amanda Wilcox argue that he did. Most scholars who believe that Cicero indeed intended these letters for publication reference a letter written to Atticus (*Ad Atticum* 16.5.5) in which he explains that though his letters have not been organized into a collection, Tiro has a number of them that need to be edited before they can be published. Scholars also point to a letter Cicero wrote to Tiro (*Fam.* 16.17.1) in which he refers to his letters being gathered in volumes. See Edwards, 273; D. R. Shackleton Bailey, "Introduction," in *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* (New York: Penguin, 1978), 7; Wilcox, *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome*, 6. For a lengthy discussion on this topic see Caroline Bishop, *Cicero, Greek Learning, and the Making of a Roman Classic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 219–56.

[44] Edwards, "Epistolography," 272.

the foundational model for how to engage with a friend as an epistolary correspondent.[45] In his letters, Cicero puts into practice theoretical trademarks of the epistolary genre that had already been theorized by ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Demetrius.[46] These include understanding the letter as a halved dialogue or conversation and communicating with an absent friend as though they were present.[47] Though Cicero often acknowledges his preference for in-person contact in his missives, he also makes it clear that letters "not only substitute for live conversation but somehow approximate it."[48] Though these ideas were already commonplace in treatises and letters of Greco-Roman antiquity, they became even more so with the publication of Cicero's letters in the Renaissance.

From a thematic point of view, there are a couple of noteworthy traits to be found in Cicero's correspondence with Atticus that appear later in Renaissance letters. These include expressions of longing for an absent friend and the letter as a medium for news and contact. As Amanda Wilcox writes, "the essential function of Cicero's letters, more crucial if not more basic than imparting news, was creating, maintaining, advertising, deepening, and extending relationships,

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[45] Shackleton Bailey contends that in the letters addressed to Atticus in particular "Cicero reveals himself as to no other of his correspondents except his brother." "Introduction," 1. Similarly, G.O. Hutchinson believes that the letters in *Ad Atticum* are written in an informal register especially if compared to those found in the *Ad Familiares*. *Cicero's Correspondence: A Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 4.

[46] While Aristotle did not specifically compose a letter writing manual, his theories on rhetoric and persuasion as detailed in *Rhetoric* have been adapted and applied to letter writing. As Kathy Eden argues, "without addressing the letter, the kind of discourse eventually associated most closely with rhetorical intimacy, the *Rhetoric* does address a fundamental feature of letter writing that establishes the groundwork for later epistolary theory: writing itself." *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11. Meanwhile, Demetrius's epistolary treatise, *On Style*, which was inspired by Aristotle's writings, is one of the earliest and most well-known letter writing manuals. Carol Poster, "A Conversation Halved: Epistolary Theory in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 22.

[47] Edwards, "Epistolography," 271.

[48] Peter White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.

sometimes all at the same time."[49] In many of his letters addressed to Atticus, Cicero depicts his emotional suffering caused by his friend's absence. Not only does he convey to Atticus how much he misses him, but he also underscores that receiving his letters eases the pain of his absence. According to Kathy Eden, intimacy is created in Cicero's letters precisely in the way he communicates the urgency to unveil his feelings.[50] In one letter, Cicero writes, "I must tell you that what I most badly need at the present time is a confidant—someone with whom I could share all that gives me any anxiety, a wise affectionate friend to whom I could talk without patience or evasion or concealment […] That is why I am writing and longing for you."[51] In this passage, Cicero adopts a familiar tone to depict himself as vulnerable, highlighting an emotional instability that works to emphasize his yearning for Atticus' presence.[52] Moreover, he implicitly reveals that letter writing becomes the best medium to cure his longing; the act of writing to Atticus is what alleviates his suffering. Indeed, Wilcox argues that these kinds of letters simultaneously console and evoke desire for both writer and reader: "they offer to both partners comfort derived from writing, from reading, even from caressing the physical text. Yet, these letters also provoke desire even as they satisfy it, and so the writers of these letters produce additional sets, which may renew satisfaction but also, in turn, desire."[53] In this way, exchanging letters both relieves and stimulates further longing for a friend, explaining Cicero's insatiable request for more letters from Atticus. For

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[49] Wilcox, *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome*, 5.

[50] Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*, 31.

[51] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 65. "[N]ihil mihi nunc scito tam deesse quam hominem eum quocum omnia quae me cura aliqua adficiunt una communicem, qui me amet, qui sapiat, quicum ego cum loquar nihil fingam, nihil dissimulem, nihil obtegam […] qua re te expectamus, te desideramus" (Cicero, 18.1.18).

[52] As Wilcox explains, "Cicero uses absence and the shared distress occasioned by it as a thematic device that structures the letters." *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome*, 66.

[53] Wilcox, 13.

example, in another letter, Cicero writes, "I hope you will write to me often. If you lack a topic, just put down whatever comes into your head."[54] Evidently, the content of the letter is not what is intriguing to Cicero, it is the receiving of the letter itself.

Gathering current news was another reason Cicero solicited his trusted companion for letters; the friend acts as both a confidante and reliable source of information. In many letters, Cicero passes on important updates about political happenings, and additionally asks Atticus to give advice or input in relation to these events. The reporting of events in Cicero's letters is, as Gregory Hutchinson writes, "as a rule coloured strongly by the personal, political, or artistic motives of the writer."[55] Cicero believed that sharing news was a reciprocal action that occurred among friends. In fact, there are numerous moments in his correspondence in which Cicero expresses frustration for not having received important information from Atticus. In one case, Cicero explicitly reprimands his friend for his inactivity:

> Your letters used to give me not only news of the town, but of the state as well, and not only of the past but the future too. Now unless I pick up something from a passing wayfarer, I must remain in the darkness. So, though I expect you in person pretty soon, do give this boy (I've told him to hurry back to me at once) a nice massive letter, full of news and also of your own comment, and mind you let me know what day you are leaving Rome.[56]

Through a comparison of Atticus' previous "good" epistolary behavior with his now "bad" habit, Cicero makes his dissatisfaction obvious. He even dramatizes the situation by portraying himself as having to gather information from random persons, as if to say that news is best received from

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[54] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, I:45. "[T]u velium saepe ad nos scribas. [S]i rem nullam habebis, quod in boccam venerit scribito" (Cicero, 12.1.12).

[55] Hutchinson, *Cicero's Correspondence: A Literary Study*, 9.

[56] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, I:97. "[E]tenim litterae tuae non solum quid Romae sed etiam quid in re publica, neque solum quid fieret verum etiam quit futurm esset indicabant. [N]unc, nisi si quid ex praetereunte viatore exceptum est, scire nihil possumus. [Q]ua re, quamquam iam te ipsum exspecto, tamen isti puero, quem ad me statim iussi recurrere, da ponderosam aliquam epistulam plenam omnium non modo actorum sed etiam opinionum tuaru, ac diem quo Roma sis exiturus cura ut sciam" (Cicero, 32.2.2).

those near and dear. He concludes with a request for a lengthy letter—writing long letters was considered a sign of affection—filled with current events and commentary. In this instance and as in the previous letter, we see the inner workings of Cicero's friendship with Atticus. Not only does Cicero use epistolary writing to portray his pining for Atticus' presence, but he also communicates his desire to receive news from him.

When Petrarch uncovered Cicero's letters in the Cathedral Library of Verona in 1345 that had been missing for centuries, he was immediately moved by the familiarity, spontaneity, and intimacy with which the Roman politician wrote. This discovery sparked within him a desire to write and publish his own collection of letters, the *Rerum familiarum libri* (more commonly referred to as the *Familiares*), which would effectively change the cultural landscape of early modern Europe by "reinvigorating the familiar letter book."[57] The *Familiares* features 350 Latin epistles that were written between 1325 and 1366, and were organized, edited, and assembled by Petrarch into twenty-four books from 1345 to 1366.[58] Petrarch's meticulous curation of his own letters reveals his dedication "to promote his cultural agenda and to convey an idealized self-portrait."[59] Unlike the letters of Elisabetta and Isabella that circulated solely among family members or others close to them, Petrarch's letters are "quasi-public documents," explicitly meant for a literary audience that could

[57] Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*, 50. In his old age, Petrarch published eighteen more books of letters known as the *Rerum senilium libri*.

[58] Over the course of these years, Petrarch rearranged his letters into an ordering of his liking. He additionally shared the work with close friends, even reading aloud select missives to those close to him asking for their feedback. Aldo S. Bernardo, "Introduction," in *Letters on Familiar Matters*, by Francesco Petrarca, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, vol. 1 (New York: Italica Press, 2005), xvii–xxxii. For more on his epistolary project as a whole see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Petrarch's Epistolary Epic: Letters on Familiar Matters," in *Reception of the Classics: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Classical Tradition*, ed. William Brockliss et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 97–107.

[59] Lynn Lara Westwater, "The Uncollected Poet," in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 302.

actively engage in the ethical and philosophical discussions they presented.[60] While some of the letters were sent to their addressees, others appear never to have been mailed. The *Familiares* even comprises letters addressed to those long dead, including Cicero, Seneca, Epicurus, and Virgil. All of the letters, whether sent or not, were most likely subject to some kind of revision, which illuminates the self-conscious quality of Petrarch's epistolary project.

Eden characterizes Petrarch's finding of Cicero's letters as setting "the primal scene for the Renaissance discovery of intimacy."[61] Through Ciceronian epistolary imitation, Petrarch adopts a tone of familiarity in his letters that recreates the sense of immediacy and urgency found in direct communication. In the opening letter of the *Familiares* addressed to his "Socrates" (the pseudonym he gives to his friend Ludwig Van Kempen), Petrarch implements a familiar tone. In contemplating the devastating effects of the Black Plague on their lives, Petrarch begins the letter with a question, cast through personal and affectionate language: "What are we to do now, dear brother?"[62] In fact, the question posed "draws the reader unceremoniously into an ongoing conversation between intimate friends."[63] This was indeed Petrarch's aim. Later in this same letter, Petrarch tells his readers to enjoy "this plain, domestic, and friendly style" of his, and to expect to find "many things in these letters written in a friendly style to a number of friends."[64] That "friendly style" to which he refers is the same intimate style of Cicero.[65] Petrarch not only writes to his contemporary friends in this tone,

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[60] Nancy Struever, *Theory as Practice: Ethical Inquiry in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

[61] Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*, 50.

[62] Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, vol. 1 (New York: Italica Press, 2005), 3. "Quid vero nun agimus, frater?" *Epistolae Familiares* (Rome: Biblioteca Italiana, 2004), I.1.1.

[63] Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*, 54.

[64] Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, 2005, 1:6, 10. "[H]oc mediocre domesticum et familiare dicendi […] Multa igitur hic familiartier ad amicos." *Epistolae Familiares*, I.1.16, I.1.33.

[65] In fact, Petrarch specifically nominates Cicero as his guide and not Seneca. He writes, "Seneca chided Cicero for this very thing although I must confess that I shall for the most part follow the example of Cicero

but he also addresses past historical figures in the same manner. He treats Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, and others as though he knew them personally, as though they were close friends.[66]

Like Cicero, Petrarch used letters to lament absence and make the absent friend present, continuing the idea that letters are one of the most useful mediums to keep bonds of friendship alive.[67] For example, another letter written to one of Petrarch's earliest and closest friends, Philippe de Cabassoles, Bishop of Cavaillon, Petrarch informs Philippe that his departure and subsequent return home have emotionally affected him and the community around them. He writes,

> I am happy to hear that you have returned from your long journey. With my palms turned heavenward I exclaim with Anchises: "So you come at last […] over what lands, what wide, wide seas you have made your journey, and now you are here with me!" But how could I not greatly rejoice at the safe return of a father so dear and deserving of my love? With me rejoices the entire church which you left leaderless for two months that seemed longer than two years […] Absence is always unpleasant for those who love, but it is sometimes useful for arousing affection. Just as it is good for a field to lie fallow, so it is with personal relations; and just as a temporary interruption improves crops, so does it produce a more abundant harvest of pleasure for the spirit. In truth this agricultural law applies to barren lands as the rule on friendship does to tepid spirits. Just as those who cultivate their fields with some success have no need for such absences, neither do I nor do all those whose spirit burns with love for you. Rather we desire and seek that you always be present, if possible, and never absent from our sight.[68]

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more than that of Seneca in these letters." Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, 2005, 1:10. "[Q]uamquam in his epystolis magna ex parte Ciceronis potius quam Senece morem sequar." *Epistolae Familiares*, I.1.32.

[66] Book XXIV contains most of the letters addressed to ancients. In his letters to Cicero (XXIV.2–3), Petrarch assumes a familiar tone and explains to his dead correspondent how discovering his letters allowed him gain personal insight into Cicero's life. See Stephen Hinds, "Petrarch, Cicero, Virgil: Virtual Community in Familiares 24, 4," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 52 (2004): 157–75; Gur Zak, "Petrarch and the Ancients," in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch* (Cambridge, UK: Casanova, 2015), 141–53.

[67] Struever, *Theory as Practice: Ethical Inquiry in the Renaissance*, 8.

[68] Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, vol. 2 (New York: Italica Press, 2005), 118.

> Reducem te peregrinatione longissimia letus audio et tensis ad celum palmis cum Anchise ordior: "Venisti tandem […] Quas ego te terras et quanta per equora vectum Accipio!" Quidni autem gratuler tantum et tam bene de me meritum patrem sospitem michi restitui? Tota mecum gaudet ecclesia, quam bimestri spatio, quod polusquam bienne visum est, acephalam reliquisti. Totus amantissimus ille grex tuus exoptatum pastoris sui plaudit ad reditum, serenissime semperque mitissime iubar frontis aspiciens, benesuade ac salutifere sonum vocis audiens leta pascua designantem, ad hec et leve iugum et pastoralem baculum suavissimum recognoscens […] Molesta quidem amantibus semper absentia sed interdum utilis excistandis affectibus; multos ego arbitror

Petrarch opens the letter by expressing his joy upon hearing about Philippe's return. He confirms these sentiments through literary allusion, quoting from Book VI of the *Aeneid*. Here, Petrarch cites the words of Anchises in the moment that he reunites with his son, Aeneas, in the underworld. Petrarch therefore equates Anchises' fatherly sentiment of longing to be with Aeneas, his son, to his own personal desire to be with Phillippe, his friend. He also details how Philippe's going away has distorted his temporal sense: "two months that seemed longer than two years." He then proposes an interesting hypothesis on the cultivation of friendship; from dwelling on his friend's departure and homecoming, he concludes that being apart only strengthens and excites bonds between close friends ("Absence is always unpleasant for those who love, but it is sometimes useful for arousing affection"). In other words, absence only makes the heart grow fonder. From here, Petrarch then includes an extended discussion on friendship that allows him to further reflect on his conclusion. He uses agricultural metaphors—specifically that of the harvest—to affirm that absence is a necessary requisite to enhance and fortify personal relations in the same way that interruption of the harvest improves later crop production. However, Petrarch plays devil's advocate. He argues that absence is not always a requirement to stimulate friendships and that it is indeed not necessary in his relationship with Philippe. In the end, Petrarch builds an argument only to contradict it.

It is not just the familiar style with which Petrarch writes that demonstrates how his letters are relevant to the friendship *topos*. As shown in the letter addressed to Philippe, Petrarch also includes philosophical discussions on the ethics of friendship in order arrive at his own conclusions;

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quonam cultu sis colendus presens per absentiam didicisse; ut enim ruris sic convictus multui prodesse solet intermissio, et cessatio temporalis sicut frugum ex novalibus, sic ex animis uberiorem messem dilectionis elicere. Verum hec et in terris sterilibus agriculture lex et in animis tepidis amicitie regula locum habet; contra autem, sicut qui felicius arvum colunt, sic ego cum tuis omnibus quibus animus desiderio ardens est, tali vicissitudine non egemus; semper potius te presentem, si fieri possit, nullamque tui vultus eclipsim oculis nostris occurrere et cupimus et rogamus. *Epistolae Familiares*, XI.15.1-3.

to use Nancy Struever's words, he confronts "friendship as a moral topic."[69] By doing this, he builds a literary readership and calls upon his readers to respond to and reflect on these same issues. In this way, his letters, in addition to the humanist tradition of letter books he inaugurates, differ from the epistolary writing of Elisabetta and Isabella. Nevertheless, Petrarch's letters are still important for their continuation of Cicero's intimate epistolary style into the Renaissance.[70] This same intimate style that Petrarch brings back to life carries through into other types of epistolary writing, like in the correspondence between Elisabetta and Isabella.

II. Elisabetta Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este: Their Lives, Letters, and Friendship

A. United by Marriage: The Princesses' Lives and Their Gonzagan Tie

Both Elisabetta and Isabella came from families of immense prestige. Elisabetta was born in 1471 to the third marchese of Mantua, Federico I Gonzaga (1441–1484), and German noblewoman, Margarete von Wittelesbach of Bavaria (1441–1479). Isabella was the daughter of Ercole I d'Este (1431–1505), duke of Ferrara, and Eleonora d'Aragona (1450–1493), daughter of King Ferrante of Naples (1423–1494). Like most women of noble patronage, Elisabetta and Isabella were betrothed young: Elisabetta at the age of sixteen to Guidobaldo da Montefeltro (1472–1508), the son and successor of Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), the duke of Urbino; and Isabella, even younger, at the age of six to Francesco Gonzaga (1466–1519), future marchese of Mantua. Elisabetta lived at her family's court in Mantua for the first eighteen years of her life before she moved to Urbino to assume her title as duchess in 1488, while Isabella left Ferrara at sixteen to reign with her husband as marchesa of Mantua just two years later in 1490.

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[69] Struever, *Theory as Practice: Ethical Inquiry in the Renaissance*, 9.

[70] The first print edition of Petrarch's *Familiares* appeared in 1492 by a Venetian press. They were reprinted in 1501, 1503, 1551, 1554, and 1581. Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity: Letters and Letter Collections," 38; Michele Feo, "Francesco Petrarca," in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Enrico Malato, vol. 10 (Rome: Salerno, 2001), 274.

While their elite origins and the status of their marriages certainly set an auspicious precedent for their future as some of the most influential women in sixteenth-century Italy, Elisabetta and Isabella fully embraced their roles, excelling at fostering artistic and humanist culture in both Urbino and Mantua. As marchesa of Mantua, Isabella quickly earned a reputation for her dynamic personality and exquisite taste.[71] As Sarah Cockram notes, "she deployed conscious self-fashioning and careful image management to direct her position within the restrictions placed on the Italian Renaissance noblewoman."[72] Isabella's contemporaries saw her as a persuasive politician, aficionado of luxurious goods, and avid collector of art and poetry. She was also a sought-out patron, with notable intellectuals like Mario Equicola (1470–1525), Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), and Matteo Bandello (1485–1561) who paid her tribute and dedicated their works to her. Elisabetta also successfully cultivated a respectable image for herself. She, too, was admired as a cultured woman who, through her patronage of well-known intellectuals like Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) and Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), was able to strengthen the cultural capital of Urbino.[73] Despite the difficulties Elisabetta faced in her life—she was routinely sick with health issues, her husband suffered from gout, and she and Guidobaldo were unable to produce any heirs—Elisabetta was

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[71] As Shemek explains, many are familiar with Isabella as being a popular "personality" of the Italian Renaissance. Shemek, "Introduction," 1. Many biographies and even historical novels have been written about her. A few include Julia Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 2 vols. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1903); Edith Patterson Meyer, *First Lady of the Renaissance: A Biography of Isabella d'Este* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970); Massimo Felisatti, *Isabella d'Este: La primadonna del Rinascimento* (Milan: Bompiani, 1982); Daniela Pizzagalli, *La signora del Rinascimento: vita e splendori di Isabella d'Este alla corte di Mantova* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001).

[72] Sarah Cockram, *Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga: Power Sharing at the Italian Renaissance Court* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 5–6.

[73] Many are familiar with Elisabetta as a character in Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1528) who represents the ideal courtly woman. Indeed, most of the scholarship on Elisabetta has focused on Castiglione's portrayal of her. In comparison to the scholarship and popular literature that has been written on Isabella, much less has focused on Elisabetta's life. See Chiara Continisio and Raffaele Tamalio, "Introduzione," in *Donne Gonzaga a corte. Reti istituzionali, pratiche culturali e affari di governo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2018), xv–xxx; Uberto Motta, "Per Elisabetta. Il ritratto della duchessa di Urbino nel 'Cortegiano' di Castiglione," *Lettere Italiane* 56, no. 3 (2004): 442–61.

regularly praised for her modesty, reserved demeanor, and fortitude; Baldassare Castiglione famously describes her in *Il Cortegiano* as a tempered and virtuous woman whom all aspired to imitate: "parea che tutti alla qualità e forma di lei temperasse; onde ciascuno questo stile imitare si sforzava, pigliando quasi una norma di bei costumi della presenzia d'una tanta e così virtuosa signora."[74]

As children, the two princesses were given the tools necessary to become leading ladies of the Renaissance court; they each received a thorough humanist education and were regularly surrounded by famous scholars and artists at their home courts. They also had influential mothers, from whom they most likely learned what was expected for them in their future roles as princely consorts.[75] When comparing their upbringing to that of other noblewomen of the time, it seems as though their preparation was more comprehensive and exceptional.[76] Elisabetta, along with her younger sister Maddalena, shared various humanist tutors including Gianmario Filelfo (1426–1480), Colombino da Verona (1440–1482), and Silvestro Calandra (1450–1503).[77] Isabella's first tutor in Latin was Battista Guarino (1435–1513) who commented on her high intelligence at such a young age, noting that she was already able to read Cicero and Virgil in Latin at fifteen.[78] Her love for the classics as well as vernacular literature carried into her new life in Mantua where she routinely made

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[74] Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Bruno Maier (Turin: UTET, 1981), I.4. For a translation see Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002), 13.

[75] Cockram, *Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga: Power Sharing at the Italian Renaissance Court*, 18.

[76] Cecil H. Clough, "Daughters and Wives of the Montefeltro: Outstanding Bluestockings of the Quattrocento," *Renaissance Studies* 10 (1996): 31; Shemek, "Isabella d'Este and the Properties of Persuasion," 110.

[77] Clough, "Daughters and Wives of the Montefeltro: Outstanding Bluestockings of the Quattrocento," 44; Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche* (Rome: Arnaldo Forni, 1893), 6.

[78] Luzio and Renier, *La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, 3.

requests for books, even asking for renowned editions of certain texts she greatly admired.[79] Her library in Mantua included works of Greek philosophy, Latin classics, and numerous vernacular writings including those by Dante and Petrarch.[80] Both Elisabetta and Isabella also took on extracurricular activities like embroidery, music playing, and horseback riding. In a letter to Federico Gonzaga, Elisabetta and Maddalena's governess, Violante de' Pareti describes the sisters as diligent in their studies, excellent embroiderers, and fine horseback riders.[81] Isabella, too, was proficient in these activities, but she was also praised for her musical abilities; she knew how to play keyboard and other stringed instruments.[82]

Isabella and Elisabetta first met in 1488, when Elisabetta stopped in Ferrara on her way to celebrate her marriage to Guidobaldo in her new home of Urbino.[83] However, the two truly began their friendship when Isabella arrived at the court of Mantua in February of 1490 to marry Francesco, Elisabetta's eldest brother to whom she was especially close.[84] Therefore, the two were

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[79] For example, in 1505 Isabella requested printed copies of Virgil from the Venetian printer Aldo Manuzio, who also later sent her various volumes of Juvenal, Persius, Martial, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Lucan. She also asked for copies of works by authors she knew personally, such as Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441–1494) and Niccolò da Coreggio (1450–1508). Jennifer Cavalli, "Between the Convent and the Court: Isabella d'Este and Female Community in the Renaissance" (PhD diss., Bloomington, Indiana University, 2011), 56.

[80] Shemek, "Introduction," 8.

[81] Julia Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, vol. 1 (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1903), 89.

[82] Shemek, "Introduction," 8. For more on Isabella and her musical endeavors see Iain Fenlon, "Isabella d'Este e i suoi contemporanei. Musica e mecenatismo presso le corti dell'Italia settentrionale," in *Bernardo Clesio e il suo tempo*, ed. Paolo Prodi (Città di Castello: Bulzoni, 1988), 607–36; Iain Fenlon, "Music and Learning in Isabella d'Este's Studiolio," in *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna: 1450-1550*, ed. Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko, and Leandro Ventura (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), 353–68; William F. Prizer, "Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo Da Pavia, Master Instrument-Maker," *Early Music History* 2 (1982): 87–127; William F. Prizer, "Isabella d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia as Patrons of Music: The Frottola at Mantua and Ferrara," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38 (1985): 1–33.

[83] Luzio and Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, 51.

[84] Francesco assumed the role of marchese of Mantua at the age of eighteen when their father, Federico I Gonzaga, died in 1484. With the absence of both their parents (their mother had also died five years prior), Francesco became in charge of looking out for his younger siblings. His sisters, especially Elisabetta, looked

officially sisters-in-law; and, indeed they often refer to each other as *soror* (Latin for sister) in their letters. Katherine McIver aptly argues that the correspondence between elite, learned women who were linked through marriage often worked as a mechanism to promote their interests as well as those of their families.[85] Additionally, as Evelyn Welch has shown, courtly women had their own systems of references—horizontal and vertical connections as she classifies them—that sometimes surpassed those of their male counterparts. Horizontal connections were relationships among social equals and composed of relationships between courts established by marriage or by blood, including familial ties and close friendships. Vertical connections instead included those between women of different social classes in the same court, like those between noblewoman and handmaids.[86] Elisabetta and Isabella undoubtedly shared a horizontal connection, since they were joined together by their Gonzagan connection.

As husband to Isabella and brother to Elisabetta, Francesco played an integral part in the development and continuation of their bond. In addition to the missives Elisabetta and Isabella addressed to each other, they also often spoke of one another in letters sent to Francesco. Either they wrote to Francesco when they were together, updating him on the happenings of their days spent together or they sent him letters while they were apart, asking the marchese to pass along warm wishes to the other. For instance, in March of 1490, just a month after Isabella and Francesco's wedding, Francesco organized Elisabetta and Isabella's first of many trips to Lake Garda. The short vacation was purely for pleasure, allowing the women to get to know one another

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up to him dearly even as a paternal figure, which helps explain the close nature of their relationship. Luzio and Renier, 7.

[85] Katherine A. McIver, "Two Emilian Noblewomen and Patronage Networks in the Cinquecento," in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, by Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001), 161.

[86] Welch, "Women as Patrons and Clients in the Courts of Quattrocento Italy," 23.

and enjoy each other's company.[87] Together, the women ate well, went horseback riding, and took long walks along the waterfront. To assure that everything was running smoothly, Isabella sent Francesco updates about their trip:

> Hozi doppo disinare cum bona licentia de la Signoria Vostra andaremo la illustrissima madama duchessa de Urbino et io a cena a Goito. Domane [andaremo] a Capriana dove venirà la moglie del Signore Fracasso et zobia andaremo sul laco de Garda secundo l'ordine de la Signoria Vostra, et de questo ne ho datto aviso ali magnifici rectori de Verona per havere le ganzare a Sermione et pregatoli che se per ventura non potessimo retornare la sera a Capriana ne vogliano fare accommodare de qualche allogiamenti per la nocte. Raccommandome in bona gratia de la Excellentia Vostra. Que diu felix valeat.[88]

Writing letters to family members while away on trips was a standard practice for noblewomen of the period.[89] As such, the letter above primarily functions to detail Elisabetta and Isabella's travels from Goito (a town just outside of Mantua) to Cavriana (a town further north of Goito) to Sirmione (a town on the southern shore of Lake Garda) and to inform her husband of their possible lodging arrangements. We cannot characterize Isabella's language as intimate here, for, as James explains, travel letters of this kind "were prompted not by a creative urge but by duty, since there was a clear expectation that a wife would acknowledge her husband's continuing authority by providing a close account of her activities during absences from the home."[90] This letter instead makes apparent Francesco's role in the princesses' friendship.[91] Though in traveling together without the supervision

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[87] In fact, from the few letters that were written about their trip to Lake Garda, it immediately becomes easy to see the affection between the two sisters-in-law that was starting to take shape. Luzio and Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, 54.

[88] 25 March 1490, Mantua, busta 2106, carta 355r, Archivio Gonzaga (AG), Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn). Transcriptions are my own, unless otherwise indicated. For clarity, I have updated punctuation, word divisions, and accents. Additionally, I have regularized capitalization. Round brackets indicate illegibility of the document, while square brackets designate my own insertions used for clarification.

[89] Carolyn James, "The Travels of Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua," *Studies in Travel Writing* 13, no. 2 (2009): 100.

[90] James, 101.

[91] Though this particular letter does not appear sentimental, Elisabetta and Isabella did write other letters to Francesco in which they express their mutual longing to be in his presence. For example, in another letter sent to Francesco two weeks later on 28 March 1490 while the women were still at Lake Garda, Isabella

of their husbands, Elisabetta and Isabella experienced increased mobility outside the home, it was still Francesco, a male authority figure, who set the boundaries within which their friendship was able to flourish. In the context of this particular letter, the marchese arranged their trip to Lake Garda: "andaremo sul laco de Garda *secondo l'ordine de la Signoria Vostra*." Perhaps in arranging this trip, Francesco wanted his sister and new wife to cultivate a lasting relationship in efforts to continue stable relations between Mantua and Urbino. Alternatively, his motivation to join the two together could have been more personal, keeping Elisabetta's and Isabella's best interests at heart. For Elisabetta, the short vacation could have been a way for her to cope with the nostalgia she felt since leaving her natal home of Mantua, for during the early years of her marriage, she often asked Francesco to visit her in Urbino.[92] For Isabella, the trip could have been a way to help her adjust to her new life in the Lombard city-state.

Though the closeness Isabella and Elisabetta shared was certainly beneficial to the alliance between the courts of Mantua and Urbino, the women's Gonzagan relation does not solely explain the depths of their bond, especially since ties between courtly sisters-in-law not always evolved into

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wrote: "Io insieme cum la illustrissma madonna duchessa nostra comune sorella sto bene. Né altro ce manca per nostra consolatione se non la presentia de la Signoria Vostra ala quale prego Dio conceda bono et prospero viagio cum presto ritorno, et a la sua bona gratia me recommando sempre insieme cum la predetta madama duchessa." 28 March 1490, Mantua, b. 2106, c. 364r, AG, ASMn.

[92] For example, in a letter sent to her eldest brother on 21 July 1488, Elisabetta uses hyperbolic language to express her yearning for Francesco to visit her. In the letter, Elisabetta adopts a mock threatening tone, writing that Francesco had better stick to his word and make an appearance soon in Urbino. If he does not come, she threatens to take matters into her own hands by coming over to him on a horse. However, she hopes the situation will not reach that point: "Non prolongi più el termine. Perché s'el me fusse cussi licito a me como a lei non seria stata a questa hora a venire a vistarla, che me pare cento anni non l'havere veduta e gli sciò dire che se la me inganna quest'altra volta serrà difficile che me possa contenere che non monti un zorno a cavallo et la vengi a vedere. Però la prego me voglia mantenere la fede sua et non me dare questa occasione." 21 July 1488, Urbino, b. 1066, c. 138, AG, ASMn.

friendship.[93] On the contrary, their friendship blossomed and deepened due to the solace they found in one another over the course of their lives, traces of which we find in their correspondence.

B. Expressing and Reciprocating Intimacy in the Princesses' Correspondence

Elisabetta's and Isabella's exceptional upbringing and preparation across different disciplines fueled their admiration for literature, art, and music, influencing their rule as princely consorts in Urbino and Mantua. While their backgrounds certainly positioned them well for becoming successful patrons of the arts, their educational formation also informed their letter writing. We have yet to estimate how many letters Elisabetta sent overall in her lifetime. However, we surmise that it was a large number, considering the number of people with whom she corresponded. It was perhaps not as high as the number of letters Isabella wrote, which has been estimated to be over 16,000 between 1490 and 1539. As examined earlier, for courtly women epistolary communication served various purposes that ultimately afforded them a kind of agency not all early modern women could obtain. Indeed, Elisabetta's and Isabella's letters functioned to gather and deliver news, delegate administrative affairs, and most importantly for this chapter, maintain their close rapport.

The majority of the princesses' letters are preserved today at the Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn), Elisabetta's as originals since they were incoming mail and Isabella's mostly in the form of bound copybooks or *copialettere*.[94] The two women exchanged hundreds of letters with each other over the course of their lives from 1490, the year Isabella married Francesco, to 1526, the year of Elisabetta's death. The corpus of their correspondence available at the Mantuan state archive

[93] For example, let us consider Isabella's relationship to one of her other sisters-in-law, Lucrezia Borgia, who married her brother Alfonso I. The two were civil to one another, but Isabella famously initiated an intense rivalry with her. See Isabella d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Deanna Shemek (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017), 170n101.

[94] Prior to sending out letters via trustworthy couriers, chancery secretaries transcribed their contents into these copybooks for preservation. Shemek, "Introduction," 12.

currently totals 670 letters: Elisabetta's side comprises 482 letters, while Isabella's totals 188. Though these numbers point to an obvious imbalance in their correspondence—the sum of Elisabetta's missives outweighs Isabella's—this corpus is evidently incomplete for various reasons.[95] Apparently, a substantial amount of Isabella's correspondence was not copied, thus leaving a part of her epistolary production unaccounted for. Moreover, the letters in this study do not cover those that may be spread out among other archives outside of Mantua. Nevertheless, the letters we do have provide substantial evidence that allows us to reflect on the nature of their close bond.

In examining their available correspondence, which spans from 1490 to 1526, a minor shift in the topics discussed and language used appears around 1509.[96] Affectionate letters extend throughout the entirety of their exchanges, however their letters from 1509 onward reveal a slightly stronger preoccupation with bureaucratic, political, and familial affairs. For example, once Eleonora, Isabella's eldest child, married into the court of Urbino in 1509, many of the exchanges between the two sisters-in-law focus solely on her including the precarious behavior of Eleonora's spouse, news of her pregnancies and childbirths, and her overall wellbeing. While a study of their letters exchanged throughout the entirety of their thirty-six-year friendship is for a later project, my analysis here focuses primarily on letters exchanged between 1490 and 1496, years when their relationship was just forming and burgeoning into an enduring, mature bond.

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[95] Up until this point, I have been unable to locate letters exchanged between the two women for the years 1518, 1519, and 1521.

[96] The question of whether this change in subject matter and language in their letters points to a brief fracture in their friendship is work for a later project. Indeed, between the years 1509 and 1511, Elisabetta and Isabella may have experienced a rift in their friendship. From the middle of 1509 to early 1510, Francesco was captured by Venetian forces and imprisoned, leaving Isabella to rule over Mantua. During this time, Isabella's daughter, Eleonora, was betrothed to Francesco Maria della Rovere, the adopted son of Elisabetta and Guidobaldo. While Elisabetta pressed Isabella to quicken the finalization of their marriage (including Eleonora's dowry), Isabella requested patience and understanding from her friend. The marchesa argued that it was exceedingly difficult for her to make these wedding arrangements due to the financial and emotional cost of Francesco's captivity.

At this juncture in their friendship—at its onset—I believe that letter writing served an important purpose in helping to establish their close relationship beyond their tie as sisters-in-law. To illustrate this argument, I examine their friendship through the following ways in which they used letter writing to express and return intimacy: letters as a medium to alleviate geographical distance, letters to advance in-person contact, and letters to console and to give gifts. Using their friendship letters as a case study, I also propose that epistolary writing not only gave noblewomen the opportunity to practice friendship in the familiar style classical and humanist authors modeled, but also allowed them to find their own real ways of expressing intimacy as women.

i. "Visitare cum Lettere:" Letters to Alleviate Geographical Distance

Like many Renaissance correspondents, Elisabetta and Isabella relied on letter writing to bridge the temporal and geographical gaps that separated them. In their exchanges, they exhibit an understanding of the letter's ability to perform and reproduce the kind of intimacy embodied in face-to-face contact, especially when meeting in person proved to be impossible. They compensate for each other's physical absence through the sending back and forth of letters, ensuring that both parties participated in this mutual exchange. This practice ultimately worked to make each virtually present to the other, as the friend's letters—especially those written in her own hand—could be kept as remembrances or artifacts to look back upon, thus heightening the intimacy letter writing engenders.[97]

One of their exchanges from February of 1496 precisely exhibits Elisabetta's and Isabella's use of letter writing as a medium to relieve the pain generated by the friend's absence. From

[97] Shemek has persuasively singled this out as one of the most defining characteristics of Isabella's extensive correspondence. Regarding mostly letters addressed to her family in Ferrara after her marriage to Francesco in 1490, Shemek writes, "Isabella aimed to fill the space of her family's absence with text, in a production of letters that could aptly be called elegiac, so filled is her language with images of mourning." "Isabella d'Este and the Properties of Persuasion," 284.

November 1495 to the beginning of 1496, Elisabetta and Isabella spent significant time together as the duchess celebrated the Christmas holidays with her natal family in Mantua. Overall though, 1496 was a year tainted with difficulty for both women. Their husbands were away at war intermittently; Francesco was in Naples helping King Fernandino reestablish power and Guidobaldo was mostly in Bracciano fighting against the Orsini on behalf of Pope Alexander VI.[98] Additionally, Isabella was pregnant with her second child, Margherita, who would die just a couple months after her birth in September of that same year. Once Elisabetta left Mantua to return home to Urbino after the holidays, Isabella wrote her a rather melancholic missive in which she plays up Elisabetta's absence in order to justify a request:

> Credo ben che Vostra Signoria habia preso displicentia assai della partita sua de qui per essere tutta dolce et amorevole, ma non voglio già credere che la sia magiore de la mia. Perché se lei parte da soi fratelli et sorelle, va a vedere et godere lo illustrissimo signore suo consorte. Ma io resto non solum priva de la fidele et grata conversatione sua, ma anchora de la persona del signore mio consorte, quale va ad impresa periculosa et difficile como scia Vostra Signoria. Le vero ch'el resta qua la illustrissima madonna archiduchessa nostra comune sorella che serrà ad me de gran refrigero. Ma non sciò mo' qual de nui habia magiore bisogno de essere confortate. Perhò senza una persona de mezo che non sia in tanta passione non stiamo bene, né poteremo pigliare troppo consolatione. De la partita dunque de Vostra Signoria meritamente dovemo sentire magiore dolore. Uno remedio serrà a leviarlo, se la Signoria Vostra me scriverà spesso: perché legendo le lettere sue me redurrò a memoria mille piaceri che per la dolce conversatione nostra havemo preso insieme. Racommandome ala Signoria Vostra et pregola me recommando alo illustrissimo signore suo consorte et Signore Octaviano, non se scordando de Madonna Emilia.[99]

In a number of ways, Isabella's evokes Elisabetta's absence as a cause of her own loneliness. Already in the letter's opening, the marchesa argues that she takes greater displeasure in Elisabetta's departure than does the duchess herself, signaling the missive's confessional tone. Isabella provides an example to further this point by comparing her homelife to Elisabetta's, specifically by

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[98] James Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino, Illustrating the Arms, Arts, and Literature of Italy, 1440–1630*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), 344; *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 81n178.

[99] 22 February 1496, Mantua, b. 2992, libro 6, c. 29r, AG, ASMn. For a translation of this letter see d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 81–82.

referencing the fact that not only is she without Elisabetta's steadfast and pleasant conversation, but she is also without her consort while Elisabetta may return home where Guidobaldo awaits her. In this moment, the marchesa feigns a competition over who is the lonelier and pretends to take pride in her victory, which on the contrary is a loss. Isabella adds another reason why Elisabetta's absence weighs heavily on her: even though Chiara Gonzaga, Elisabetta's younger sister, is with Isabella, her presence does not fulfill the marchesa's emotional void. Perhaps this was because Isabella's and Chiara's husbands, fighting on opposite sides of the war between France and Naples, were away on military duty.[100] Isabella even suggests that Elisabetta acted as a mitigator who helped the other two women deal with their anxieties concerning their faraway husbands, but now that she is gone, they have no one to fill that role and are left miserable. Without Elisabetta, they are both emotionally unwell and not sure which of them (Isabella or Chiara) is in most need of comfort.

Only toward the end of letter do we understand that Isabella plays up her loneliness in order to justify her plea for Elisabetta's letters. Assimilating the duchess' future incoming letters to medicine that serves to heal, Isabella finds that Elisabetta can only offer her peace of mind by writing often. The continuation of the idea that letters could alleviate the friend's absence from Cicero to the princesses' time shows that this was a withstanding trait of epistolary intimacy for men and women alike. Moreover, the reasoning she gives for requesting letters—that the physical act of reading Elisabetta's letters conjures many delightful memories the two have shared together, namely in conversation—furthers this idea. As Shemek has noted, letters functioned as mnemonic tokens for Isabella as "material evidence of the affections its sender bears the recipient."[101] As material

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[100] While Francesco was in service to Venice fighting against the French in Naples, Charles VIII left Gilbert de Montpensier, Chiara's husband, as Viceroy and General to defend Naples. Christopher Hare and Marian Andrews, *Charles de Bourbon, High Constable of France, "The Great Condottiere"* (New York: John Lane, 1911), 19; Luzio and Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, 85–86.

[101] Shemek, "In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire," 285.

reminders of her love for Isabella, Elisabetta's replies compensate for her own absence, and relieve Isabella's subsequent longing for her. Whereas Petrarch dwells on his friend's absence to make a larger philosophical reflection on friendship, Isabella, like Cicero, underscores the effects of Elisabetta's absence with a specific goal in mind: to request and receive letters in order to bring Elisabetta metaphorically closer.

Elisabetta responded to the marchesa's 22 February letter six days later, reciprocating many of the same sentiments Isabella previously expressed. For instance, Elisabetta also indicates that she misses Isabella and longs for their conversation. Most importantly though, she agrees to fulfill Isabella's request for letters, but only on the condition that she return the favor.

> Trovandomi priva della dolce conversatione e presentia de Vostra Signoria, non senza mia grande displicentia, ho eletto almeno quanto più spesso poterò visitarla cum mie lettere sperando per lo medesimo recevere de le suoe. Il che in questa mia partita non mi serà piccolo refrigerio e conforto. Advisoli dumqua come sabbato a sera io gionsi qui a salvamento sana Dio grazia benché alquanto stancha per li contrari tempi havessimo nel maggio. E così atrovai lo illustrissimo signore mio consorte in bona convalescentia e di bona voglia. Me parso darne adviso a Vostra Excelentissima rendendome certa che insieme cum me ne piglarà piaxere. Et ad epsa el predetto signore insieme cum me, et el signore zio e Madonna Emilia de continuo ne recomandamo.[102]

While Elisabetta, like Isabella, emphasizes her friend's absence and its effects, she does not dwell on the other factors that contribute to her loneliness. For example, Elisabetta affirms that her departure from the marchesa also brought her great displeasure, but she does not add anything further. Despite her less dramatic tone, Elisabetta still makes clear her desire for epistolary contact. Her use of the expression "poterò visitarla cum mie lettere" (I will be able to visit you with my letters) a recurring trope in classical and Renaissance letter writing, implies that Isabella's physical presence can be encapsulated in writing and sent via courier. The idea of visiting one through letters suggests an understanding that a sent missive itself is a gift, acting as a proxy for the sender's physical

[102] 28 February 1496, Mantua, b. 1067, c. 11, AG, ASMn.

presence.[103] As a gift and proxy, Elisabetta's letter fulfills Isabella's request, allowing the marchesa, as she said in her previous missive, to reminisce on the "mille piacieri" (thousand pleasures) of their time spent together. The duchess' missive activates Isabella's memories of her, therefore generating and reproducing the intimacy embodied through in-person contact. More significant though is the condition Elisabetta sets for fulfilling her friend's request for letters: she requires that Isabella do the same in return ("lo medesimo recevere de le suoe"). Elisabetta's reply here unveils her understanding of friendship as a mutual give and take, an idea that harks back to classical ideals of *amicitia*. As a real practice, epistolary correspondence becomes the demonstration for friendship, in which two friends must actively do their parts to keep one another happy. In this case, mutual satisfaction signifies sending letters to relieve the pain generated by geographical distance.

Even more preferable than dictated letters from loved ones was receiving their autograph letters. Autograph missives were those penned in hand of the sender. Though Elisabetta and Isabella mostly dictated their letters to personal secretaries, on a few occasions they wrote their own letters. They were rare to receive, making them inherently special. If a friend's letter functioned as a conduit for her physical presence, then a missive written in her own hand further heightened the intimacy of that experience. As Daybell explains, "the act of personally writing a letter imbued it with emotional significance absent from correspondence dictated to a third party."[104] Unlike dictated letters, autograph ones bear the physical markings of their sender, allowing a recipient to feel closer to the sender. Elisabetta and Isabella embraced holograph letters from each other, evident in their reactions upon receiving them.

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[103] Judith Bryce, "Between Friends? Two Letters of Ippolita Sforza to Lorenzo de' Medici," *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 3 (2007): 46.

[104] James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112.

For instance, on 10 May 1493, Isabella's reply to one of Elisabetta's autograph letters illustrates their importance:

> Da uno canto ho preso grande piacere de la lettera che de sua mano me ha scripto la Signoria Vostra per comprehendere el suo ben stare, dal'altro dispiacere per non poterli respondere de mano propria come seria mio debito, et desiderio per retrovarmi sempre ala presentia de la Excellentia de madonna et signori mei fratelli […] Ringraziola quanto più posso del scrivere suo.[105]

The marchesa experiences a "grande piacere" (great pleasure) in learning of Elisabetta's wellbeing precisely because it was transcribed in her own hand. She also apologizes for not replying with a holograph missive of her own, framing it as an expected reciprocation that she cannot fulfill ("as would be my duty"). More importantly though, the marchesa stresses the importance of Elisabetta's hand at the beginning of the letter ("which you wrote in your own hand"). Molly Whalen rightly argues that the "aura of the hand pervades the letter form" in both hand-written and dictated letters.[106] In the case of Isabella and Elisabetta's correspondence, the figure of the hand appears most frequently in their replies to autograph letters. Elisabetta's writing hand becomes an extension of her body and mind, perhaps making her autograph letter most representative of her innermost thoughts and feelings. This emphasis placed on the writing hand fashions the autograph letter as more personal and intimate than its dictated counterpart.

Not only is the writing hand an emblem for the writer's truest feelings, but it is also more symbolic of the sender's physical presence. Even more so than dictated letters, they act as metonymic markers that "encapsulate and transmit the powerful presence of a body to which they

[105] 10 May 1493, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 3, c. 50r, AG, ASMn.

[106] "The Public Currency of the Private Letter: Gender, Class, and Epistolarity in England, 1568–1671" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1994), 42.

were once 'attached.'"[107] On 19 March 1496, Elisabetta reacted enthusiastically to an autograph letter of Isabella's:

> La Vostra Excellentia non mancha in cosa alchuna che non mi faza aperto e manifesto el vero e cordiale amore che mi porta per la sua innata bonta e gentileza, benché non meno ne porto a lei per esserli tucta affectionatissima. E però, quanto più posso la rengratio e del cavallaro a mi mandato a posta de la lettera a mi scripta de sua mano, laqual legendola e relegendola più volte me ha dato un refrigerio e conforto incredibile. Et così per lo medesimo me parso el debito a lei rescrivere de mia mano. Piacerà adunqua a Vostra Excellentia perseverare in questa laudabile usanza per consolatione de l'una e del'altra a ciò non possendose vedere personalmente come seria el nostro desiderio almeno cie visitiamo per lettere.[108]

Elisabetta begins the letter by paying her sister-in-law compliments, singling out the marchesa's warm affection and her innate goodness. Opening with flattery lessens the blow of her inability to send a letter back in her own hand, to which she refers at the end of her letter. Indeed, Elisabetta apologizes for not responding with a holograph text, implementing the word "debito" (debt) to denote her guilt and intend that she owes Isabella one of her own—the identical word Isabella uses in her above reply to indicate the same sentiment.[109] As Amanda Wilcox explains, Seneca in his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* often uses vocabulary of financial obligation such as the verb *debere* (to owe in Latin) to signal that "he is keeping an account (*rationes)* of their exchange, in which individual letters are payments that erase debts (*solvendo*)."[110] Similarly, Elisabetta and Isabella's shared usage of the language of "debito" signals the exchange of autograph missives as another expectation of epistolary communication between close correspondents. Though this prospect was somewhat

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[107] Shemek, "In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire," 289.

[108] 19 March 1496, Urbino, b. 1067, c. 2, AG, ASMn.

[109] Daybell finds this in women's letter writing in Tudor England. He believes these women regularly imply being in someone's "debt" to express their unease or embarrassment of not replying adequately to a friend's missive, whether that be with a dictated or autograph text. *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 161.

[110] Wilcox, *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome*, 101.

illusory since it seldom occurred— it was more often said than done—the idea is there: replying with an autograph letter erases the emotional debt that the first one creates.[111]

We further infer Elisabetta's guilt through her expressed excitement upon receiving Isabella's autograph missive. Similar to Isabella's previous reply, Elisabetta highlights her friend's writing hand to emphasize the uniqueness of the letter because of its enhanced intimacy. She even describes the importance she attaches to this particular letter though repetitive imagery used to describe her act of reading and re-reading Isabella's letter ("laqual legendola e relegendola"). Because as Whalen explains, autograph letters "bear the indelible mark of their author, whose handwriting itself contains his [or her] identity," they further facilitate the conjuring of the friend's image, making her more present.[112] In this case, the act of reading and re-reading Isabella's autograph missive transports the marchesa to where the duchess is, providing Elisabetta with immense relief and comfort. Additionally, Elisabetta's final statement of her missive in which she writes that since they cannot see each other in person as they would like at least they can visit each other through letters ("non possendose vedere personalmente come seria el nostro desiderio almeno de visitiamo per lettere") illuminates once more the exchange of letters as a significant practice at play in their friendship. When face-to-face contact proved impossible, letters helped relieve their geographical separation by making the friend present. Thus, autograph letters may have alleviated this distance even more. from

[111] Justifications for not writing in one's own hand appear frequently throughout Elisabetta and Isabella's correspondence. Shemek notes that this was a characteristic of Isabella's correspondence overall, even in her exchanges with other family members and friends: "the personal writing hand that repeatedly surfaces in their discourse is an absent ideal, symptomatically marked as desirable but paradoxically dismissed as expendable." "In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire," 288.

[112] "The Public Currency of the Private Letter: Gender, Class, and Epistolarity in England, 1568–1671," 42. Moreover, as I discuss later, this idea holds true also for gift exchanges, which Elisabetta and Isabella participated in often with food. In response to receiving dried figs from Elisabetta, Isabella writes, "li fichi che me ha mandato la Signoria Vostra me sono stati carissimi, sì per essere adesso tempo de tal fructi, sì etiam per venire da le mane de la Excellentia Vostra." 3 April 1495, Mantua, b. 2992, l. 5, c.30v, AG, ASMn. Here, Isabella calls attention to Elisabetta's hands to say that this gift is especially welcomed since it bears the duchess' physical marking.

On 19 January 1508, Isabella responded to another letter written in Elisabetta's hand, equating the autograph letter's contents to words shared by mouth. Specifically, Isabella writes in a loving tone about the joy she feels upon receiving a handwritten letter from Elisabetta during a time when they could not chat in person: "Perhò la prego mi habbi excusata como son certa mi haverà, essendo conscia d'il amore gli porto, d'il obligo gli ho, et del piacer ricevo quando non potendo a bocca confabulare cum lei farlo cum lettere di propria mano."[113] Because they are written in the hand of the sender, they could help reproduce the intimacy embodied in physical contact.

ii. "La Dulcissima Conversatione:" Letters to Advance In-Person Contact

Though the princesses' dictated and autograph letters functioned to substitute and even recreate the intimacy embodied in physical contact, the other side of this coin also holds true. For the two friends, letters also served to facilitate their live encounters, acting as a medium to keep their relationship vibrant. As their exchanges attest, Elisabetta and Isabella place a unique importance on their face-to-face conversations. In some cases, they reference missing each other's "conversatione" (conversation), but omit what was specifically discussed, alluding to the significance of the activity itself. In other instances, they express a desire to indulge fully in the details of each other's experiences by exchanging them "in bocca" (by mouth) rather than receiving such news through written contact. They shared an understanding that some stories were best told in person, further implying that letter exchanges do not always foster intimacy in the same way as live discourse. Grounding the desire to converse as a justifiable pretext for visiting each other, the princesses used letter writing as a practical tool to facilitate their next encounters.

Letters exchanged between Elisabetta and Isabella from the end of 1492 into the spring of 1493 aptly illustrate their prizing of in-person communication and their eagerness to spend time with

[113] 19 January 1508, Mantua, b. 2994, l. 20, cc. 86v–87r, AG, ASMn.

each other. The sisters-in-law's mutual yearning to be together worked to advance a girls' trip in June 1493 to Porto Mantovano, a town just outside of Mantua where Isabella had a summer palace to escape the heat. Their correspondence from 1492 shows that the two friends sought continuously to spend time together, but their plans seldom came to fruition. Elisabetta's health fluctuated for most of the year, affecting her ability to travel. Near the end of 1492 however, she believed to be well enough to come to Mantua after the Christmas holiday, the news of which greatly excited Isabella. On 14 November, Isabella wrote her sister-in-law, rejoicing at the prospect of seeing her soon.

> Intesi dal Castellano ultra il scrivere de Vostra Signoria el ben stare suo et la dispositione de venirsene in queste nostre acque facto natale. De l'una e l'altra cosa ho preso inextimabile piacere. Cussì, la prego voglia exequire acciò che possiamo passare questo inverno in consolatione de compagnia; et io in questo mezo andarò numerando li zorni, li quali già me cominciano a parere più longhi del consueto. Tra molti altri rasonamenti che ce accaderemmo fare insieme, haveremo da recontare qualche cossetta deli viagii nostri. Ma spero ch'io haverò matheria de far magior gola a Vostra Signoria che la non haverà lei a me. Raccomandome a quella et pregola me raccomandi a lo illustrissimo signore suo consorte et Signore Octaviano, non se scordando de la reverenda madonna mia comatre.[114]

The marchesa underscores her enthusiasm by calling attention to the activities they will share together. First, she speaks generally, writing that they simply will enjoy each other's company over the long holiday period. Then, she details their soon-to-be union with precision and highlights what she looks forward to the most: conversing with Elisabetta, namely by exchanging entertaining travel stories.[115] Isabella represents the activity of sharing stories as a competition; she hopes Elisabetta will be more engrossed in her stories than she by Elisabetta's. In this way, Isabella communicates her understanding of conversation between friends as a game in which interlocuters must try their best to entertain listeners involved.

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[114] 14 November 1492, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 2, c. 80r. AG, ASMn. For a translation of this letter see d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 51.

[115] Isabella and Elisabetta traveled often and enjoyed sharing competing travel stories with each other. For more on their travel rivalry see James, "The Travels of Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua."

On 6 December, Elisabetta replied to Isabella, reciprocating many of her friend's eager sentiments. She does so by responding directly to Isabella's expressed sense of temporality and her desire for competitive conversation.

> Ho ricevuto doi lettere de la Excellentia Vostra, le quale non me poteriano essere state de magiore consolatione per più respecti […] Ho facto deliberatione tenermelo fino ala venuta mia là, la quale io desidero cum tucto el core per poterme stare in consolatione. Et in piacere cum lo illustrissimo signore marchese mio fratello, cum la Excellentia Vostra, et cum li altri reverendissimi et illustrissimi signori nostri fratelli, né credo per niente che quella ne habia magiore desyderio de me, che se lei numera li giorni, io numero le hore. Et è el vero che conducendomi a rasonare cum la Excellentia Vostra de li viaggi, et de le altre cose viste, me rendo certissima che io seria convincta da lei. Se non che io me refido nelle cose stupende, mirabile, et fuora de omne potentia humana che io ho visto a Roma, ale quale non dubito che la Excellentia Vostra cederà sì bene al'incontro de questo ella potesse alegrare tucto el resto del mondo, quale non po' essere a comparatione alchuna cum Roma, come allora io li narrarò distinctamente cosa per cosa.[116]

The playfulness in Elisabetta's tone features strongly in this missive. In Isabella's previous missive, she expresses anxiousness to see Elisabetta by evoking her skewed sense of temporality: "andarò numerando li zorni li quali già me cominciano a parere più longhi del consueto" (I will number the days that already seem to begin to pass more slowly than usual). With their union on the immediate horizon, time for Isabella moves slowly with each passing day—an idea we saw previously in Petrarch's letters, illustrating the continuity of this kind of expression to communicate longing. Wittily, Elisabetta counters her sister-in-law's claim when she indicates that, in counting down the hours, rather than the days, time passes even more sluggishly for the duchess. By elaborating on her temporal perception, Elisabetta in a light-hearted manner intimates that she yearns for their union more. Additionally, Elisabetta agrees with the marchesa's proposal of partaking in the exchange of exciting travel stories. Encouraging some friendly competition, Elisabetta does not relinquish or downplay her storytelling skills. Instead, she invites Isabella to a challenge, using the rhetorical device of mock competition to argue that she can deliver an engrossing tale of her trip to Rome

[116] 6 December 1492, Urbino, b. 1066, c. 331, AG, ASMn.

"cosa per cosa" (detail by detail) and that even if Isabella can talk about the whole rest of the world, she has to agree that nothing tops Rome. Moreover, while Elisabetta alludes to the grand allure of Rome, she leaves out any minute details, knowing that they are worth waiting to disclose in person rather than through the letter. Deferral is another of their rhetorical devices: for if you already told your best stories, if the stories have already been related by letter, you can only repeat and embellish them in person, rather than reveal and allow the discovery for your interlocuter to happen in real time.

Unfortunately, the princesses' plan to spend winter days together in 1492 fell through. Elisabetta, not fully recovered from her sickness, was unable to travel to Mantua. Her doctors instead sent her to the green hills of Poretta, a province of Perugia, to take in the baths to treat her illness. After the Christmas holiday came to a close, Isabella insisted that Elisabetta come to Mantua for Carnival. However, Elisabetta continued to suffer from stomach problems, and wrote apologetically to Isabella on 5 January that her travels needed to be delayed once again due to a "passione de stomacho" (stomach spasm) that gave her "fastidio assai" (considerable nuisance).[117] In response, Isabella sent a despondent message to the sickly duchess in which she acknowledges Elisabetta's excuse, but nonetheless still accentuates her disappointment.

> Ho recevuto una sua [lettera] per la quale me significa esser sta' necessitata per passione de stomacho pigliare l'aqua de la Poretta, cosa che haverà ad prolongare qualche dì più la partita sua. Lo dispiacere che ne ho preso, et per rispecto de la Excellentia Vostra che sente el male ne la persona, et per el mio che me dà non mediocre passione a l'animo è grandissimo tanti pur inextimabile. Né sciò qual cosa mi possa più indurre a recreatione in questo carnevale, parendome esser certa che tutti li concepti che per la venuta sua havea facto seranno stati exposti al vento. El tempo ch'io pensava spendere in letitia e consolatione insieme cum la Signoria Vostra, convertirò in solitudine, standomene nel mio studiolo a dolermi de questa adversa sua valitudine.[118]

[117] 5 January 1493, Urbino, b. 1066, c. 337, AG, ASMn.

[118] 15 January 1493, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 3 cc. 2v.–3r, AG, ASMn.

Isabella expresses understanding for her friend's ailment, writing that Elisabetta's sickness causes her great pain ("che me dà non mediocre passione a l'animo"). Yet, the marchesa also prioritizes her own sentiments by subtly faulting her friend for the change in plan. Specifically, she insinuates that Elisabetta's absence due to illness precludes their much looked-forward-to activity of conversing and sharing stories. As a result, these plans of socializing and passing time together, in the words of Isabella, have gone to the wind. Isabella further highlights her dissatisfaction through guilt-ridden language; she adds that Elisabetta's absence robbed them of having a good time, ultimately resulting in the marchesa's solitude. Isabella even paints an image of herself, distressed and alone, in her *studiolo*—a specific locale—to add further emotional effect. In fact, as Stephen Campbell has shown, Isabella's *studiolo* acted as a space where she could confront her passions, and here, the marchesa states she will do just that.[119] On the one hand, this letter certainly characterizes Isabella as a melodramatic princess. On the other, it also underscores her priority of connecting with one of her closest female friends in person.

By the spring of 1493, Isabella and Elisabetta still had not seen each other, but the two continued to try to organize a visit. In early May, the doge of Venice invited Isabella to celebrate the city's festivities in honor of Ascension Day. On 14 May, she sent a detailed account of her trip to Francesco, directing copies of this letter as well to her mother and Elisabetta. While Elisabetta reacted keenly to Isabella's letters about her trip to La Serenissima, the duchess anxiously awaited her return to Mantua, where she expected her. In response to her travel letters, Elisabetta sent the following two letters to her friend. The first she sent on 18 May:

> A pieno per littere de Benedecto Codilupo ho inteso et el prospero viaggio di Vostra Signoria et li grandi honori recenti dala secreteria del principe et da la Serenità cum tutto el processo de che ne ho preso tanta letitia quanto a dire fusse possibile. Commo conviense a la extrema beninolenza porto a Vostra Signoria dove spesso mi ritrovo intra due gran desideri: uno che continuo voria intendere quella ritronarsi in triumphi et letitie et in li meriti honori,

[119] See Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este*, 59–86.

> l'altro che voria continuo potermi godere la dulcissima conversatione sua. Et quella ritornasse a reintegrare la seperata nostra conversatione senza laquale io confesso non saper pigliare alcuno compito piasere. Et altro non desidero che essere cum Vostra Signoria quale prego vogli fare bono ritorno et accellerato quanto sia possibile […] In questa dimostratione del sangue di Christo sonno facte belle cose et nove quale per essere lunghe le riservo dire a bocha a Vostra Signoria che mi confido li hanno a piasere molto.[120]

Five days later, on 23 May, she sent the second:

> Io ho habuto tanta letitia per havere inteso commo Vostra Signoria se parte per ritornare al luoco dove cum gran desiderio la expecto. Non rigratiarò quella altramente de li advisi ogni hora mi dà ma solo attenderò a solicitarla che deba venire cum quella celerità sia possibile che senza quella el non mi pare sapere vivere. Et cum tanto zelo la desidero che non me par vedere quella hora che io la possi abrazare. Et benché habia singulare piasere de soi contentamenti deli piaceri et honori a quella sonno facti me lo disturba el gran desiderio ho di vedere Vostra Signoria al quale non scriverò altro, se non che acceleri la sua venuta a comune nostra satisfactione et a quella continuo mi racommando.[121]

Elisabetta communicates a sense of urgency and impatience to see Isabella, noted by the different variants of the verb *accelerare* ("to quicken") such as "accelerato," "celerità," and "acceleri" found in both letters. She also resorts to hyperbolic language to convey the effects of Isabella's absence, specifically through expressions of lack in phrases that begin with *senza* ("without"): "*senza* laquale io confesso non saper pigliare alcuno compito piasere" (without that [Elisbetta's conversation] I admit I do not know how to take up any enjoyable task), and "*senza* quella el non mi pare sapere vivere" (without you I don't think I know how to live) as seen in the second. Arguing that Isabella needs to return home as soon as possible, Elisabetta implements the latter *senza* phrase to communicate her desire for Isabella's physical presence. In contrast, the former *senza* phrase expresses a more precise yearning—to converse with Isabella in real time.

Whereas the previous section illustrated the princesses' reliance on letter writing to bring the friend metaphorically closer, here, the focus shifts to bring each other physically closer by promoting

[120] 18 May 1493, Mantua, b. 1066, c. 358, AG, ASMn.

[121] 23 May 1493, Mantua, b. 1066, c. 360, AG, ASMn.

a future meet up. Elisabetta describes the different ways she could enjoy her sister-in-law's presence. In the first missive, she mentions twice the delight to be had in their conversations: "voria continuo potermi godere la dulcissima conversatione sua" (I would like to be able to continue to enjoy your most sweet conversation) and "facte belle cose et nove per essere lunghe le riservo dire a bocha a Vostra Signoria che mi confido li hanno a piasere molto" (I will wait to tell Your Ladyship the beautiful and novel stories by mouth because I am certain you will enjoy them a lot). In the second, she highlights her excitement at the prospect of embracing Isabella. Elisabetta's stressing of Isabella's sweet conversation and her own news to be delivered "a bocha" (by mouth) reveals the letter's inability in this instance to make up for the intimacy engendered in person. For one, as Elisabetta writes, when there is a wealth of news to share, the letter fails in its delivery because the transcription of that information takes too long. Secondly, and most importantly, the sheer excitement of sharing new and beautiful things that have happened with a friend in person is worth the wait, and this sentiment of anticipation becomes lost in written communication. Because Elisabetta's news is fresh off the press and juicy, sending this information via a letter would compromise her eagerness to experience firsthand Isabella's reactions to her stories.[122] By waiting to tell Isabella, Elisabetta builds excitement for their next encounter, making that future moment more intimate.

Isabella felt similarly. On 23 May, Isabella wrote Elisabetta on her way back from her stay in Venice. She provides a solution to their joint wish to see each other by inviting Elisabetta on

[122] Correspondents typically preferred to receive sensitive or confidential news in person to evade any possibility of interception. Cockram has noted this in respect to Isabella's epistolary exchanges with her husband: "If the *marchesi* [Isabella and Francesco] knew they would soon be together, important information was deferred until it could be communicated face-to-face." *Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga: Power Sharing at the Italian Renaissance Court*, 32–33.

vacation with her to Porto. Her invitation includes the logistics of her proposition, revealing she was methodical in her planning in order to eliminate any chance of the trip not occurring.

> Andando domane a Verona dove starò ferma sabato, facio penser venire dominica per la via de Castione mantovana al palazo de Porto per stantiare lì. Prego la Signoria Vostra che la voglia dignarse de venirlì anchora lei quello dì, o, prima se gli parerà. Aciò che de compagnia godiamo quello aere bono; et stiamo in consolatione a rendere conto l'una a l'altra de quanto ce occorso doppo siamo state seperate. Johan da Villa Nova mio factore ha havuto comissione de fare mettere in ordine el palazo. Vostra Signoria poterà mo' di novo comettergelo da parte sua. Perché non mancho la obedirà ch'el facia me stessa, sapendo che la intentione mia et che l'habia libertà sopra tutti li servitori mei.[123]

Isabella employs first-person plural verb conjugations in order to reference the physical benefits the trip will have on them because they will be able to take in some fresh air. She again evokes it to explain that by being together, they would be able to properly catch up, confirming that her stories are best shared by mouth. In the context of this particular letter, Isabella is presumably alluding to the fact that she had much more to unveil about her trip to Venice than she was able to pen in a letter. Luckily for the two princesses, Elisabetta accepted Isabella's invitation. They spent the following six weeks together in Porto, reading, singing, and enjoying the comfort of each other's presence.[124]

Even though letter writing could help bridge geographical and temporal gaps between two people, in this case, the sending and receiving of letters from dear friends still did not replace in-person contact, which is especially significant considering that noblewomen were not afforded as much mobility as their consorts. In contrast to visiting each other through letters, being together to fully indulge in the details of each other's experiences and sentiments remained the preferred option. In these circumstances, we can only speculate about the women's personal hardships since they kept

[123] 23 May 1493, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 3, c. 60, AG, ASMn. For a translation of this letter see d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 58–59.

[124] Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 1903, 1:102.

the intimate details of their personal lives fairly discrete. However, as the next section conveys, during these years (1492–1493), Elisabetta suffered from a debilitating sickness, while at the time of their Porto trip, Isabella was roughly three months pregnant. In late December of that same year, she gave birth to her firstborn, Eleonora Gonzaga (1493–1550), named after her late mother.[125] Perhaps their respective physical difficulties of illness and pregnancy may have heightened their desire to be together.

iii. "In Consolatione": Letters and Gifts to Console

Throughout their friendship, Isabella and Elisabetta comforted each other during times in which each experienced physical difficulties relating to either illness or pregnancy. Whereas Elisabetta regularly underwent the physical and emotional trials associated with a chronic illness, Isabella endured the mental and bodily toll during multiple pregnancies and childbirths. The circumstances of their hardships in relation to their friendship reveal an interesting dynamic of need and support, in which the friend in need searches for help, and the other responds with words or gifts of encouragement and love. A closer glimpse into the princesses' exchanges from these times indeed sheds light on the women's reliance on each other for emotional support, and their sympathetic and uplifting responses to such requests, either through consolatory language or gift giving.

The years from 1490 to 1493 were especially hard on Elisabetta, who met with many doctors and sought various remedies, including trips to Poretta and Viterbo to take in the thermal baths in effort to cure her debilitating symptoms. Not only did she routinely seek medical attention for her sickness, but she also often requested emotional support from those close to her, especially Isabella. A precise diagnosis of Elisabetta's infirmity remains unknown. However, historians, interpreting the

[125] Luzio and Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, 68–69.

letters of Elisabetta and her doctors, believe that she most likely suffered from a severe case of anemia.[126] Elisabetta's health problems predated her friendship with Isabella, as her troubles began in her teenage years. By the time Guidobaldo traveled incognito to Mantua to visit his future *sposa* in 1486 when Elisabetta was just fifteen, she was already very sick.[127] Her health continued to worsen at the onset of their marriage, making it apparent that Elisabetta had a chronic condition that would endure many ups and downs. Over the course of her life, many doctors visited the duchess to diagnose her malady and provide treatment. For instance, during one of her bad bouts of sickness in December of 1489, Francesco sent a doctor, Matteo Cremaschi, along with his secretary, Benedetto Capilupi, to check in on his younger sister in Urbino. Writing to Francesco, Capilupi details Elisabetta's condition:

> Gionti qua, como o dicto, el lune, ritrovassimo la illustrissma madonna vostra sorella essere pur nel termine che se dicea, cioè magra, pallida, extinuata et debile, senza alcuna parte del collore suo tanto vivo et naturale como soleva havere, et se qualche volta ha rosseza procede da vergogna o movimento. Vero è che a questo modo ha una certa gratia et reverentia che la pare più presto creatura angelica che humana, et par niente sua Excellentia non vole se dica che la sia tanto magra et voria fare del galiardo, ma le gambe non gli correspondeno. Sta ben vestita tutto el giorno, ma a me ha confessato che, come ha passegiato una volta o due per la camera, bisogna subito ritornare a sedere. Tutto procede da mala dispositione causata da la retentione del menstro como meglio intederà Vostra Excellentia per lettere de Messer Matheo.[128]

As Capilupi describes in this letter, Elisabetta's symptoms include physical weakness caused by her thinness and fragility, pallor, lack of menstruation, and endless fatigue. The combination of these symptoms was worrisome, especially her menstrual retention. According to early modern science, virgins with suppressed periods, like Elisabetta in this case, were in danger of developing ulcers,

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[126] Luzio and Renier, 50; Maria Luisa Mariotti Masi, *Elisabetta Gonzaga. Duchessa di Urbino* (Milan: Mursia, 1983), 35.

[127] Luzio and Renier, *Mantova e Urbino, Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, 7.

[128] Transcription of this letter relies on Luzio and Renier, 49–50.

tumors, and fevers—all of which were considered to be fatal. Without a period, their bodies lacked the means of purging the menstrual blood, potentially leading to further issues later like infertility.[129] Though Capilupi provides an interesting silver lining to Elisabetta's condition by noting that her side effects liken her to an angel—perhaps in effort to not completely worry Francesco—he nonetheless makes apparent the devastating circumstances of the young duchess' disease. He specifically highlights the difficulty she has in moving her body; her legs are not robust, causing her to feel strained in quotidian movements such as walking around the bedroom. While in this particular instance, Elisabetta recovered shortly after Cremaschi's visit, the symptoms he details reappeared regularly throughout the remainder of her life.

Doctors and secretaries were not the only ones to report on Elisabetta's wellbeing. Elisabetta openly discussed the intimate details of her illness with close friends and family members. Already at the beginning of their friendship, Elisabetta sent Isabella numerous reports on her health. Her letters that treat the topic of her health weave together factual and emotional information. The factual information entails anything from descriptions of her symptoms to the doctors who came to visit her to their prescribed treatments. In contrast, the personal information mostly unveils her frustrations, discomfort, and wavering sense of hope for recovering. Most importantly though, in these letters, Elisabetta expresses a need for consolation from Isabella, either in person or through letters. In a letter sent on 10 May 1492, the duchess writes to her friend:

> Ho recevuto la lettera de la Excellentia Vostra et veduto el Castellano quale quella mi ha mandato tanto volunt(ieri) et di bona voglia quanto se po' immaginare. Et la ne regratio infinite volte, pregandola che per più mia satisfactione voglia essere contenta ch'el dicto Castellano restia qua cum mecho per infino a tanto che io vado a li bagni de Virterbo dove io ho facto pensiero de andare per casone de questo mio pocheto de opilatione, et per potermene poi venire a stare in consolatione cum le Signorie Vostre per qualche giorno, il che io no poteria più desiderare come io faccio. La Excellentia Vostra non se maraviglie se io non li scrivo de mia mano perché questo mio male mi dà fastidio assai. Et ancho perché io

[129] P. Renée Baernstein and John Christopoulous, "Interpreting the Body in Early Modern Italy: Pregnancy, Abortion and Adulthood," *Past & Present* 223, no. 1 (2014): 56.

> me ritrovo al presente cum qualche occupatione per aspectare lo illustrissimo signore vostro predetto in fra uno dì o doi. Et ala Excellentia Vostra continuo mi racomando.[130]

As this letter illustrates, Elisabetta routinely kept Isabella up to date on her health. In contrast to Capilupi's letter, the specifics of the duchess's sickness are recounted from her own perspective. In this particular instance, Elisabetta downplays her medical situation; she briefly reports on her "pocheto de opilatione," or *oppilazione* in modern Italian, which refers to an obstruction in her body. In this specific case, Elisabetta's obstruction was thought to be somewhere near her abdomen. As Michael Stolberg points out, suffering from an obstruction was considered a fatal disease since it could block the uninterrupted flow of fluids, spirits, and vapors within the body. This flow "could be slowed or blocked altogether by any thickening or agglutination of the fluids but also by anything that caused a narrowing of the channels."[131] Additionally, it was believed that the obstruction could cause scirrhous knots or tumors and cancers. One of the common remedies advised for patients with obstructions was hot baths; doctors and patients alike firmly maintained that the disease could be treated by sweating as an easy way to purge the body.[132] For this reason, as Elisabetta recounts, she voyaged to the spa waters of Viterbo to treat herself.

Elisabetta accompanies the description of her bodily state with her yearning for Isabella's comfort and compassion. As we saw previously, in spring 1492, the women were attempting to plan a trip to see one another. After her trip to Viterbo, Elisabetta hopes to visit Isabella and Francesco in Mantua. Moreover, through the use of the conditional, "il che io no poteria più desiderare come

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[130] 10 May 1492, Gubbio, b. 1066, c. 300, AG, ASMn.

[131] Michael Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 127. Moreover, Valeria Finucci describes the Renaissance disease of *oppilazione* as "an ubiquitous and gender-neutral infirmity frequently named as causing an array of bodily related afflictions but nonexistent today." *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 43.

[132] Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe*, 130.

io faccio" (that which I could not more desire than I already do), the duchess eagerly expresses her need to see them. While language to denote longing occurs often in Elisabetta and Isabella's correspondence, here, Elisabetta's desire couples with a subtle description of her discomfort. Without stating the pain caused by her obstruction, Elisabetta mentions the nuisance of her sickness coded in an apology for not sending Isabella an autograph letter. In a letter sent just four days after the one above on 14 May, Elisabetta reflects slightly more on her condition, expressing her reliance on the baths to heal her: "Li quali [i bagni] spero in Dio m'habbiano ad essere molto proficui."[133] In this way, the Renaissance letter did more than just inform about a friend's sickness. It also permitted a recipient to understand the physical and emotional impact the illness had on her companion, allowing for a more empathetic response.

Three days after Elisabetta's May 14 letter, Isabella responded to her sister-in-law. Like a keen friend, Isabella was attuned to her need for comfort. Though in her response she voices displeasure in hearing Elisabetta could not visit her because of her sickness, Isabella nonetheless consoles her friend using various forms of counsel.

> Omne altra risposta expectava da la Excellentia Vostra se non questa, che la me ha facto certa la venuta sua qua. Perché se ben havea inteso fusse mal disposta del stomacho et havesse opilatione, non credeva perhò dovesse negare de venire a liberarse nel suo naturale aere, qual forsi non gli haverà manco conferito che farranno li bagni. Tuttavia doppo che cossì è parere de li medici e speranza de Vostra Signoria che la se habia ad liberare per essi resto contentissima. Et accepto la scusa sua pur che puoi retornata da li bagni, me attendi la promessa de venire il che non manco desydero per beneficio de Vostra Signoria como facio per mio piacere tenendo per certo che supra modo gli giovarà el mutare aere maxime conducendose in quello dove è nata et allevata una cosa me pare ricordarli per lo amore gli porto, ch'el primo bagno la commincia a tuore sia el proponimento de guardarse da le cose triste, et vivere de quelle che rendeno sanità et substantia, et sforciarsi fare exercicio movendose come la persona a cavallo et a pede stando rasonamente piacevoli per scaciare le melenconie et affanni che per indispostione del corpo o animo gli occurressino. Né attendere ad altro che ala salute del'anima prima puoi ad honore et comodo de la persona perché altro da questo fragile mondo [non] si può cavare. Et chi non scia compartire el tempo de la vita sua passa cum molte passione et poca laude. Questo non ho dicto perché non sapia Vostra Signoria como prudentissima, intenderlo meglio di me ma solumente aciò

[133] 14 May 1492, Gubbio, b. 1066, c. 1302, AG, ASMn.

> che sentendo ch'io anchora sia de la dispostione sua tanto più voluntieri si adapti a volere vivere et pigliare recreatione come facio io. Et secundo, la poterà informare el Castellano quale lo illustrissimo signore mio consorte è rimasto contento stia apresso la Signoria Vostra finché la serà retornata da li bagni et quanto più a lei piacere, intendendo perhò quando la sia in deliberatione de venire a Mantua.[134]

A substantial portion of this letter demonstrates Isabella's mode of giving advice. The advice she offers ranges from being practical to medical to spiritual. She even artfully prefaces her consolation with loving words; she writes, "me pare ricordarli per lo amore gli porto" (I need to remind you of these things because of my love for you) to acknowledge that her words stem from a place of compassion. On the practical level, Isabella tells her friend that seeking care at the baths signifies a solid first step towards physical and mental recovery. According to Isabella, this treatment will both cure Elisabetta from problems that weigh her down and allow her to focus on what helps her attain sanity and meaning in her life. Indeed, Isabella's use of "cose triste" (depressing occurences) refers to Elisabetta's description of her physical ailments and emotional distress, indicating her sensitive reading of Elisabetta's previous missives.

The marchesa then provides her recommendations. First, she recommends physical activity in order for Elisabetta to rid herself of depression that affects both the body and soul. Her suggested treatment for melancholy points to a potential overlooked factor of Elisabetta's character in past historiography—perhaps she suffered from depression. This becomes even more telling in Isabella's spiritual counsel in which she recommends that Elisabetta also attend to her soul. She recommends taking care of the soul before tending to the body. This advice subscribes to the Platonic belief that the body and soul are separate, and more importantly, that the soul influences the body, making it the more powerful of the two entities. Through prioritizing the health of the soul, Isabella believes that Elisabetta might fruitfully live without having to experience extensive suffering or receive little

[134] 17 May 1492, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 2, cc. 19r–19v, AG, ASMn.

praise. The marchesa ends her prescription in a similar way to how she began, by making sure Elisabetta does not take her words in the wrong way. She offers one last word of advice: to follow in her example and enjoy life as much as she does. While such a recommendation could be construed as insensitive, perhaps it instead reveals Isabella's empathy. By pointing to herself as a model, she references her own physical and mental trials and the steps she had to take to overcome them. In this way, she relates to what her friend is going through in order to give advice about the best way forward.

Isabella's consolation is fascinating because she delivers practical, medical, and spiritual advice as though she were specialized to do so, in a similar way that some humanist writers saw themselves as expert consolers and "doctors of the mind."[135] Indeed, the various genres that form part of Renaissance consolation literature—the letter, treatise, oration, elegy, manual, to name a few—were of course not novel to humanist writings. The roots of this tradition were found in the writings of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and orators, and Christian thinkers.[136] What is interesting in this letter is that though Isabella was a devout Christian, she follows classical, rather than Christian, consolatory thought more closely. As Angus Gowland explains, Christian writers would often include citations and examples from the Bible to help console—something Isabella does not implement in this letter.[137] Additionally, while Christian thinkers who participated in the consolatory tradition such as St. Paul and Augustine preserved some of the aspects of the classical *consolatio*, they modified certain themes, namely that of suffering: "Christian consolation excluded the

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[135] George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4.

[136] McClure, 4.

[137] From classical literature the most important consolatory works include Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes*, Seneca's *Epistoale ad Lucilium* and *De consolation ad Marciaum,* and Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Appollonium* while for Christian thought they are St. Paul's epistles, Jerome's letters, and Augustine's *Confessions*. Angus Gowland, "Consolations for Melancholy in Renaissance Humanism," *Society and Politics* 6, no. 1 (2012): 12.

Classical idea that passions were the cause of melancholia and could be managed by self-discipline. Instead, the sufferer should learn to welcome his suffering as a sign of divine presence and care."[138] Isabella's letter goes against this notion; she explicitly tells Elisabetta to tend to her mind and soul through the practice of self-care. Moreover, humanist consolatory writers, like their classical forebearers, believed in the therapeutic power of language to heal the soul in the same way that medicine could treat the body. Central to the idea of language's influence on the soul was the Platonic and Christian notion that the soul is immortal and separate from the body—beliefs to which Isabella ascribes in her letter.[139] Through references to consolatory thought, Isabella exhibits an understanding of language's healing function and implements classical consolatory language in order to address and give advice on a friend's physical and psychological concerns.

While Isabella comforted Elisabetta in the throes of her sickness, the duchess aided the marchesa when she was pregnant or had just given birth. However, her mode of consolation in these instances varies from Isabella's. Whereas Isabella in her above missive used words to advise and heal, Elisabetta took to the material route and sent gifts. As when Elisabetta was ill, when Isabella was expecting or had just given birth, she used letter writing to keep her close family and friends current on the particulars of her health. For courtly women, childbearing was an important facet of their existence. A lot of pressure was placed on them to bear children, especially sons, since male progeny dictated the future of a family's dynasty. Sending pertinent information about noblewomen's pregnancies or births to close confidantes was therefore expected. Indeed, family members and friends revered this precious intel, especially anticipating news on the arrival of a son.

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[138] Beata Agrell, "Consolation of Literature as Rhetorical Tradition: Issues and Examples," *Lir-Journal* 4 (2015): 15. Moreover, Gowland explains that for these Christian writers, "human misery was typically portrayed as an inevitable accompaniment of early existence after the Fall." "Consolations for Melancholy in Renaissance Humanism," 15.

[139] McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism*, 5.

On the last calendar day of 1493, to her dismay, Isabella gave birth to a girl as her first child, (Eleonora). After her delivery, Isabella kept Elisabetta current on her experience of childbirth and her postpartum health. In January 1494, the marchesa sent her friend a missive. From it, we learn that Elisabetta parted from Isabella not long before this message was sent. Elisabetta and her consort Guidobaldo spent the Christmas holiday in Mantua, meaning she was indeed present at Eleonora's time of birth.

> Per lo reciprocho amor nostro debbe desyderare intendere el successo del parto mio dopo la partita sua como facio io del viagio de quella, m'è parso cum questi quatro versi significarli che per gratia del Nostro Signore che non ho dopo sentito alcuna passione né per la (c…) né per veru(m) altra cosa et ho talmente continuato in convalesentia che in capo de quindeci zorni sono levata da lecto et andata per le camere arivando anche a quella de la cuna per vederla. Cussì ogni zorno me resto per mo' che spero poter usire presto de casa. […] No posso già pre(n)rire che non la certifichi ch'io senta gran(ché) perturbatione d'animo quando penso che sono priva de cussì dolce et amorevol conversatione quanto era quella di Vostra Signoria mentre ch'io son sta' in lecto me ne parso stranio ma molto più me ne parerà.[140]

In the above letter, Isabella reminisces about Elisabetta's accompaniment by her bedside, illustrating the importance of female companionship to Isabella during this specific time. In particular, the marchesa writes that she is deprived of "cussi dolce et amorevol conversatione" (such sweet and loving conversation), making clear that the act of conversing gave her solace while she was in bed. By referencing her bedridden state multiple times, Isabella makes her anxiousness to get out of the house obvious. As examined in the previous section, the desire to exchange stories featured prominently in the princesses' correspondence. However, Isabella's longing to converse with Elisabetta in this case is coded by a uniquely feminine experience, that of childbirth and reproductive health.

In early modern Europe, as for most of history and in many cultures even today, childbirth pertained exclusively to the world of women: "before childbirth belonged to medicine, it belonged

[140] 20 January 1494, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 4, c. 20v, AG, ASMn.

to women […] women had constructed a coherent system for the management of childbirth, a system based on their own collective culture and satisfying their own material needs."[141] Whereas men's absence was customary at childbirth, the attendance of women was "an expected part of community culture."[142] In fact, the entire process of childbirth centered on the presence of women. Midwives managed the actual birth while female attendants and friends gathered in the birth chamber, offering both physical and psychological support.[143] The dangers and perils of childbirth and labor that could result in a stillborn baby or the mother's death were well known. Some expecting women wrote their wills before their due dates.[144] Pregnant women feared these imminent possibilities and therefore relied on their female support networks to console and help them before, during, and after childbirth. It is no wonder that expectant mothers desired familiar faces around for and after their deliveries.[145] Isabella and Elisabetta's relationship was no different; Isabella expected Elisabetta to be by her side during and after childbirth, and Elisabetta did her best to fulfill this sisterly obligation.

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[141] Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation," in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990), 70.

[142] Linda A. Pollock, "Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England," *Social History* 22, no. 3 (1997): 288.

[143] Jacqueline M. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 23.

[144] Stanley Chojnacki, "Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (1975): 587.

[145] Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 24. Furthermore, Pollock argues that "sympathetic assistance was a much-needed psychological prop. Childbirth for many was a terrifying prospect. Women were afraid of the pain involved, concerned that they would not be able to endure this well, and were also afraid of dying in childbirth." "Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England," 290–91.

Like a dependable friend, the duchess was present for Isabella's first delivery.[146] Yet, from the marchesa's missive, Elisabetta perhaps understood that Isabella sought further consolation. Not only was her labor with Eleonora difficult—a fact she mentions in other letters to friends—but she also felt understandably lonely.[147] As the marchesa's previous letter to Elisabetta indicates through the many references to her bedridden state, postpartum women, like Isabella during this time, were often prescribed a month of bed rest. This was advised in order to purge (usually by bloodletting) the bodily remnants of pregnancy.[148] During the purge, a physically draining process that could lead to serious infection, women found it tiresome to return to their daily activities. Knowing her friend was experiencing such hardships, the duchess responded to her with two letters, one sent on 1 February, and another on 13 February.

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[146] Moreover, their mutual understanding that Elisabetta be present for Isabella's deliveries becomes even more evident when it was not possible. For example, in July of 1496, Elisabetta wrote an apologetic letter to her friend, stating she could not be present for Isabella's second delivery. She asked the marchesa to accept her legitimate excuse and hoped to hear soon about the birth of a baby boy: "Dal altra parte rencrescerme che in vano l'habbia la expectatione mia al parto suo, non potendo per questa fiada venire […] So certa che per sua innata benignità me admetterà la sensa e precipue attenta le ragione legitime che me retengano. A dio piaccia che de lei presto possa haver nova de l'acquisto d'un figlio maschio come desidero e spero et che la si conservi sana e salva." 6 July 1496, Urbino, b. 1067, c. 33, AG, ASMn. Isabella responded with disappointment and displeasure, claiming that Elisabetta had broken a promise: "Lecto la littera che de mane sua me ha scripto la Signoria Vostra, io credetti prima facie che la fingesse de non venire per volere sopragiongere qua al improviso. Ma essendo hogi el quarto dì et non ne sentendo altro, cominicio a credere ch'el sia vero quanto la me scrive de che certo piglio grandissimo dispiacere. Perché la aspectava cum summo desyderio, et non me pareva poter havere recrescimento al anno se la Signoria Vostra se fusse ritrovata qua al parto mio. Et se non ch'io son certa che a lei altrotanto rencresca como a me de non poter venire, me doleria d'essa fui al celo che la me havesse frandato de la promessa." 10 July 1496, Mantua, b. 2992, l. 4, cc. 67v–68r, AG, ASMn.

[147] For example, roughly a month after her delivery of Eleonora, Isabella sent a letter to Bernardino Prosperi, a Ferrarese courtier, whose wife was pregnant. Along with the letter, she gifted him with a birthing stone, hoping it would facilitate his wife's delivery. Moreover, she wishes the mother-to-be a smooth delivery while referencing the "grandissima difficultà" she experienced in her own. 2 February 1494, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 4, c. 23v, AG, ASMn.

[148] For more on postpartum purges in early modern Europe see Leah Astbury, "Being Well, Looking Ill: Childbirth and the Return to Health in Seventeenth-Century England," *Social History of Medicine* 30, no. 3 (2019): 500–19; Silvia De Renzi, "The Risks of Childbirth: Physicians, Finance, and Women's Deaths in the Law Courts of Seventeenth-Century Rome," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 84, no. 4 (2010): 549–77.

> Advengha che per questo messo non habbia receute lettere di Vostra Signoria commo per intendere maxime del suo ben stare et de la putina desyderavo. Non m'è parso però ch'el ritorni senza mie [lettere] a significarli commo continuamente sto in expectione intendere de li boni successi di quella et del continuo ben stare suo et de la putina che veramente ne pigliarerà singulare consolatione. Et me seria grande ristauro a quanto mi pare essere priva per stare absente da Vostra Signoria, che confesso veramente senza quella non mi parere essere meza. Ma poiché reintegrarmi la necessità me lo divieta, la prego mi facci alcuna volta riconfortare con farmi continuamente intendere de li soi optati (p)rosperi successi, che ultra lo a piasere singulare mi farea li prometto restargli obligata. Et a quella di continuo mi recomando, et li ricordo satisfare li soi voti et venire a Loreto aciò mi sia licito retenerla qui et rifare li danni del tempo che non l'o veduta che me pare che deba essere già milli anni.[149]
>
> Ho habuto singulare a piasere intendere che Vostra Signoria cum la puttina stiano benissimo commo me ha facto scrivere, che stando in continuo desyderio de intenderlo me ha alleviato in parte el dispiasere ch'io sento per non potermi continuamente ritrovarmi in loco ch'io potesse godere quella commo desydero sempre. Et insieme ho habuto grande apiasere intendere che la stia in fermo proposito venire in queste parte et qui a casa sua commo me ha promesso. El termine se aproxima et parmi milli anni che guingha per mio singulare contento commo ali dì passati per altro me li mandaii a ricordare, et la ricercho mi servi la promessa. El signore mio manda ala excellentia del marchese certi fichi de li quali ne habbia ancho a fare parte a Vostra Signoria; quella ce haverà per excusato che questo anno per la carestia che n'è stata, et per havere el Signore Gioanni de Pesaro insino da Natali facto coglierni quanti ne ha potuti trovare, non havemo cum ogni diligentia potuti trovarvi quella copia che haveremo desyderato, et ancho sua Signoria non ha trovati molti più che se sia fatti per el signore mio.[150]

In the two letters, Elisabetta replies to Isabella's reassuring news that both she and Eleonora, "la putina," (the baby girl) are healthy and doing well. In fact, she expresses receiving such news as a desire that has been fulfilled and as an act that reduces their geographical distance, a distance that feels greater because of the duchess' strong desire to be with her sister-in-law and niece in Mantua.[151] Once again, Elisabetta reciprocates Isabella's nostalgia for their time spent together, but to do so, she implements a classical-turned-humanist ideal of perfect friendship in the first missive. Specifically, in the 1 February letter, she evokes the idea that two friends in a pair each represent one

[149] 1 February 1494, Urbino, b. 1066, c. 392, AG, ASMn.

[150] 13 February 1494, Urbino, b. 1066, c. 392, AG, ASMn.

[151] Interestingly, in many of their exchanges after Eleonora's birth, Elisabetta appears to have a strong emotional attachment to her niece—who later becomes her daughter-in-law—that seems to even outweigh Isabella's affinity toward her own daughter.

half of a whole; she writes that without Isabella's presence, which she needs to fully reintegrate herself into a whole person, she is halved.[152] A lonesome, physically tired, and emotionally vulnerable Isabella must have found particular comfort in hearing Elisabetta express such a sentiment, for it shows that her dearest friend missed her as well.

As the second letter reveals, Elisabetta also sent the marchesa gifts of figs, a specialty from Urbino, which Isabella regularly looked forward to receiving.[153] She apologizes if there are not enough, as the harvest did not produce as much as usual. The transmission of goods, as Shemek explains, "perpetuated a gift economy that contributed to family bonds, but it also brought the separate cities' resources together and created a wider zone of production and consumption, especially for members of the elite class."[154] Isabella later planted fig trees in her summer palace in Porto, but prior to that, she relied on Elisabetta's deliveries to enjoy them.[155] In this case though, Elisabetta sends figs as compensation for not being with Isabella for longer after her delivery. The figs as a gift become a way to make up for her absence during a time in which a tired and lonely Isabella particularly needed her.[156] A material gift, like a letter, conventionally transports the love of

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[152] In addition to her consolation letter examined earlier, Isabella's use of humanist language appears sporadically throughout her correspondence. For example, in a letter sent to Elisabetta in which she yearns for her presence, the marchesa communicates the same classical and humanist idea that she and Elisabetta are so close as if they had been born of the same body, i.e as if they were natural sisters: "la presentia sua la quale tutta me confortaria per el cordiale amore che gli porta qual non è punto minore che se fussiemo nate de uno medesimo corpo." 15 February 1492, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 1, c. 97v, AG, ASMn.

[153] They were presumably dried since fresh figs were not in season at the time of this particular exchange.

[154] d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 79n171.

[155] d'Este, 308.

[156] We see a similar occurrence of this when Isabella, pregnant for a third time in late 1499, wished to have Elisabetta presence at the delivery of her third child (Federico II Gonzaga). In response, Elisabetta sent the marchesa pomegranates, knowing that she craved them during her pregnancy. Isabella responded enthusiastically: "Le melegranate de sue natura me piaceo summamente. Ma havendomene la Signoria Vostra mandato cinquecento in questo tempo de la mia gravedenza nel quale anchora più d'il solito me delectanno, me sono stati de grandissima gratificatione, et havendone gustato me hanno parso li megliori mangiasse già bon tempo, il che è proceduto per venire da Vostra Signoria la quale per lo amore nostro reciproco non

its bearer. The gift of food furthers this idea; through ingestion, a transfer of love between sender and recipient is more fully realized.

Isabella's response written twelve days later on 25 February illuminates her gratitude in receiving Elisabetta's gift. However, Isabella also uses this letter as an opportunity to praise Elisabetta and reflect lovingly on their relationship. Her shift from thanks to compliments underscores the power of Elisabetta's gift.

> El mio illustrissimo signore consorte mi ha facto bona parte de li fighi mandati per la Excellentia Vostra, li quali sono stati in tanta copia ch'el non gli accadeva le scuse che quella gli fa, le quale procedeno più de la magnanimità et generosità sua ch'a ch'el preserve havesse bisogno d'essere accompagnato da tale excusatione. Io ho molto grato per più respecti, et maxime per esser derivato da la Signoria Vostra, la quale amo et ho in loco de amorevele et honorevole sorella. Né cum lei me extenderò troppo ultra, reservando ad dirli a bocha molte cose che me occorrevano, ma quando seremo insieme che spero serà presto, che fin pochi giorni faccio pensiere de partire per attenderli la promessa, alhora fruiremo de le suave presentie et dolci colloqui l'una de l'altra. (Interni) La Excellentia Vostra starà in expectione di me et io in dsyderio de lei, come sono stata fin hora che non credo sia passato giorno che de quella non me sia racordata et non habia rasonato cum gran mia (…)nrlità et dilecto. La puttina mia figliola procede in bene, et io per la dio gracia sono sana.[157]

The level of warmth in Isabella's tone increases throughout the letter. She opens by giving thanks for the figs, but her language quickly becomes laudatory as she shifts to admiring Elisabetta's character. For instance, the marchesa pays the duchess a compliment in her response to Elisabetta's worry of not sending enough fruit. Moreover, she understands Elisabetta's "scuse" (excuses) as accolades that mark her generous character. Isabella then ends the gratitude portion of her letter with a proclamation of her feelings for Elisabetta, stating explicitly that she loves her and exalting Elisabetta further by describing her as a loving and honorable sister. The letter then reaches its peak of intimacy as Isabella's tone switches to that of longing. Akin to sentiments expressed in their other

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poteria mandare se non cosa bona." 23 November 1499, Mantua, b. 2993, l. 10, c. 95r, AG, ASMn. For a translation of this missive see d'Este, 137.

[157] 25 February 1494, Mantua, b. 2991, l. 4, c. 31r, AG, ASMn.

exchanges, the desire to be in each other's presence and converse with one another features strongly, along with understanding that these feelings are mutual: "La Excellentia Vostra staria in expectione di me et io in dsyderio de lei." From gratitude to compliments to longing, a trajectory of increasing affectionate language appears prominently in Isabella's missive, demonstrating Isabella's appreciation of Elisabetta's gift during a time in which she felt particularly solitary.

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The selection of their correspondence analyzed in this chapter only represents a snapshot of Elisabetta and Isabella's exchanges between the years 1490 and 1496. While these early letters evidence the use of letter writing as an important medium that helped the women's friendship flourish at the onset of their relationship, their epistolary intimacy indeed continued throughout the their lives. For instance, from a September 1503 exchange, once Guidobaldo had successfully recuperated Urbino from the control of Cesare Borgia's forces, Isabella sent Elisabetta a missive expressing her happiness at hearing the news, writing that though they are not together, she shared with her this great success:

> L'è tale il piacere che mi ha dato la felice nova de la recupatione del stato de Urbino facta per lo illustrissimo signore duca consorte de Vostra Signoria confermandone per lettere sue, che non sciò se quello de la Signoria Vostra possi essere maiore. Reputandome non meno essere cum lei participo in questo suo buono successo ch'io sii stata fin qua ne li fortunii suoi. Mi ne congratulo adunche quanto posso cum la predetta Signoria Vostra la quale aspecto cum desyderio de intendere alla giornata tutti li buoni progressi.[158]

Elisabetta replied thanking her sister-in-law for helping her stay calm and sane through such a chaotic and politically messy time, describing her as not only a fine sister-in-law but also as an excellent and most pious sister: "Vostra Signoria essendone sempre stata, et maxime in queste mie calamità, non solum bona cognata, ma optima et piissima sorella."[159] In another instance from more

[158] 1 September 1503, Mantua, b. 2994, l. 16, c. 21r, AG, ASMn.

[159] 4 September 1503, Venice, b. 1068, c. 207, AG, ASMn.

than a decade letter—between November and December of 1516—while the duchess was traveling to Genova for pleasure, the two exchanged a number of letters expressing mutual yearning for letters as a way to compensate for their longing for one another. In one letter from this exchange, the duchess anxiously hopes that, despite their distance, Isabella will not forget her, and will instead respond to her with more letters: "non resta cosa de più satisfatione quando me retrova esserle da lontano che la memoria sua […] mi occorrerà visitarla con mie lettere pregandola parimente che Vostra Excellentia per più mio riposso voglia qualche fiate farmi già di sue lettere."[160] Isabella, in fact, replied thirteen days later, reciprocating many of the same sentiments; she details the difficulty of Elisabetta's absence for her, expressing the duchess' same fear of being forgotten and her desire to enjoy the pleasures of Genoa by her side:

> Le parole che dissi a Messer Baldesare maravigliandomi non intendere qualche cosa de la gionta di Vostra Excellentia in Genoa, non furono già da me deste, perch'io credessi esser stata da lei posta in oblivione […] non voglio già negare che di l'absentia di Vostra Signoria non mi parà molto strano, et che non mi contentasse volentieri posso essere insieme com lei a godere le delitie di quella città.[161]

Even in the later years of their friendship, the two women used letter writing to affirm and reciprocate affection for each another. Overall, they understood letters as a medium to bring the absent friend closer, to facilitate future encounters, and console when needed, whether through language or with gifts. In their missives, they also consistently evoke recognizable classical and humanist tropes of friendship like sameness, reciprocity, the friend as representative of the self's other half, and the letter as a means of consolation. We see that the language of ancient authors such as Cicero, who took advantage of the letter's capability for intimacy, was of use to Elisabetta and Isabella. These works, which the sisters-in-law most likely studied as children—since as earlier noted

[160] 17 December 1516, Genoa, b. 1069, c. 647, AG, ASMn.

[161] 30 December 1516, Mantua, b. 2997, l. 34 c. 3v, AG, ASMn. For a translation of this letter see d'Este, *Isabella d'Este: Selected Letters*, 414–415.

inventory records show that their family libraries owned copies of such texts—provided the language from which they could model their situations and sentiments.

The fact that these same modes of communicating intimacy and describing friendship extend into their correspondence reveals that these two women's lived experiences of female friendship were also founded in these notions. Classical ideas about friendship did not only pertain to the male sphere for which they were imagined. However, as we saw, some of Elisabetta and Isabella's exchanges are also grounded in uniquely feminine experiences, like that of childbirth. These examples only further destabilize the male-centeredness of the history of friendship, broadening its parameters to demonstrate the additional ways in which friendship was interpreted and practiced in early modern Italy.

CHAPTER 2. WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIP LYRIC IN THE *RIME DIVERSE D'ALCUNE NOBILISSIME ET VIRTUOSISSIME DONNE*

The principal aim of this chapter is to understand how lyric poetry enables and stylizes expressions of female friendship in the poems that appear in the first all-female verse anthology, the *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (1559) edited by Lodovico Domenichi (1515–1564). How did lyric as a genre move women to portray female sentiment and intimacy? And, how did the codification of Petrarchism allow women to build literary friendships with each other? To answer these questions, I first examine the emergence of Petrarchism and its privileging of female literary expression by outlining the roots of Petrarchan poetry and women's appropriation of the genre. After presenting this background, I then turn to trace and piece together the history of friendship lyric in the Italian tradition, a *topos* within the genre that has yet to be fully examined in the same way as, for instance, amorous verse.

The second section of the chapter opens with a discussion of lyric anthologies, their appearance on the literary scene in sixteenth-century Italy and their significant role in the dissemination of Petrarchan, and especially, women's poetry. A significant portion of this section concerns my examination of the friendship poems, both sonnet exchanges and single-authored lyric (addresses and funerary verse), from the *Rime diverse*. The foci of my analysis include the modes through which women used poetry to initiate and develop literary friendships with each other despite never having met, to mourn the deaths of their close female friends, and to playfully use Petrarchan conventions of amorous verse to express mutual admiration and form a female community. Collected together in the *Rime diverse*, these poems reveal the variety of ways women from different backgrounds initiated, wrote about, and promoted female bonds.

I. Lyric Poetry: Petrarchism in Renaissance Italy

Early Italian lyric poetry can be characterized in two phases with the first beginning in the early thirteenth century and continuing into the late fourteenth, and the second starting roughly one

hundred years later, during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The first phase was marked by three poetic traditions during the thirteenth century in which poets made innovations in Latin and Italian verse: the *Scuola siciliana* at the court of Federico II where the sonnet was most likely invented by Giacomo da Lentini; the spread of the sonnet to northern Italy where Guittone d'Arezzo and his followers who used its form for moral, political, and religious verse; and the movement dubbed later by Dante in *Purgatorio* 27 as the *dolce stil nuovo* founded by Guido Guinizzelli in Tuscany that theorized love through poetry.[1] Dante and Petrarch were both heirs and innovators of these literary traditions, adapting aspects from their predecessors' verse to fashion their poetic modes and philosophies. Dante's early work—the *Vita nuova*, in particular, whose story describes the poet's passion for his beloved Beatrice and his gradual understanding of her as a beatific figure—demonstrates his experimentation with love poetry as formulated by the *Scuola siciliana*, d'Arezzo, and the *stilnovisti*, a group to which Dante initially belonged.[2] However, unsatisfied with his earlier lyric and the teachings of the *stil nuovo*, Dante began to search for a new poetics when he wrote the *Divina commedia*.[3] We see this change most clearly in the figure of Beatrice, who in the *Commedia*, becomes more than a metaphor for beatitude as she was in the *Vita nuova*. To summarize simply, she becomes the path towards God; as Teodolinda Barolini writes regarding the *Commedia*, "Dante

[1] Deanna Shemek, "Verse," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Michael Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 180; Jonathan Usher, "Origins and Duecento," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–20. For more on these poetic movements see Armando Balduino, *Boccaccio, Petrarca e altri poeti del Trecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1984); Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento*, 2 vols. (Milan: Ricciardo Ricciardi, 1960).

[2] Dante also experimented in his *Rime*, a collection of eighty-nine poems—sonnets, *ballate*, and *canzoni*—that he composed over a twenty-five-year span, from approximately 1283 to 1308.

[3] We see this at the end of the *Vita nuova* when Dante writes that he will no longer write of Beatrice until he can find the most worthy way to treat her: "mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potessi più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sae veracemente." Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, ed. Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995), XLII. 1–2.

conflates into one the two poles of his desire [God and Beatrice], making the journey to Beatrice coincide with the journey to God."[4] Petrarch, too, took from these earlier traditions of lyric, evident in his collected book of 366 poems, the *Canzoniere*, that would become, like Dante's *Commedia*, one of the most influential poetic works in the western tradition.[5] The text borrows from the lyric of the troubadours and the *stilnovisti*, but also contains "an intense engagement with Roman antiquity."[6] As a whole, the collection tells the story of a divided self. The overarching narrative recounts the poet's agonizing love for Laura and his psychological struggle to understand or deal with his longing for her as something deeper than a vain, earthly obsession. Intertwined in this love story are the poet's search for spiritual salvation and eternal fame. All these threads converge into the figure of Laura, who, in fact, does not represent any one thing, but rather is a projection of all the poet's inner, conflicted desires. Unlike in the *Commedia* where the pilgrim-poet undergoes a complete spiritual conversion thanks to Beatrice whose role as a salvific guide is consistent throughout—in clear contrast to Laura—this kind of religious conclusion remains unclear in the *Canzoniere*.[7] Yes, the collection ends with a prayer to the Virgin Mary in which the poet asks for her forgiveness, and Laura is now cast as Medusa. But, if we return to the opening sonnet of the *RVF* in which the poet states that he is only "in parte" a changed man, this admission could, in fact, signify a failed

[4] Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21.

[5] Originally titled by Petrarch as *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, this collection came to be better known in Italian as the *Canzoniere*. Throughout this chapter, I will use these two titles—*Canzoniere* and *RVF*—interchangeably.

[6] Shemek, "Verse," 182.

[7] As John Freccero argues, "Beatrice is in many senses the opposite of Laura. She was a mediatrix, continually pointing beyond herself to God. Throughout most of the *Paradiso*, for example, the pilgrim looks into her eyes only obliquely so that he sees what lies beyond her. Laura's eyes by contrast, are 'homicidal mirrors' in which her narcissistic lover finds spiritual death." "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," *Diacritics* 5, no. 1 (1975): 39.

conversion, bringing the collection full circle.[8]

The second phase, known as *poesia cortigiana*, flourished at the princely courts of northern Italy, Florence, and the kingdom of Naples. *Poesia cortigiana* was certainly influenced by Dante's and Petrarch's poetry, but "was not limited to the metrical and thematic repertoire established by these masters."[9] Instead, authors like Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441–1494) and Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492) adopted a less strict style, allowing them to write more freely to interweave various traditions of classical Latin lyric with Italian vernacular verse.[10] Many of these courtly poets wrote in an elevated register of their native regional dialects while interspersing strategic Latinisms and Tuscanisms throughout their work. In terms of content, they chose love as their prominent theme of choice, a popular *topos* in medieval lyric as well. However, their depictions of love differed from medieval configurations because they were not always characterized in a spiritualized religious context. That is, the beloved lady of *poesia cortigiana*, who before was often portrayed as a beautiful and salvific figure in accordance with Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura, did not have to cohere with those ideals. Similarly, the poet's love for a woman did not necessarily have to represent a spiritual journey towards God. Instead, fifteenth-century love poetry was much more secular and realist, drawing from classical texts like Ovid's *Heroides*, to relate personal woes and lament the

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[8] Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2.

[9] Virginia Cox, ed., *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 16.

[10] Courtly poetry was extremely experimental: "The *poesia cortigiana* tradition was notably formally eclectic, featuring a wide metrical range, from Dantean *terza rima* to more modern forms such as the *strambotto* and *frottola*. Linguistically as well, the poetry of this period was quite diverse; even if we except the extremes of experimentation found in the 'comic-realist' tradition, 'serious' poetry was written in many regional koines, though with strong influences from literary Tuscan and, especially orthographically, from Latin." Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 39–40.

hardships of love.[11]

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, some poets felt the need for a stricter set of linguistic codes that *poesia cortigiana* did not offer since the Italian peninsula did not yet claim a homogeneous language. To remedy this problem, the Venetian poet and theorist, Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), began working out the intricacies of vernacular grammar and its linguistic usage in his important treatise, *Le prose della volgar lingua* (1525). As noted in chapter 1, the *Prose* proposes that authors adhere to the Tuscan language found in Petrarch's lyric and Boccaccio's prose in an attempt to standardize written Italian.[12] Initially, Bembo's ideas were controversial, but eventually they made room for universal grammatical and lexical norms, which became more easily accessible with the diffusion of print, and ultimately facilitated the spread of literacy in sixteenth-century Italy. Twenty-four years prior to the publication of the *Prose,* Bembo had done something equally influential in promoting Petrarchan lyric; with the help of Venetian publisher Aldus Manutius (1449–1515), he edited the first pocket-sized edition of Petrarch's lyric sequence, *Le cose volgari di Messer Francesco Petrarcha*, translating Petrarch's own, Latin title for his vernacular poems, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*RVF*). Manutius had already published tasteful editions of Greek and Latin classics such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, which he printed in 1502. The decision to print Petrarch's lyric in the same mode immediately elevated the Tuscan poet's language and style, placing it on the level of the ancient

[11] Ovid's *Heroides* (15 BCE) is a collection of verse epistles written from the prospective of various mythological and literary heroines, most of whom were abandoned by their beloveds. In these verse epistles, women lament the pain their treacherous lovers have caused them.

[12] The publication of the third version of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* in 1531 and Castiglione's *Cortegiano* in 1528 also helped establish the vernacular as a literary language. While Ariosto rewrote editions of the *Furioso,* making sure to adhere to the Tuscan style Bembo established and praised in his *Prose della volgar lingua*, Castiglione argues against Bembo's program in his work. However, the *Cortegiano* was eventually Tuscanized by the editors in Venice with Castiglione's consent. See Amedeo Quondam, *L'autore (e i suoi copisti) l'editore, il tipografo* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2016).

classics.[13] The combination of Bembo's praise for Petrarchan verse in the *Prose* and his influence in disseminating his lyric via the printing press led to a newfound love and wide appreciation for the *RVF*. In 1530, Bembo then published his own *Rime* in strict imitation of Petrarch. The Neapolitan Jacopo Sannazaro (1457–1530) also came out with his *Rime* the same year, which was also significant since his lyric served as another contemporary example of Petrarchan emulation though he also mixed in other models.[14] With these two examples readily available, many sixteenth-century poets could learn to adapt Petrarch's poetic style to their liking. The arrival of other *canzonieri*, or lyric collections, in the Petrarchan tradition soon followed such as the *Rime* of Ludovico Martelli (1533), Alvise Priuli (1533), and Giovan Battista Schiafenato (1534); these poets were from Venice, Milan, and Florence respectively, demonstrating the outreach of Tuscan Petrarchism to other geographical regions in Italy.[15]

Even though the printed version of the *RVF* was published in 1501, it took fifty years for it to circulate widely in print. It was the innovation of the printing press that disseminated the *Canzoniere* at a faster pace and more widely beyond the Italian peninsula into other parts of Europe.[16] For instance, between 1501 and 1510 in Italy, nine different editions of the *RVF* were printed, and by the end of the sixteenth century 162 editions had been published.[17] While Petrarch always played an influential role in Italian courtly lyric, sixteenth-century Petrarchism is distinct in that it defines a

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[13] Shemek, "Verse," 185.

[14] As Stefano Jossa notes, "Bembo's Petrarchism was probably too strict and reductive to be taken as the only model at the time, however, in conjunction with the example of Sannazaro, who was much freer in his use of Petrarch's poetry and was ready to combine it with other models, Bembo's authority was more easily accepted and followed by a large majority of poets." "Bembo and Italian Petrarchism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Unn Falkeid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 193.

[15] Jossa, 197.

[16] Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*, 24.

[17] Roberto Fedi, "From the 'Auctor' to the Authors: Writing Lyrics in the Italian Renaissance," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 17, no. 2 (1996): 65.

tradition of lyric that was less free stylistically, was composed solely in the vernacular, and follows a close imitation of the Tuscan poet's verse. In its simplest form, the literary movement can be defined as "the use of Petrarchan words, phrases, lines, metaphors, conceits, and ideas and the adoption, for poetic purposes, of the typical Petrarchan experiences and attitudes."[18] A strict Petrarchist uses no word, theme, or sentiment that did not derive from Petrarch himself.

Thematically speaking, Petrarchan lyric primarily focuses on unrequited love and its torments, placing the poet's experiences and psychological state at the heart of the work. Many of the poems in the *Canzoniere* are erotic: "they set out to explore the patterns of thought and emotion generated by Petrarch's love for Laura, the subjective or psychological aspect of this love figuring, within the economy of the whole, altogether more prominently than its objective or descriptive aspect, than the figure of Laura herself."[19] At the same time, the *RVF* offers an honest, sublime, and idealized model of love, later deemed Neoplatonic because of its philosophical roots in Plato's love theory as expressed in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. By featuring "a lover whose erotic aspirations rarely transcend the pleasure of seeing his lady and hearing her voice, and whose descriptions of her physical beauties limit themselves largely to her eyes, lips, hands, and hair," Petrarchan poetry permits a modest yet elegant representation of love.[20] There were many prominent Petrarchists in the sixteenth century, including but not limited to, Bembo himself, Veronica Gambara (1485–1550), Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547), Benedetto Varchi (1503–1563), Lodovico Domenichi (1515–1564), Chiara Matraini (1515–1604), and Laura Battiferri (1523–1589). As this list reveals, many women found a home writing lyric in this tradition.

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[18] Ernest H. Wilkins, "A General Survey of Renaissance Petrarchism," *Comparative Literature* 2, no. 4 (1950): 329.

[19] John Took, "Petrarch," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95–96.

[20] Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*, 21.

A. Women as Petrarchists

The prevalent participation of female poets in the Petrarchan tradition distinguishes lyric poetry as a fundamental genre of women's literary and cultural production in Renaissance Italy. Women's vernacular poetry began receiving critical attention in Italy around the 1530s and 1540s when the work of Veronica Gambara, a wealthy noblewoman from Brescia, and Vittoria Colonna, the marchesa of Pescara from an aristocratic and politically important Roman family, reached a wider audience.[21] Both women made their first print appearance in the second edition of Bembo's *Rime* (1535), which featured sonnet exchanges between the Venetian writer and each woman respectively.[22] With their exceptional poetic ability on display in Bembo's *Rime*, the two women were well on their way to canonization. Three years later, Colonna's own *Rime* was published in a pirated edition in 1538, which subsequently underwent thirteen editions until her death in 1547. Though the first edition of Gambara's collected poetry did not arrive in print until 1759, her lyric nonetheless featured prominently in anthologies from 1545 and onward.

Colonna and Gambara became the models for later women Petrarchists to emulate for they "had successfully combined the pursuit of literary excellence with a flawless moral character, thus establishing the respectability of literature as an appropriate activity for women."[23] The second generation of women Petrarchists no longer had to rely on male-authored lyric as their authoritative models; they instead could draw on Colonna's and Gambara's verse. Their poetry achieved this

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[21] Earlier precedents for women's vernacular poetry dates to the 1470s as woman like Lucrezia Tornabuoni (1427–1482), Antonia Pulci (1433–1508), and Ginevra de' Benci (1457–ca.1520) composed such lyric. However, a discussion of these authors as antecedents to Petrarchism has received little attention. See Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 45–53.

[22] Prior to this publication however, Colonna and Gambara were already well known and well connected to elite literary circles where they circulated manuscript copies of their lyrics. Diana Robin, "The Breasts of Vittoria Colonna," *California Italian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 2. Ariosto had also already praised their poetic production in cantos 37 and 46 in third edition of his *Orlando furioso* published in 1532.

[23] Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 76.

highly imitative status because of their recasting of Petrarchan themes in devout, chaste, and faithful ways. Not only did they flip the gender paradigm of Petrarch's verse with the poetic subject now depicted as female, and the love object, instead, as male but they also contributed greatly to spiritual Petrarchan lyric, especially Colonna. In accommodating the female voice and experience in their lyric, they were careful to represent amorous sentiments in a way that also complied with contemporary female decorum.[24] For instance, instead of portraying the pain and suffering characteristic of unrequited and adulterous love as Petrarch does with Laura, Colonna and Gambara detail married love, particularly their separation from their husbands while at war or once widowed.[25] In writing from the position of wife and widow, Colonna and Gambara present female desire as chaste. For instance, after the death of her husband, Ferrante d'Avalos (1490–1525), Colonna asserts her devotion to him remains strong and she will never take another lover again: "Di così nobil fiamma Amor mi cinse / ch'essendo morta in me vive l'ardore; / né temo novo caldo, ché 'l vigore / del primo foco mio tutt'altri estinse."[26] As Janet Smarr summarizes with respect to Colonna's verse, the love she describes is rational, not sensual, often featuring nonplatonic undercurrents.[27] For Gambara, too, her characterization of love is pure; hers is a conjugal, consummated love.

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[24] Ann Rosalind Jones, "Female Petrarchists," in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Unn Falkeid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 225. For a compelling reading of the erotic undercurrents present in Colonna's *Rime amorose* see Shannon McHugh, "Rethinking Vittoria Colonna: Gender and Desire in the *Rime amorose*," *The Italianist* 33, no. 3 (2013): 345–60. For a biography on Colonna see Ramie Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

[25] Both women's husbands died in battle. Gambara was widowed in 1519, never remarried, and remained the regent countess of Correggio. Meanwhile, Colonna was left a widow in 1525, and she, too, did not remarry. While Gambara wrote poems about her husband *in vita*, Colonna, with one exception, composed poems about him after his death. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 70.

[26] Vittoria Colonna, *Rime*, ed. Alan Bullock (Rome-Bari: Gius. Latereza & Figli, 1982), 6.

[27] Janet Levarie Smarr, "Substituting for Laura: Objects of Desire for Renaissance Women Poets," *Comparative Literature Studies* 38, no. 1 (2001): 3.

In addition to amorous lyric, the two women also wrote spiritual and political poetry, demonstrating the adaptability and variation of female-authored verse within the Petrarchan tradition. In her *Rime spirituali*, the title given to the fifth edition of Colonna's poems published in 1539, she turns to God, a similar transformation that occurs at the end of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.[28] Colonna's spiritual verse reflects her deep religious conversion; her husband no longer features as the primary inspiration for her verse. Rather, the focus of her lyric morphs into discussions on deep Christian and spiritual concerns.[29] Gambara, too, wrote spiritual verse, but on a much smaller scale. Rejecting love as a subject matter in her mature poetry and influenced by her role as dowager Countess of Correggio, she instead chose to focus her later poetry on public themes such as praising Charles V's imperialism or celebrating her homelands of Brescia and Correggio.[30] In one sonnet, Gambara pays respect to Pope Paul III, lauding his third encounter with Charles V in 1534. She ends the poem with the words, "Italia mia," echoing the opening lines of *RVF* 128, one of

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[28] Jones, "Female Petrarchists," 202. After the death of her husband, Colonna's intellectual network included important churchman like Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542), Reginald Pole (1500–1558), Capuchin Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564), and perhaps Juan de Valdés (1509–1541), a reformist scholar who fled the Spanish Inquisition for Naples in 1530. For a discussion of Colonna's "spiritual Petrarchism" and its influence on the Italian Reformation see Fiora A. Bassanese, "Vittoria Colonna's Man/God," *Annali d'Italianistica* 25 (2007): 263–74; Abigail Brundin, "Vittoria Colonna and the Poetry of Reform," *Italian Studies* 57 (2002): 61–74; Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*; Rinaldina Russell, "The Mind's Pursuit of the Divine. A Survey of Secular and Religious Themes in Vittoria Colonna's Sonnets," *Forum Italicum* 26, no. 1 (1992): 14–27; Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna*, 227–74.

[29] The change in subject matter from amorous to religious verse makes it possible, as Joseph Gibaldi notes, to view Colonna's oeuvre as "embodying the Neoplatonic ladder of love." Moreover, he argues that her verse progresses "as the poems do from the early declarations of passionate earthly love […] through the Petrarchan delineation of idealized human love in her middle years to the final religious poems that culminate, poetically if perhaps not chronologically in her *Triumph of Christ's Cross*." Joseph Gibaldi, "Vittoria Colonna: Child, Woman, and Poet," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 31.

[30] Gambara had personal ties to Charles V as her elder son, Ippolito, served in his imperial army. She had also met with the Holy Roman Emperor on numerous occasions, even inviting him to stay at her Correggio court in 1530, and she fully supported his military campaign in Italy. Molly M. Martin, "Introduction," in *Veronica Gambara: Complete Poems*, by Veronica Gambara, ed. Molly M. Martin and Paola Ugolini (Toronto: Iter Academic Press, 2014), 10.

Petrarch's most political poems.[31] As their verse reveals, Colonna's and Gambara's poetry, like verse of Petrarch, was not only limited to the topic of love. By expanding their lyric to cover diverse topics and themes, they participated in the cultural discourses of their time, paving the way for later women poets to insert their voices in similar public arenas.

The legacy of Colonna's and Gambara's poetry held strong as a new generation of women Petrarchists emerged during the second half of the sixteenth century.[32] Such women included Tullia d'Aragona (ca.1510–1556), Chiara Matraini (1515–1604), Laura Terracina (1519–ca.1577), Gaspara Stampa (1523–1554), Laura Battiferra (1523–1589), and Veronica Franco (1546–1591), to name a few. This second wave of female Petrarchists, in similar manner to that of their predecessors, reinvented Petrarchan lyric to suit their own voices. They differed from their foremothers in that most of them were not born into important, noble families (with the exception of Terracina). For example, Matraini was born to a middleclass family of weavers in Lucca, Battiferra was the illegitimate child of a nobleman and a prostitute, and d'Aragona's Roman noble family lineage is still disputed.[33] The majority of these women were neither associated with the court nor with socially acceptable roles such as that of wife and widow; Stampa was a celebrated *virtuosa*, praised for having one of the most beautiful voices in Venice while d'Aragona and Franco were *cortigiane oneste*, who

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[31] Richard Poss, "Veronica Gambara: Renaissance Gentildonna," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 52.

[32] By 1560, Colonna's *Rime* had undergone fifteen editions (one in 1538, four in 1539, two in 1540, two in 1544, and one each in 1546, 1548, 1552, 1559, and 1560). As mentioned earlier, a collection of Gambara's work in print was only made available by 1759. Prior to that publication, her verse was included regularly in lyric anthologies. For a list of women's published writings in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries see Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 235.

[33] A recently found Sienese notary document shows that Tullia's mother, Giulia, was the daughter of the Orsino Pendaglia, presumably a member (either natural or legitimate) of the noble family of Ferrara. The document also names Giulia as the wife of Africano Orlandini, a member of the Sienese nobility. Julia L. Hairston, "Introduction," in *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and Others*, by Tullia d'Aragona, ed. and trans. Julia L. Hairston (Toronto: Iter Academic Press, 2014), 11.

weaved successfully in an out of elite literary circles even though they received hostile criticism from detractors on the promiscuous nature of their occupation.

The verse of these later female Petrarchists was also modified. While they still implemented the gender paradigm initiated by Colonna and Gambara—situating the poetic "I" as female and the beloved as male—the love they depicted was not always chaste. Scholars often point to Stampa's poetry as most evident of this transformation, for she chooses as her love object, Count Collaltino di Collalto (1523–1568), a nobleman from the Treviso area with whom she had an affair. In her *Rime*, published posthumously in 1554 by her sister Cassandra, over two hundred of the poems are about Collaltino, but she also describes the beginnings of a relationship she had with another man named Bartolomeo Zen. For a woman to write about the tribulations of the heart with different men was considered indecorous. The important distinction here though, is that not only does she situate Collaltino and Zen as her beloveds, but she also depicts her desire for them as physical, passionate, and intense.[34] In one sonnet for example, Stampa parallels the experience of being caught at sea to the growing intensity of her love:

> A mezzo il mare, ch'io varcai tre anni
> fra dubbi venti, ed era quasi in porto,
> m'ha ricondotta Amor, che a sì gran torto
> è ne' travagli miei pronto e ne' danni;
> e per doppiare a' miei disiri i vanni
> un sì chiaro oriente agli occhi ha pòrto,
> che, rimirando lui, prendo conforto,
> e par che manco il travagliar m'affanni.
> Un foco eguale al primo foco io sento,
> e, se in sì poco spazio questo è tale,
> che de l'altro non sia maggior, pavento.
> Ma che poss'io, se m'è l'arder fatale,

[34] Stampa never married. As Jane Tylus explains, her inferior social status in comparison to Collaltino's "would have prevented the count from ever taking their relationship seriously." "Introduction," in *Gaspara Stampa: The Complete Poems*, by Gaspara Stampa, ed. Jane Tylus and Troy Tower (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3. The count's inaccessibility to Stampa and the pain it causes her are well described in her *Rime*. For more on how Stampa uses Petrarchan conventions to depict the count's emotional and social unavailability see Smarr, "Substituting for Laura: Objects of Desire for Renaissance Women Poets," 15–20.

se volontariamente andar consento
d'un foco in altro, e d'un in altro male?[35]

As Fiora Bassanese has argued with respect to this poem, Stampa subverts, in erotic terms, Petrarch's boat metaphor from *RVF* 132—which he implements to denote his emotional distress over Laura—to express her glee in returning to the choppy waves of love.[36] Her representation of strong affection stands in stark contrast to "the ideals of the courtly love tradition, as well as most poetry of the period influenced by Platonic ideas and Petrarchan conventions," signifying a break with such models.[37]

Another example that shows how later women poets built on the verse of their predecessors can be found in Matraini's *Rime et prose*, first published in 1555.[38] Her *canzoniere amoroso* treats the tragic love affair she had with a married man, Bartolomeo Graziani, that came to an end when he was murdered by his wife's brother. Like Stampa, she portrays love outside the confines of marriage. Matraini follows Petrarch's model in outlining her love story from its beginning (falling in love and praising the beloved) to its end (the death of the beloved which results in a religious conclusion). She also explicitly evokes Petrarch's and Colonna's verse when she equates Graziani to the sun, a recurrent descriptor Petrarch uses to describe Laura and one that Colonna attributes to

[35] Gaspara Stampa, *Gaspara Stampa: Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. Laura Anne Stortoni and Mary Prentice Lillie (New York: Italica Press, 1994), 174.

[36] Fiora A. Bassanese, "Gaspara Stampa's Petrarchan Commemorations: Validating a Female Lyric Discourse," *Annali d'Italianistica* 22 (2004): 166.

[37] Unn Falkeid and Aileen Feng, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Unn Falkeid and Aileen Feng (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 4.

[38] In addition to a *canzionere amoroso*, the *Rime et prose* also includes two prose sections including a letter addressed to an unidentified man defending love as a subject matter and the *Orazione dell'arte della guerra*. Additionally, Matraini was mentored by Lodovico Domenichi who included her poetry in his 1556 anthology, *Delle rime di diversi eccellentissimi autori*. Giovanna Rabitti, "Introduction," in *Chiara Matraini: Selected Poetry and Prose*, by Chiara Matraini, ed. Elaine Maclachlan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2, 10.

her late husband.[39] However, her lyric differs in that it is explicitly autobiographical; for instance, she describes in detail the brutal assassination of her lover in addition to the anger she felt in learning that his murderer went unpunished: "Or dell'ardente suo furore il nostro / nemico traditor trionfa e gode / qual fea Neron ne l'alta arsion di Roma. / Ma se di così ardente e crudel Mostro/ la giust' ira di Dio l'ardir non doma, / che direm noi? Ch'ei pur lo vede et ode."[40] The sprinkling of these autobiographical elements within the confines of Petrarchan lyric displays Matraini's experimentation with form.[41]

Stampa and Matraini are just two examples of women poets who followed in the footsteps of their female predecessors, but still continued the revision and personalization of Petrarchan themes. Unlike Colonna and Gambara who adapted their lyric so that it fit with the expectations of their gender, these later poets challenged male-authored conventions of Petrarchism.[42] Many of these women played with Petrarchan form in their amorous verse, but as we saw earlier with Colonna and Gambara, they also composed lyric on other topics. Domenichi's anthology includes lyric from both the earlier and later women Petrarchists, providing an array of women who subverted Petrarchan and courtly love themes. Charting the development of women's engagement with Petrarchan lyric and the way they adapted Petrarchan verse to their liking provides a foundation

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[39] As Rinaldina Russell explains, Matraini was heavily influenced by Colonna's lyric. "Chiara Matraini nella tradizione lirica femminile," *Forum Italicum* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 415.

[40] Chiara Matraini, *Selected Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Elaine Maclachlan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 96.

[41] Rabitti, "Introduction," 14.

[42] This is the key idea that frames Ann Rosalind Jones' groundbreaking study, *Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Jones uses the Gramscian idea of *negotiation* made popular by cultural studies specialists to understand how Renaissance women poets in England, France, and Italy used love lyric to challenge gender ideologies and male-dominated literary traditions.

for interpreting their treatments of other themes, like that of friendship. But, where does friendship as a theme fit into the genre of lyric poetry?

B. Friendship in the Lyric Tradition

In contrast to love poetry, friendship lyric does not have as identifiable a tradition; some group poetry on friendship as a subset of amorous verse, while others place it within occasional verse, especially celebratory poetry or *in morte* lyric, or within the practice of sonnet exchanges.[43] The friendship poems in the *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime e virtuosissime donne* fall into all of these groupings: the female poets of the anthology use lyric to celebrate their friends, mourn their deaths, or engage in poetic correspondence to express admiration and praise in hopes of forging friendships. In some cases, they also write about their friends using erotic language similar to that found in Petrarchan love lyric. The following discussion outlines the roots of friendship lyric in the Italian tradition, starting with the Dante and the *stil novisti* who relied on lyric exchange to form close, poetic bonds. I then turn to Petrarch, whose *RVF* includes a handful of addresses to his dear, departed friend Sennuccio, and I end with women's participation in friendly, published sonnet exchanges with their male peers. In tracing these various moments in the lyric genre, I show that friendship lyric, though fragmented, indeed has a home within the tradition.

i. Friendship Lyric from Dante to Petrarch

Provençal poets formed intellectual circles, in which they shared, read, and responded to one another's poetry. This exchanging of poems continued among the literary elite in thirteenth-century Italy, often in the form of sonnets or *canzoni* written on small pieces of paper called *brevi* or *cedole*.[44]

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[43] Teodolinda Barolini, "Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io," in *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and of the "Vita Nuova,"* by Dante Alighieri (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 85.

[44] Claude Marguéron, *Récherches sur Guittone d'Arezzo: sa vie, son époque, sa culture* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 121–28.

This practice was common among the *stilnovisti*, a group of upper-middle class poets founded by the Bolognese Guido Guinizelli (1230–1275) in Tuscany who often wrote about the ennobling and spiritual experience of love. Within the group, they circulated, commented on, and exchanged poems in the vernacular. Their practice of lyric correspondence often functioned in a "round-robin" fashion: a reader would receive a poem, make a copy, pass the text along to others, and then compose an answer.[45] As Jonathan Usher explains, "*sodalitas* (personal friendship) is an important factor in the development of *dolce stil novo*, where close social contact meant that influences were swiftly felt and ideas supplanted each other rapidly."[46] Such friendships rooted in poetic intellectual exchange are visible, for instance, in Dante's *Vita nuova* (1292–1294), in which the young poet collects and comments on his early verse that he had anonymously sent out to others for interpretation.

The *Vita nuova* unveils the effects Dante's circle of friends had on his work; at various moments in the introductory and explanatory prose sections that accompany the poems, the young writer names specific friends, dedicates lyric to them, and details their responses to his lyric. On occasion, he even expresses disagreement with their interpretations. Friendship in the *Vita Nuova* is therefore predicated on the exchange of lyric as an intellectual conversation. One of the most important friendships present over the course of the text is that between Dante and Guido Cavalcanti (1255–1300); scholars such as Giuseppe Mazzotta claim that their bond makes friendship a "constitutive category" of the *Vita nuova*: it "comes forth as metaphor for an intellectual

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[45] John Ahern, "The New Life of the Book: The Implied Reader of the *Vita Nuova*," *Dante Studies* 110 (1992): 2.

[46] Usher, "Origins and Duecento," 25. For more on the contribution of the *docle stil novo* and Dante's influence on Italy's lyric tradition see Zygmunt Barański, "'Lascio cotale trattato ad altro chiosatore': Form, Literature, and Exegesis in Dante's *Vita nuova*," in *Dantean Dialogues: Engaging with the Legacy of Amilcare Iannucci*, ed. Maggie Kilgour and Elena Lombardi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 1–40; Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

conversation, for a certain benevolence of minds on account of which the two friends, in good will, 'turn together,' exchange and communicate ideas, share the secrets of their craft, decipher and penetrate each other's fablings."[47]

When Dante first introduces Cavalcanti in chapter 2, he famously describes him as his first friend. This moment occurs as Dante identifies Cavalcanti as one of the many who responded to his sonnet, "A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core." The young poet writes, "A questo sonetto fue risposto da molti e di diverse sentenzie; tra li quali fue rispondere quelli cui io chiamo primo de li miei amici, e disse allora uno sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Vedeste, al mio parere, omne valore*."[48] Dante singles out his older friend and their friendship by mentioning the title of one of Cavalcanti's sonnets, instead of giving his name, illustrating the connective tissue that lay between poetry and personal identity. The "molti e di diverse sentenzie" to which Dante refers also further highlights the internal literary community within the work as a whole. In fact, we know of three poets, including Cavalcanti, who responded to this sonnet.[49] Dante continues to muse, "E questo fue quasi lo principio de l'amistà tra lui e me, quando elli seppe che io era quelli che li avea ciò mandato," recognizing his and Cavalcanti's poetic exchange as the starting point of their friendship.[50]

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[47] Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Language of Poetry in the *Vita Nuova*," *Rivista Di Studi Italiani* 1, no. 1 (1983): 5. As Peter Hainsworth has already noted, Dante refers to Cavalcanti and their friendship six times throughout the *Vita nuova*. "Cavalcanti in the *Vita Nuova*," *The Modern Language Review* 83, no. 3 (1988): 586. Other scholars, however, find that while Dante does celebrate their friendship, he also exhibits ambivalence towards Cavalcanti in the *Vita nuova*, "expressing a definitive crisis in their relationship." Robert M. Durling, "Guido Cavalcanti in the *Vita nuova*," in *Guido Cavalcanti tra i suoi lettori*, ed. Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Florence: Edizioni Cadmo, 2003), 177. The bond between the two poets was far from perfect; fissures emerge in their bond as we read the *Vita nuova*. By the time Dante wrote the *Commedia*, the two had had a falling out over their different philosophies of love, though scholars are uncertain about precisely when such event occurred. See Modesto, *Dante's Idea of Friendship: The Transformation of a Classical Concept*, 80–3.

[48] Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, III.14.

[49] Though he does not mention them in the text, the other two who gave their opinions on Dante's vision were Terino da Castelfiorentio and Dante da Maiano.

[50] Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, III.14–15.

"A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core" begins the poetic dialogue and friendship between the two men. In the enigmatic sonnet, Dante envisions the figure of love holding his heart and feeding it to his beloved, Beatrice.

> A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core
> nel cui cospetto ven lo dir presente,
> in ciò che mi rescrivan suo parvente,
> salute in lor segnor, cioè Amore.
> Già eran quasi che atterzate l'ore
> del tempo che onne stella n'è lucente,
> quando m'apparve Amor subitamente,
> cui essenza membrar mi dà orrore.
> Allegro mi sembrava Amor tenendo
> meo core in mano, e ne le braccia avea
> madonna involta in un drappo dormendo.
> Poi la svegliava, en d'esto core ardendo
> lei paventosa umilmente pascea:
> appresso gir lo ne vedea piangendo.[51]

Dante directs his poem to those who possess gentle hearts and whose souls have been seized by love. In this way, Dante "addresses the reader as a peer and possible friend, a fellow poet and lover who might write back."[52] He does so in order to solicit opinions on a vision he had—the term "visione" appears in the prose accompanying the sonnet—demonstrating the dialogic aspect of the poem.[53] Through a *salutatio* or formal request for interpretation, the young writer seeks to build a poetic community with the *stil novisti*. In the introductory prose to the poem, he expresses a desire for famous poets to read his work, believing himself to be competent in composing verse: "pensando io a ciò che m'era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti li quali erano famosi trovatori in quello tempo: e con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l'arte del

[51] Alighieri, III.10–12.

[52] Ahern, "The New Life of the Book: The Implied Reader of the *Vita Nuova*," 3.

[53] Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, III.9.

dire parole per rima."[54] His yearning for acceptance and inclusion in the elite poetic community of the *stilnovisti* becomes clearer in Dante's choice of love as the subject matter of his sonnet.[55]

The remainder of the sonnet cryptically portrays the apparition of love, which is personified with humanlike characteristics through sensory and illustrative language. The prose explains that the vision occurred the night after Beatrice, "madonna," first greeted the poet. Accepting the challenge of unlocking the meaning of Dante's bizarre dream, Cavalcanti responded directly to the sonnet with "Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore."

> Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore
> e tutto gioco e quanto bene hom sente,
> se foste in prova del segnor valente
> che segnoreggia il mondo de l'onore,
> Poi vive in parte dove noia more,
> e' tien ragion nel càssar de la mente;
> sì va soave per sonni a la gente,
> che' cor' ne porta senza far dolore.
> Di voi lo cor e' ne portò, veggendo
> che vostra donn'a la Morte cadea:
> nodrìla d'esto cor, di ciò temendo.
> Quando v'apparve ch'e' se n' gia dogliendo,
> fu 'l dolce sonno ch'allor si compiea,
> che 'l su' contraro lo venìa vincendo.[56]

In "Vedeste, al mio parere," Cavalcanti highlights the "visionary aspect" of Dante's dream, interpreting the vision as a positive encounter and as key to the young poet's happiness.[57] He understands the feeding of Dante's heart to his beloved as a noble act, for death was imminently

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[54] Alighieri, III.9.

[55] As Lucia Battaglia explains, "la tematica d'Amore era il centro di questa scuola ed è logico pensare che Dante abbia rivolto loro, non un rompicapo qualsiasi, bensì una sua teoria sull'amore, simboleggiata da un sogno, sotto l'aspetto di una questione." "Per l'interpretazione del sonetto cavalcantiano 'Vedeste al mio parere,'" *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 147 (1970): 359.

[56] Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, ed. Letterio Cassata (Anzio: De Rubeis Editore, 1993), 177.

[57] Teodolinda Barolini, "A Ciascun'alma Presa e Gentil Core," in *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and of the "Vita Nuova,"* by Dante Alighieri (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 59.

calling on Beatrice. The flaming heart nourishes her, evidencing the salvific power of love. Though Dante rejects Cavalcanti's interpretation, his friend's reply demonstrates how poetic exchange mimics live dialogue, providing a platform for writers to discuss through rhyme the main ideas of the original poem at hand.[58] Poetry as a forum for debate and discussion as exemplified in Dante and Cavalcanti's exchange in fact forms part of the ongoing *tenzone* tradition that had longstanding roots in medieval Latin and Occitan literature. While earlier Italian poets such as those from the *Scuola Siciliana* used the *tenzone* to openly debate philosophical ideas about love with a clear, identified winner, Dante and his circle transformed this poetic form to be a "vehicle for friendly exchange."[59]

Musings on the experience of love between friends also take shape in Petrarch's *RVF*. While the *Canzoniere* predominantly details the emotional highs and lows of being in love, the collection also contains lyric that expresses sentiments of friendship. One of the most important bonds Petrarch celebrates in his collection is that between him and Sennuccio del Bene (1275–1349), a white Guelph and a poet who was exiled from Florence in 1312. He and Petrarch met in Avignon where Sennuccio sought refuge, working as a secretary and papal envoy to Germany. The two men connected over their shared interest in the classics and often spoke to each other about their experiences of love. Petrarch wrote of their friendship in many of his texts including his uncollected poems (*Rime Disperse*), his familiar letters (*Epistolae Familiares*), his allegorical poem sequence (*I Trionfi*), and most importantly, the *RVF*, signaling the importance of lyric poetry and epistolary

[58] Dante writes that even he did not understand the dream when it happened, but now in light of what unfolded, its meaning is clear to everyone: "Lo verace giudicio del detto sogno non fue veduto allora per alcuno ma ora è manifestissimo a li più semplici." *Vita nuova*, III.15.

[59] Jelena Todorović, *Dante and the Dynamics of Textual Exchange* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 155.

writing to discourses of friendship.[60] Out of 366 poems in the *Canzoniere*, five are directed to Sennuccio.[61] Two in particular, *RVF* 113 and 287, illustrate the use of lyric to evoke classical ideals of friendship and to mourn the death of a friend.

Most of the poems that Petrarch addresses to Sennuccio describe his passion for Laura and the suffering that comes as a result of his ardent desire. As Joseph Barber has argued, Petrarch—specifically in the *Disperse* and *RVF*—positions Sennuccio as a witness to his enamorment with Laura. That is, Sennuccio sees firsthand the psychological changes that overcome his friend, and as his friend, shares and understands Petrarch's experience. This is especially evident in *RVF* 113:

> Qui dove mezzo son, Sennuccio mio
> (così ci foss' io intero et voi contento),
> venni fuggendo la tempesta e 'l vento
> ch' ànno subito fatto il tempo rio.
> Qui son securo, et vo' vi dir perch'io
> non come soglio il folgorar pavento
> et perché mitigato, non che spento,
> né mica trovo il mio ardente desio.
> Tosto che giunto a l'amorosa reggia
> vidi onde nacque l'aura dolce et pura
> ch' acqueta l'aere et mette i tuoni in bando,
> Amor ne l'alma ov' ella signoreggia
> raccese 'l foco et spense la paura:
> che farrei dunque gli occhi suoi guardando?[62]

The first line of the sonnet conveys the intimate tone of the poem. Not only does Petrarch warmly address his friend as "Sennuccio mio" but he also announces that he feels only half of himself, evoking classical conceptions of friendship.[63] Here, in particular, Petrarch cites Horace's *Odes* I.3, a

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[60] For an astute commentary on the poems about Sennuccio from the *Disperse* see Justin Steinberg, "Petrarch's Damned Poetry and the Poetics of Exclusion," in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Armando Maggi and Victoria Kirkham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 85–100.

[61] Joseph Barber, "Il sonetto CXIII e gli altri sonetti a Sennuccio," *Lectura petrarce* 2 (1992): 37.

[62] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 221.

[63] Barber, "Il sonetto CXIII e gli altri sonetti a Sennuccio," 23.

poem that characterizes Virgil as embodying half of the poet's soul: "Be sure to discharge him intact on the shores of Attica, I pray you, and save one [Virgil] who is half of my soul."[64] Justin Steinberg notes that in addition to Horace, the chorality Petrarch emphasizes in *RVF* 113 recalls the poetic community of the *stilnovisti*, specifically the friendship between Dante and Cavalcanti.[65] The rest of the sonnet treats Petrarch's visit to Vaucluse, the supposed birthplace of Laura. He feels his fear dissipate in that place, the experience of which reignites his fervor for her. By narrating this experience through the framework of friendship—i.e. the poem's address to Sennuccio, a friend, and the evocation of classical theories of friendship—Petrarch highlights the importance of the friend to the journey of love. The friend, as half of the self, inherently empathizes with the lover's situation, and most importantly, shares that suffering.

In addition to dedicating poetry to Sennuccio and celebrating their friendship through lyric while Sennuccio was alive, Petrarch also uses verse to lament his dear friend's death. Sennuccio died soon after Laura in October of 1349, the effects of which Petrarch solemnly conveys in *RVF* 287:

> Sennuccio mio, benché doglioso et solo
> m'abbi lasciato, i' pur mi riconforto,
> perché del corpo ov' eri preso et morto
> alteramente se' levato a volo.
> Or vedi inseme l'un et l'altro polo,
> le stelle vaghe et lor viaggio torto,
> et vedi il veder nostro quanto è corto;
> onde col tuo gioir tempro 'l mio duolo.
> Ma ben ti prego che 'n la terza spera
> Guitton saluti, et messer Cino, et Dante,
> Franceschin nostro et tutta quella schiera.
> A la mia donna puoi ben dire in quante
> lagrime io vivo et son fatt' una fera,
> membrando il suo bel viso et l'opre sante.[66]

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[64] Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 29. "[F]inibus Attics / reddas incolumem precor, / et serves animae dimidium meae" (Horace, 28).

[65] Steinberg, "Petrarch's Damned Poetry and the Poetics of Exclusion," 97.

[66] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 467.

As in *RVF* 113, the sonnet above opens with the warm address to Sennuccio, "Sennuccio mio," signaling the poem's intimate tone. Though Petrarch clearly mourns the loss of his friend, especially in the first quatrain in which he details his own grief and lonesomeness now that Sennuccio has passed, the poem's sorrowful mood shifts. Mixed feelings of sadness and joy are portrayed as Petrarch finds comfort in imagining his friend transcend to paradise, precisely to Venus, "la terza spera." Because of this transcendence, Sennuccio thus no longer possesses the shortsightedness of earthly knowledge as the poet himself still does. The emotional turn occurs in the final sestet, as Petrarch no longer dwells on his loneliness. He instead envisions the community of people Sennuccio encounters in heaven, which includes Laura, but more importantly, Guittone d'Arezzo, Cino da Pistoia, Dante, and Franceschino degli Albizzi, all poets, and asks Sennuccio to greet them in Petrarch's name. Once again, Petrarch weaves Sennuccio, the friend, into his experience of love for Laura, but he also continues the idea of a poetic community by inserting Sennuccio, and by proxy himself, into this "schiera."

As Petrarchan lyric became more diffused in the sixteenth century with the advent of the printing press, poems written about friendship and poems exchanged between friends also became more visible and readily available. Men of course were not only engaging in poetic correspondence with each other but also with women, and these exchanges featured regularly in newly printed collections of verse. The next section therefore examines amicable sonnet exchanges between male and female Petrarchists, signaling this moment as an important steppingstone to the publication of friendship poetry by and between women.

ii. Friendly Sonnet Exchanges between Male and Female Petrarchists

Establishing a poetic community through rhyme became culturally more visible with the arrival of the printing press. Similar to collected correspondence intended for publication that showcased a writer's fictional or real epistolary network, sixteenth-century Petrarchists published

sonnet exchanges with, and dedications to, other poets in their collected rhymes. The exchanges in particular could be arranged like a dialogue—an address, the *proposta*, and reply, the *risposta*, in consecutive order—to recreate the back and forth of a live conversation. Writers also often dedicated poetry to display their admiration for others they did not personally know, perhaps in attempt to solidify literary connections with them. Sonnet exchanges worked similarly; often times the poets had not met in person. Before these poems came to print in a collected edition, they often traveled individually in scribal form through the author's poetic circle and network, possibly undergoing revisions and several passes before becoming final drafts. Sometimes the lyric was sent to their addressees or interlocutors directly, other times they arrived via intermediaries. In this way, lyric poems, like published missives, were rarely ever intended for only the private eyes of the addressee or dedicatee. Though these exchanges and dedications occurred first in manuscript form, once in print, they illustrated to a wider public the literary community that could be further elaborated in lyric collections, a facet that becomes even more pertinent in later poetic anthologies.[67]

Understanding women's positioning in published sonnet exchanges brings us once again to Pietro Bembo, whose second edition of *Rime* in 1535 first evidences a lyric community in print that includes female poets.[68] In contrast to its first edition, published five years earlier in 1530, the second version contains an appendix of sonnet exchanges between him and Vittoria Colonna and Veronica

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[67] Exchanges or dedications were often sent first between friends through private channels, what Brian Richardson calls "private diffusion," before they were approved by the author to be printed. Some lyric stayed among a poet's limited circle; for instance, consolatory poems that were typically deemed more private tended not to be diffused widely. Additionally, there were times when scribal publication of lyric was still preferred in the age of print for it "fulfilled an important social function, both for the author and for the other participants in the operation" Brian Richardson, "From Scribal Publication to Print Publication: Pietro Bembo's *Rime*, 1529-1535," *MLN* 95, no. 3 (2000): 685–86, 688.

[68] Before the publication of the first edition of Bembo's *Rime*, poets were reluctant to publish their verse in print and many indeed continued to pass their lyric through scribal editions. On the one hand, print allowed authors to assert more control over their work and decreased the chances of poem misattribution. Richardson, 684. On the other, authors did not always have a say in the curatorial or editorial process of their works appearing in print.

Gambara respectively. While both Colonna and Gambara had already been corresponding with Bembo via letters and sonnet exchanges in manuscript decades before the publication of his collection, his second edition marked the arrival of their lyric in print and their public debut as poets who participated in a larger literary community. The exchange between Bembo and Gambara for instance, displays the mutual admiration of the two writers. Gambara begins the exchange, and Bembo answers with a *risposta*.

> A l'ardente desio ch'ognor m'accende
> di seguir nel camin ch'al Ciel conduce
> sol voi mancava, o mia serena luce,
> per discacciar la nebbia che m'offende.
> Or poiché 'l vostro raggio in me risplende,
> per quella strada c'a ben far ne induce,
> vengo dietro di voi, fidato duce,
> che 'l mio voler più oltra non si stende.
> Bassi pensier in me non han più loco
> ogni vil voglia è spenta, e sol d'onore
> e di rara virtù l'alma si pasce,
> dolce mio caro ed onorato foco
> poscia che dal gentil vostro calore
> eterna fama e vera gloria nasce.[69]

> Quel dolce suon, per cui chiaro s'intende,
> quanto raggio del ciel in voi riluce,
> nel laccio, in ch'io già fui, mi riconduce
> dopo tant'anni, e preso a voi mi rende.
> Sento la bella man, che 'l nodo prende,
> e stringe sì, che 'l fin de la mia luce
> mi s'avvicina; e, chi di fuor traluce,
> nè rifugge da lei, nè si difende:
> ch'ogni pena per voi gli sembra gioco,
> e 'l morir vita; ond'io ringrazio Amore,
> che m'ebbe poco men fin da le fasce,
> e 'l vostro ingegno, a cui lodar son roco,
> e l'antico desio, che nel mio core,
> qual fior di primavera, apre e rinasce.[70]

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[69] Veronica Gambara, *Le rime*, ed. Alan Bullock (Florence: Olschki, 1995), 95–96.

[70] Richardson, "From Scribal Publication to Print Publication: Pietro Bembo's *Rime*, 1529-1535," 607–8.

Analyzed together, Gambara's address and Bembo's response reveal an interesting negotiation of gender on the page. Gambara, in her sonnet, calls out to Bembo as her spiritual guide, referring to him as her "fidato duce" whose light illuminates the path forward. Under his guidance, Gambara will let go of "bassi pensier," focusing her attention instead on honor and virtue, two traits commonly associated as praiseworthy female attributes. Bembo, in response, casts Gambara as a typical Petrarchan love object, describing the enamoring effects she has on him via her rhyme. For example, to describe his reignited affection for her—for which he's grateful despite the fact that it nearly kills him—he uses the metaphor of a hand tightening a noose.

At first glance, the gender roles in the exchange are commonplace to a male-coded Petrarchan system with Gambara as the love object and Bembo as the guide. A closer look reveals, however, as Virginia Cox has elegantly shown, a much more complicated exchange. Analyzing Gambara's appropriation of Petrarchan lyric, Cox argues that Gambara's nomination of Bembo as her *duce* derives from *RVF* 72 in which Petrarch casts Laura as a salvific guide, implicitly placing Bembo in the role of love object. Similarly, Bembo's reciprocated use of Petrarchan language returns the exchange, "re-citing her chosen Petrarchan subtexts in such a way as to suggest that she is as fully equipped as he to take the role of spiritual leader."[71] When he compliments Gambara by equating her with Laura, his language evokes moments from the *RVF* in which Laura is conceived as the spiritual mentor, the one with the upper hand. Their exchange, due to its publication, therefore unveiled to a wider audience a positive configuration of male-female relations. The inclusion of both Colonna and Gambara in a printed collection by one of the most important Petrarchists also publicly authorized the female poetic voice. Bembo's *Rime* indeed set the stage for

[71] Virginia Cox, "Sixteenth-Century Women Petrarchists and the Legacy of Laura," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, no. 3 (2005): 596.

friendly sonnet exchanges between the sexes, which eventually expanded to include those among women in the new genre of the lyric anthology.[72]

II. Women's Friendship Lyric in the *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne*

A. Lyric Anthology Fever and the First Collection Dedicated to Women's Poetry

The commercial success of lyric poetry in print during the second half of the sixteenth century from the presses of Gabriele Giolito (ca.1508–1578), Melchiorre Sessa (fl.1505–1555), Anselmo Giaccarello (fl.1545–1565), and Vincenzo Busdraghi (1524–1601) gave rise to a new literary genre—the lyric anthology. Lyric anthologies were typically put together by *poligrafi*, "literary middlemen," whose role encompassed those of the agent, the editor, and the translator.[73] For these multi-authored collections, the *poligrafi* worked with publishers to collect and arrange vernacular poetry by various contemporary authors. The first lyric anthology, *Rime diverse di molti eccellentissimi auttori nuovamente raccolte,* came in 1545 from the well-known Venetian publisher Giolito and underwent two additional reprintings in 1546 and 1549.[74] Many appeared soon after; between 1545 and 1590, over one hundred anthologies, each consisting of more than a hundred poems, were

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[72] Tullia d'Aragona's *Rime* (1547) offers an interesting parallel as the first published single-authored collection of rhyme that primarily consists of poems in response or addressed to her by other poets. For this reason, Julia Hairston deems the work a choral anthology, which differs from the lyric anthology due to its attribution to a single author, despite the fact that various authors contributed to it. "Out of the Archive: Four Newly-Identified Figures in Tulia d'Aragona's *Rime della Signoria Tulia di Aragona et diversi a lei* (1547)," *MLN* 118, no. 1 (2003): 257.

[73] Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 82. For more on the role of the *poligrafo* see Gordon Bragantini, "Poligrafi e umanisti volgari," in *Storia della letteratura italiana: Il primo Cinquecento*, vol. 4 (Rome: Salerno, 1996), 681–754.

[74] Giolito's press was becoming just as important as that of Aldus Manutius. The difference between the two, however, is evident in their printing agendas. While the Aldine focused on printing deluxe editions of canonical Latin and Greek texts, as well as those from the Italian past, Giolito centered his press's attention on modern and vernacular texts. Louise George Clubb and William G. Clubb, "Building a Lyric Canon: Gabriel Giolito and the Rival Anthologists, 1545–1590," *Italica* 68, no. 3 (1991): 332. For more on Giolito's first anthology see Franco Tomasi, "Introduzione," in *Rime diverse di molti eccellentissimi autori*, ed. Franco Tomasi and Paolo Zaja (Edizioni RES, 2001), v–xlviii.

printed.[75] As various scholars have noted, lyric anthologies played an important role in the diffusion of current, vernacular lyric. The editors typically selected lyric by present-day authors in the vernacular, many of whom were imitators of Petrarch, which helped further establish and authorize Petrarchan poetry as a popular literary mode.[76] Some lyric anthologies even reflected a geographical region, only containing poems from writers who hailed from a certain city such as in the *Rime di diversi eccellenti autori bresciani* (1554) or *Rime di diversi signori napolletani, e d'altri* (1556).

Already in Giolito's first anthology, women's lyric is present, specifically that of Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, Francesca Baffa (fl.1543–1552), and Laudomia Forteguerri (1515–1555).[77] The incorporation of a female poet's rhyme in an anthology brought attention to her previously published single-authored collection of lyric if she already had one, garnering wider public interest in women's poetry overall. Colonna was the first woman to publish a single-authored volume of poems and the inclusion of Colonna's verse in Giolito anthology from 1545 only further canonized her *Rime*, which by that year had already undergone twelve solo editions.[78] The opposite also held true. Some women made their literary debuts in these collections, which then culminated in the publication of their solo-authored volumes; this was the case for Gaspara Stampa and Chiara Matraini. The biggest splash of women's lyric in Cinquecento Italy came in 1559 when Lodovico Domenichi (1515–1564), one of Giolito's senior editors, collected and edited the poetry of fifty-

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[75] Clubb and Clubb, "Building a Lyric Canon: Gabriel Giolito and the Rival Anthologists, 1545–1590," 335. The subsequent volumes published by Giolito are often referred to as the Giolito anthologies.

[76] Deanna Shemek, "The Collector's Cabinet: Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women," in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Modern Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy*, ed. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 240.

[77] In fact, Diana Robin has shown how Colonna and Gambara consistently appear in most of the Giolito anthologies. "The Lyric Voices of Vittoria Colonna and the Women of the Giolito Anthologies, 1545–1559," in *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna*, ed. Abigail Brundin, Tatiana Crivelli, and Maria Serena Sapegno (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 433–66.

[78] Robin, 434.

three female authors from different cities and backgrounds in an anthology entitled *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne*.[79] The collection, published in Lucca, includes a total of 330 poems across 237 pages. While previous multi-authored lyric volumes had already featured women, Domenichi's *Rime diverse* was the first anthology purposely dedicated to women's poetic achievement.[80]

Some of the women included in the anthology are celebrated poets like Colonna or Gambara; however, Domenichi also incorporates lesser-known authors, thus providing a rather sweeping view of women's literary production in sixteenth-century Italy. The goal of the anthology, according to Domenichi in his dedicatory letter, is to showcase women's ingenuity:

> Così con l'aiuto d'alcuni amorevoli miei, et grandemente affettionati al valor Donnesco, raccolsi da più parti assai ragionevole quantità di rime composte da Donne. Lequali rime sono poi state infino ad hora appresso di Me in quel grado tenute, che le più care et pretiose cose si soglion tenere. Et benché infino allhora, ch'io cominciai a raccorle, io fossi fermo di volere in ogni modo publicarle al mondo col mezo delle stampe, per chiarir coloro, iquali stanno in dubbio della grandezza dell'Ingegno femminile: nondimeno non ho potuto mai porre ad effetto tal mio pensiero, essendo quando da uno, et quando da un'altro impedimento distornato.[81]

As he makes clear in the beginning lines, Domenichi had spent time meticulously collecting these female-authored poems from various sources. Some of the poems had been previously published; for other poems, this was the first time they were appearing in print. Before the publication of this anthology, Domenichi had already established himself as a well-known *poligrafo* and advocate of women's worth.[82] Just ten years prior to the publication of the *Rime diverse*, he had published a

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[79] Gabriella Scarlatta Eschrich, "Women Writing Women in Lodovico Domenichi's Anthology of 1559," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 3, no. 2 (2009): 67.

[80] From here on, I will refer to the *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* simply as *Rime diverse.*

[81] Lodovico Domenichi, *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (Lucca: Vincenzo Busdragho, 1559), 3–4.

[82] As Shemek explains, "Domenichi's decision to publish a collection of poetry by contemporary women appears to follow logically from the combination of his Petrarchist writings, his editorial experience with anthologies, his contacts with women poets (a few of whom were already included in Giolito's earlier

dialogue, though highly plagiarized, entitled *La nobiltà delle donne* (1549) in which he celebrated the accomplishments of various women.[83] While undoubtedly the *Rime* gave authorial exposure to a wide variety of women poets in sixteenth-century Italy, Domenichi's advocacy of women should be taken with a grain a salt. As Deanna Shemek notes, there are a number of cracks in Domenichi's "editorial façade of feminist advocacy."[84] One, for instance, that features almost immediately is his choice to dedicate the *Rime* to a close male companion, Giannoto Castiglione, rather than to a female recipient.[85]

The two internal structures of the *Rime diverse* include those of the mini-*canzoniere* and the *réseau*. While a full *canzoniere*, like Petrarch's *RVF*, details the author's personal narrative over the course of an entire book of poetry, the mini-*canzoniere* compresses that chronicle to a sequence of five or more poems. As Diana Robin has shown, the mini-*canzoniere* was a distinct feature of the Giolito anthologies, especially those coming out of Naples. And though the small collection only represented a fraction of an author's oeuvre*,* the mini-*canzoniere* provided a digestible form of an author's greatest hits to the public, which could then help garner them further publicity.[86] The *Rime diverse* features sixteen mini-*canzonieri*, each ranging from six to forty-five poems for each author. For

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anthologies), and his attention to the debate on women that was contemporaneously appearing in print." Shemek, "The Collector's Cabinet: Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women," 247.

[83] Domenichi's *La nobiltà delle donne*, however, was highly plagiarized from his contemporaries who had already written on the topic. Some of the authors from whom he copied are Cornelius Agrippa, Galeazzo Capella, and Baldassare Castiglione. See Diana Robin, *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 61.

[84] Shemek, "The Collector's Cabinet: Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women," 244.

[85] Giannoto Castiglione was a Milanese friar who had just entered the service of Pope Paul IV. Robin, *Publishing Women*, 59.

[86] She indeed argues that Domenichi consciously took these framing devices from Dolce's Neapolitan anthologies. Robin, 50, 62. For more on the mini-*canzoniere* see Erika Milburn, *Luigi Tansillo and Lyric Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Naples* (Leeds: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2003).

some of the women in the *Rime diverse*, their collected lyric had been previously published, with the most obvious example being Colonna. For a majority of them such as Virginia Martini de Salvi who has forty-five poems in the anthology and Olimpia Malipiero who has thirty-three, this was the first time their lyrics were gathered together in a print edition. The second internal structure, the *réseau*, describes the network or web of friends in the anthology who dedicate a poem or a group of poems to one another. It is through this idea, according to Robin, that we can understand the lyric anthology as a virtual salon: "the *réseau* form imitates the salon, whether real or imaginary, in its interactivity, face-to-face style, variety of actors and themes, and mix of personalities."[87] The *Rime* includes seven sonnet exchanges between women, twelve sonnet exchanges between men and women, and 138 addresses to both men and women (fifty-six of those are addressed to men while forty-four are addressed to women).[88] These exchanges and dedications serve to connect poets to each other, but they also function to tie them to influential figures who could one day become their patrons. While some of the poems are addressed to powerful leaders such as Carlo V, others are directed to authors whose lyric is also present in the volume, including men, "whose appearance in this feminine lyric space is presumably motivated by their obligation to respond to the women poets or to provide context for responses written by women."[89] Out of the twelve sonnet exchanges between men and women in the anthology, six of them include correspondence with Domenichi himself, illustrating the editor as a subject of women's praise. Though the women's dedications to male recipients and the sonnet exchanges the women engaged in with male authors are not the concern of this chapter, they nevertheless play an important role in the *Rime diverse*.

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[87] Robin, *Publishing Women*, 63.

[88] In addition to addresses, I also included in my count funerary verse dedicated to male and female recipients.

[89] Shemek, "The Collector's Cabinet: Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women," 247.

Thirty-five out of the fifty-three women in the collection dedicate or address their lyric to other women, making the anthology fascinating to study from a point of view of women's relations.[90] In different ways, friendship poems—which I define here as poetic correspondence that facilitates literary friendships and lyric written on the theme of friendship—appear throughout these two internal structures. While some of the mini-*canzonieri* feature funerary lyric in which the poet laments the passing of a close female friend, within select *reseaux* women look to each other as models and build literary friendships with one another. I therefore examine the way Colonna, Gambara, Lucia Bertani, and Marguerite de Navarre use sonnet exchanges and addresses to construct literary relationships with each other through admiration and the evocation of similar poetic *topoi*; poetry as a medium to grieve the passing of close female friends in Olimpia Malipiero's and Livia Pii's mini-*canzonieri*; and the playful experimentation of Petrarchan love lyric to build a female support network and elicit sisterly bonds in the suite of sonnets by Giulia Braccali de' Ricciardi, Cornelia Brunozzi Villani, Maria Martelli de' Panciatichi, and Selvaggia Bracali de' Bracciolini. In doing so, I show not only how women wrote about and established literary female friendship through lyric but also how the *Rime diverse*, with all of Domenichi's editorial interventions, extrapolates from the women's friendship lyric the effect of a larger community that exists only in his book.

A. Securing Literary Ties in Vittoria Colonna's and Veronica Gambara's Community of Women

[90] Piéjus and Shemek both note that one of the original aspects of the *Rime diverse* was that some of its poems with dedications did not originally have a dedication when they were first published. For instance, there are dedicatory poems in neither Dolce's anthology from 1553 nor Ruscelli's anthology from 1558. Marie-Françoise Piéjus, "La Première Antologie Des Poèmes Féminins: L'écriture Filtrée et Oirentée," in *Le Pouvoir e La Plume: Incitation, Contrôle e Répression Dans l'Italie Du XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1982), 202–203; Shemek, "The Collector's Cabinet: Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women," 246.

Veronica Gambara's section of twenty-four sonnets in the *Rime diverse* opens with two exchanges with Vittoria Colonna. The choice to begin a selection of Gambara's lyric with her poetic correspondence, rather than with her single-authored poems, signals a significant editorial decision on behalf of Domenichi to highlight the extent of women's literary networks and their influence on each other. Including two women writers who were the models for later female Petrarchists in the *Rime diverse* inherently made the anthology attractive to a female readership. Incorporating and underscoring their exchanges furthermore set the stage for future exchanges among women, for as Virginia Cox notes, their sonnets to each other "had established an authoritative model for poetic exchange between women."[91]

While Gambara and Colonna had never met or exchanged letters, they certainly were aware of each other. The two navigated similar intellectual circles and, as mentioned earlier, their main shared point of reference was of course Pietro Bembo, the man responsible for circulating their lyric. When Gambara initiated the women's sonnet exchanges around 1532, both of Gambara's poems along with one of Colonna's responses—though it remains unclear which one—were sent to Bembo who judged all three poems to be "belli e gentili."[92] At this point in their lives, both women were already widowed and had begun receiving recognition and acclaim from their contemporaries for their respective literary talent.[93] While parts of their exchanges were published separately, all four appeared in the second edition of Colonna's *Rime*, published in 1558 by Girolamo Ruscelli (1518–1566) with a thorough commentary by Rinaldo Corso (1525–1582).[94] The order of their appearance

[91] Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 90.

[92] Gambara, *Le rime*, 103.

[93] See note 22.

[94] Ruscelli's publication was a second and completed version of Rinaldo Corso's edition of Colonna's *Rime* (1543), which initially lacked the "prima parte." Corso's commentary was the first to focus on the collected work of a woman writer and on a living writer (male or female), which further canonized and validated

in the *Rime diverse* in contrast to Ruscelli's placement of them in his edition illustrates an important editorial intervention on behalf of Domenichi. Ruscelli places Colonna's *risposte* each as standalones roughly a hundred pages apart and situates Gambara's *proposte* in the appendix to the first section, sensible editorial choices given that his edition was in fact a collection of Colonna's verse meant to highlight her poetry. In contrast, Domenichi groups each address with its respective reply, and the two exchanges come one after the other in the section of the *Rime diverse* dedicated to Gambara's lyric. In presenting the women's poems in this way, Domenichi retains their original format as a correspondence, which as I argue, facilitates a reading of literary friendship between the two women.

Gambara and Colonna's first sonnet exchange in the *Rime diverse* exemplifies the mode through which these two successful women writers express admiration and respect for one another. Gambara initiates the exchange with a sonnet that sings high praise for her addressee. In the sonnet, Gambara argues for Colonna's secured place in history, stating that she is worthy of eternal fame. She thus proposes the construction of a temple in order to celebrate Colonna, her literary success, and virtue.

> O de la nostra etade unica gloria,
> donna saggia, leggiadra, anzi divina,
> a la qual riverente hoggi s'inchina
> chiunque è degna di famosa historia.
> Ben sia eterna di Voi qua giù memoria,
> nè potrà il tempo con la sua ruina,
> far del bel nome vostro empia rapina;
> ma di Lui porterete alma vittoria.
> Il sesso nostro un sacro, et nobil tempio
> dovria, come già a Palla, et Febo, farvi
> di ricchi marmi, et di finissim'oro;
> et poiché di virtù siete l'esempio,
> vorrei, Donna, poter tanto lodarvi,

Colonna as a masterful author. Though Colonna was not directly involved in the curatorial process of her published *Rime*, Gambara served as a patron to the Corso edition.

quanto Io vi riverisco, amo, et adoro.[95]

The laudatory language employed in the address, along with the fact that Gambara is the one to begin the exchange, indicates her awareness of Colonna's elevated stature and Gambara's position relative to her as second. This ploy, as Abigail Brundin argues, works to establish Gambara's own literary worth, for "praising another woman poet, one who is generally recognized as the leading figure in the field, is an invulnerable literary position from which to make subtle claims about one's own literary merits, as well as the merits of female-authored works more generally."[96] In typical Petrarchan manner, the poem's chief themes are eternal glory and fame. Gambara places Colonna on a pedestal, paying tribute to her intelligence, grace, and virtue; she even includes a pun on her name in line eight. In her praise, however, Gambara reveals the poem's gendered agenda. She envisions a community of women, "il sesso nostro," who together would build a temple, like those dedicated in honor of Athena (the goddess of wisdom) and Apollo (the god of poetry), for Colonna.[97] While Gambara depicts Colonna as her superior, she also points to her as a model for women. In configuring her as a positive female exemplum, Gambara seeks not to distance Colonna from her (and other women) as an untouchable deity.[98] Gambara's adoration of Colonna carried out even to the very last line of the poem could not only depict her revered esteem for the marchesa, but also function as an invitation for a literary *amicizia* between the two women.

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[95] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 149.

[96] Abigail Brundin, "'Presto fia 'l mio potere in farvi onore': Renaissance Women Poets and the Importance of Praise," *The Italianist* 2, no. 2 (2007): 136.

[97] Cox points out the hermaphroditic qualities Gambara attributes to her dedicatee, especially in the temple metaphor, in which she likens Colonna to both a god and a goddess. Cox, "Sixteenth-Century Women Petrarchists and the Legacy of Laura," 69.

[98] In her reading of the poem, Eschrich highlights the "undeniable frisson" in Gambara's sonnet in her adoration of spiritual and intellectual desire. She borrows the term from Konrad Eisenbichler to denote the possible eroticism embedded in her adoration for Colonna. Eschrich, "Women Writing Women in Lodovico Domenichi's Anthology of 1559," 76.

In her reply, Colonna reciprocates Gambara's admiration, borrowing language from the marchesa's poem and evoking similar themes to do so. The structure of the poem's argument is very similar to Gambara's address; Colonna writes that Gambara also deserves immortalization, and so, a temple will be built for her as well.

> Di nuovo il cielo de l'antica gloria
> orna la nostra etate, et sua ruina
> prescrive, poscia che tra Noi destina
> spirto, c'ha di beltà doppia vittoria.
> Di Voi, ben degna d'immortale historia,
> bella Donna ragiono, a cui s'inchina,
> chi più di bello ottiene, et la divina
> interna parte vince ogni memoria.
> Faranvi i chiari spirti eterno tempio;
> la carta il marmo sia, l'inchiostro l'oro,
> che 'l ver costringe lor sempre a lodarvi.
> Morte col primo, o col secondo, et empio
> morso, il tempo, non ponno homai levarvi
> d'immortal fama il bel ricco thesoro.[99]

Colonna constructs her reply by replicating most of Gambara's rhyme words—such as "gloria," "vittoria," "historia," and "tempio"—as opposed to figuring in the same rhyme schemes.[100] However, she does not utilize all of them; for instance, in the last tercet, Colonna does not repeat "adoro" and changes Gambara's "esempio" to "empio." Whereas the use of "adoro" and "esempio" in Gambara's final lines convey the poet's personal admiration for Colonna—*she* adores her and Colonna acts as *her* model—Colonna eliminates this kind of personal veneration. That is not to say that Colonna does not reciprocate the praise she is given. In fact, Colonna not only returns compliments through her use of repeated words and rhymes—such as "historia" and "memoria" to say that Gambara, too, is worthy of immortalization—but also evokes the similar motifs and images

[99] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 149.

[100] According to Cox, the decision to repeat the same rhyme words was unusual for its time and only became more fashionable towards the end of the sixteenth century. *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*, 274. Because reciprocating compliments is commonplace in lyric exchanges, perhaps a reason for Colonna's use of this poetic tactic could be to completely reciprocate Gambara's compliments.

of eternal glory and fame in order continue the Gambara's conversation on topic established in the previous poem. For instance, she validates Gambara's place in history by continuing the metaphor of the temple, writing that one should be erected for her as well and that hers will be made of paper and ink. She casts her interlocuter as an equal, even though Gambara, as the one who initiates the lyric correspondence, technically assumes the inferior position. Their exchange thus creates a dialogue in which they can express mutual admiration that ultimately promotes equality and deconstructs any hierarchy that may have previously existed between them.[101]

While the women's first correspondence seeks to establish a closer connection between the two poets, their second exchange demonstrates the depth their literary bond has reached as they move away from giving and returning compliments and instead share ideas regarding weightier, religious concerns. Gambara again opens, but this time with a sonnet in which she reflects on her past, younger self and her desire to turn over a new spiritual leaf.

> Mentre da vaghi, et giovenil pensieri
> fui nodrita, hor temendo, hora sperando,
> piangendo hor trista et hor lieta cantando,
> da desir combattuta hor falsi, hor veri;
> con accenti sfogai pietosi, et fieri
> i concetti del cor, che spesso amando
> il suo male, assai più, che 'l ben, cercando,
> consumava dogliosa i giorni interi.
> Hor, che d'altri pensieri, et d'altre voglie
> pasco la mente, a le già care rime
> ho posto, et a lo stil silentio eterno.
> Et s'allhor vaneggiando, a quelle prime
> sciocchezze intesi, hora il pentirmi toglie
> la colpa palesando il duolo interno.[102]

[101] Brundin instead views Colonna's response as a way for the marchesa to distance herself from Gambara, for she does not use the gendered term "il nostro sesso." Brundin, "'Presto fia 'l mio potere in farvi onore': Renaissance Women Poets and the Importance of Praise," 140.

[102] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 150.

The sonnet's argument presents itself as a conflict of desire between continuing to write amorous verse and composing spiritual lyric. In reflecting on lovely, youthful thoughts that previously nourished her rhyme ("mentre da vaghi, et giovenil pensieri / fui nodrita"), Gambara now—note the constant repetition of "hor"—feels that these thoughts, which concern matters of the heart ("i concetti del cor"), seek the bad, and not the good. She depicts the highs and lows of this internal battle, noting, for instance, the sorrowful tears she sheds and the happy songs she sings ("piangendo hor trista / et hor lieta cantando"). While the first two quatrains do not judge her youth negatively, in the second quatrain she indicates how this struggle consumed her ("consumava dogliosa i giorni interi"). In this sonnet, Gambara establishes a temporal framework to compare her past *pensieri* with present ones. She does so in referencing her "giovenil pensieri," an explicit evocation of Petrarch's "primo giovenile errore" in the first sonnet of the *Canzionere*.[103] Gambara attempts to distance herself from her former love lyric—which she describes as "falsi" and "sciocchezze"—to instead encourage a spiritual reform. Such a turn or *volta* occurs in the last sestet of the poem; she writes that she has silenced her formerly cherished rhymes and style, and now feeds on other, presumably more pious, thoughts and desires. In addressing this sonnet to Colonna—a poet whose early erotic lyric in memory of her late husband contrasts with her later stricter religious verse—Gambara could have been seeking Colonna's advice on, and even affirmation of, her entrance into the realm of spiritual lyric.[104] Her sonnet here is indeed absent of flattery for Colonna and instead depicts Gambara's poetic troubles, suggesting a reading that their literary relationship could now have moved past the admiration phase and turned into something more profound.

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[103] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 37.

[104] Brundin argues that Gambara's address to Colonna is an attempt on behalf of the author to publicly ally herself with Colonna's "incontestable reputation for piety." "'Presto fia 'l mio potere in farvi onore': Renaissance Women Poets and the Importance of Praise," 137.

Colonna replies to Gambara with a personal reflection of how she continues to deal with the same struggle of being tempted by amorous thoughts.

> Lasciar non posso i miei saldi pensieri
> ch'un tempo mi nodrir felice amando,
> hor mi consuman misera cercando
> pur quel mio Sol per strani alti sentieri,
> ma tra falsi pensieri, et pianti veri
> la cagione immortal vuol, ch'obliando
> ogni altra cura, Io viva al fin sperando
> un giorno chiaro dopo tanti neri.
> Onde l'alto dolor, le basse rime
> muove, et quella ragion la colpa toglie,
> che fa viva la fede, il duolo eterno,
> infino all'ultim'hora quelle voglie
> saran sole nel cor, che furon prime,
> sfogando il fuoco honesto, e 'l duolo interno.[105]

Here the widowed Colonna reveals that she still experiences difficulty in not writing or thinking about the affairs of the heart, what she refers to as "falsi pensieri" and "basse rime." Though such thoughts used to bring her happiness, now they are a source of torment: "un tempo mi nordrir felice amando, / hor mi consuman misera." Whereas Gambara writes that for her these struggles are in the past, Colonna she dispels any idea that she has freed herself of these torments, however devout or politically accomplished she may be. Colonna, too, seeks a spiritual transformation, but she hints at this desire for change much more subtly than Gambara; for instance, she references her dead husband, her "Sol," but now tries to think of him in a new light as a spiritual guide ("cercando / pur quel mio Sol strani alti sentieri"), rather than as a muse for amorous verse as she had formerly done. The main difference between their poems lies in temporality. Gambara is clear about having moved past her youthful desires, while Colonna declares that she is still amidst such problems. This sentiment is most clearly conveyed in the last quatrain where Colonna repeats the same rhyme words from Gambara's poem to portray the difficultly she has in letting go of such yearnings. In this way,

[105] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 150.

Colonna unveils herself to be the more vulnerable of the two women, which is surprising given the fact that she held a higher stature than Gambara.

Together, Gambara's addresses and Colonna's replies therefore reveal poetic exchange to be an intimate space of dialogue where women can first connect and then build a relationship that permits them to openly share their concerns with one another. Domenichi's placement of the latter exchange immediately after their first in the *Rime diverse* further corroborates this idea. In fact, in the Ruscelli edition—which, if we recall, highlights Colonna's poems in its main section and includes Gambara's addresses in an appendix—the ordering of Colonna's replies are reversed; that is, Colonna's sonnet regarding her struggle to let go of amorous verse appears first in the collection, and her poem praising Gambara occurs a hundred pages later. Though historically it is unclear which sonnet Colonna responded to first since Bembo does not specify which reply of Colonna's he had received, Domenichi's choice to present their exchanges in this order creates the impression that their literary friendship progressed over their correspondence. His editorial construction of their exchanges could have been a way to project a growing level of confidence between the two poets.

The *Rime diverse* consists of other poems addressed to Colonna and Gambara. Other women poets looked to them as models, seeking to enter into conversation with them through direct address, praise, and evocation of the same themes treated in their lyric correspondence. Some of the poems in the *Rime diverse* in fact appear to have been directly responding to the women's exchanges, like those of Lucia Bertani (1521–1567). Known for her presence in literary salons and connected to prominent intellectuals such as Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565) and Domenichi himself, Bertani was an erudite noblewoman from Modena with natal ties to the dell'Orto family in Bologna.[106] Twenty of her poems were published in major sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anthologies. Her literary

[106] Her husband, Gurone Bertani, was a papal diplomat from Modena and was the brother of Cardinal Pietro Bertani. Clara Stella, "Lucia Bertani dell'Oro (1521–1567)," *Schede umanistiche* 31 (2017): 103–27.

presence extended into the works of her male contemporaries who openly wrote about and praised her in their texts. For instance, Domenichi includes her as one of the interlocutors in his *Dialogo d'amore* (1562) and pays her tribute in his *Historia di detti e fatti degni di memoria* (1556), while Giuseppe Betussi (1512–1573) writes about her in his *Imagini del tempio della signora donna Giovanna Aragona* (1556). She was perhaps most recognized for her public participation in the twenty-year long literary dispute between Annibale Caro (1507–1566) and Lodovico Castelvetro (1505–1571).[107]

As Clara Stella has noted, Bertani's poetry in the *Rime diverse* reveals the extent of her social network, displaying her in dialogue with other male and female intellectuals.[108] Two of her eleven poems in particular are dedicated to Colonna and Gambara; specifically, one is addressed to both women, while the other is directed solely to Gambara. Though they appear in the *Rime diverse* before the sonnets between Colonna and Gambara, Bertani's two poems are clearly imitative of their exchanges, especially in terms of the themes and language used to express female admiration. In placing her poems first, Domenichi builds reader anticipation toward the appearance of Gambara and Colonna in the anthology, evincing his craft as editor. The first, "Hebbe l'antica, et gloriosa etade," is derivative of Gambara's first address to Colonna, "O de la nostra etade unica gloria," in its laudatory address to the two women. In the sonnet, Bertani first announces Colonna's and Gambara's places in history by pronouncing them as her era's modern Sappho and Corinna. However, in the poem's sestet, Bertani makes an even bolder claim, stating that actually, her contemporaries surpass their ancient predecessors.

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[107] Their dispute, which was initiated by Castelvetro in 1553 when he attacked Caro's linguistic choices in his canzone "Venite all'ombra dei gran gigli d'oro," was displayed across four literary documents. Bertani attempted to mediate and wrote two letters to Caro that were published in the appendix to his *Apologia* published in 1558. Thomas E. Musso, "Ludovico Castelvetro (1505–1571)," in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies: A–J*, ed. Gaetana Marrone (New York: Routledge, 2007), 407.

[108] Stella, "Lucia Bertani dell"Oro (1521–1567)," 120. The other seven include two poems addressed to Domenichi, two to Gherardo Spini, one to Gabriele Franceschi, one to Silvia Sanvitale, and two to a married couple by the last name Castaldo on whom no biographical information remains.

Hebbe l'antica, et gloriosa etade
Saffo, et Corinna, che con dotte piume
s'alzaro insino al bel celeste lume,
per molte degne, et virtuose strade:
hor due, ch'alloro il crin cinge, et bontade,
non pur fan d'Aganippe nascer fiume,
ma spengono ogni falso, et rio costume
con opre eccelse, eterne, uniche, et rade.
Tal che l'alta Lor fama i pregi ingombra
de le due prime, e in questa, e in quella parte
sonar si sente Gambara, et Pescara.
Queste alme illustri son cagion, ch'ogni arte
tento, per torre a la mia luce l'ombra,
sol perché al mondo un dì si mostri chiara.[109]

The opening line and structure of the composition closely follow Gambara's first address to Colonna, but the poem overall also recalls Ariosto's praise and defense of women in the *Orlando furioso*. In contrast to Gambara's introductory verse in which she praises the wonders of "la nostra etade," Bertani turns first to the ancient world to pay tribute to Sappho and Corinna, two erudite female figures of the past whose achievements Ariosto also lauds in canto 20. Moreover, in this canto, Ariosto requests fellow writers to record the triumphs of contemporary women for posterity, since, as he notes, there are many talented and virtuous women in their present world whose achievements need to be celebrated in order to combat misogynist tongues.[110] This praise for contemporary women, Ariosto argues, will surpass the acclaim given to female figures of the past. Of course, as readers of the *Furioso* are aware, Ariosto later answers his own call, extolling Colonna in canto 37 and giving Gambara a line of praise in canto 46. Bertani follows suit in her poem, lauding these same women by concluding that Colonna and Gambara outshine Sappho and Corinna. Bertani, however, unlike Ariosto, is a woman writer who wants to associate herself with these strong

[109] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 112.

[110] "Ben mi par di veder ch'al secol nostro / tanta virtú fra belle donne emerga, /che può dare opra a carte et ad inchiostro / perché nei futuri anni si disperga, / e perché, odiose lingue, il mal dir vostro / con vostra eterna infamia si sommerga." Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti, Einaudi Tascabili Classici 116 (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 20.3.17–22.

female role models.[111] This association occurs in last *terzina* where she cites Colonna and Gambara as her poetic inspiration, playfully using "luce" as a metaphor in reference to the women's bright guidance and as a pun on her own name, Lucia. Here, Bertani responds directly to Gambara's call for women to seek female role models. As Cox notes "the dynamic of emulation set in train by their [Colonna and Gambara's] example is well captured in this [Bertani's] sonnet."[112] I would further add though that Bertani's poem does more than recreate the female emulation found in Colonna-Gambara exchanges; by stating that they are the reasons why she seeks her own fame ("son cagion"), Bertani shows in action how women can encourage each another to succeed.

Another of Bertani's lyrics that enters into dialogue with the Colonna-Gambara exchanges is "La santa, et veramente unica Hebrea." In contrast to her previous sonnet directed to the two women, Bertani names Gambara as the poem's dedicatee. Bertani begins the sonnet by drawing a parallel between Gambara and Saint Veronica, stating that not only does Gambara share her name but she also follows her saintly path; her piety and spiritual rhyme positively affect those on earth, including Bertani herself, explaining why Gambara deserves praise.

> La santa, et veramente unica Hebrea,
> di cui v'adorna il nome, et di cui l'orma
> seguite sì, che 'l pie' vostro riforma
> i vestigi qua giù, ch'ella premea,
> non ammirare, et adorar facea
> ne' bianchi lini la divina forma
> di Colui, che salvò l'humana Torma,
> quanto Voi fate Me, celeste Dea,
> col vostro degno, et grave aspetto santo,
> la cui stampa vegg'Io ne l'alme rime
> vostre, che fanno al maggior Tosco scorno:
> talch'Io v'adoro in terra fra le prime
> alme dotte, che fan tra Noi soggiorno;

[111] Here, we see Bertani respond to arguments made in the *Furioso* in order to address her personal role models and praise them. In this way, the *Furioso* emerges as a crucial source text that helped authorize female-female praise. See Deanna Shemek, "Ariostan Armory: Feminist Responses to the *Orlando Furioso*," *MLN* 133, no. 1 (2018): 148–59.

[112] Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 77.

et di tutte portate il pregio, e 'l vanto.[113]

Rather than only celebrate Gambara's literary prowess, Bertani lauds both her spirituality and her writing talent. As scholars have noted, in the poem Bertani evokes two Veronicas: Saint Veronica, known in the Catholic tradition for wiping Jesus' face on her handkerchief—which then retained an image of his face—while he was carrying his cross to Golgotha, and Veronica Gambara herself.[114] The poem recalls *RVF* 16 in which Petrarch recounts the pilgrimage of an old man who travels to Rome to see Veronica's veil, and thus also, Christ's face. Petrarch then compares the man's journey to his own quest of seeing Laura once again. Bertani instead begins with an image of this renowned female figure as a way to draw a direct comparison with her addressee. She moreover builds a genealogy of female adoration between them: Gambara follows St. Veronica in her holiness, which inspires Bertani to emulate Gambara. In the second half of the poem, the tone becomes increasingly panegyric; Bertani claims Gambara's superiority as a Tuscan poet whose verse surpasses even that of Petrarch ("il maggior Tosco").[115] At first glance, the opening spiritual references seem out of place since the poem then transforms into a celebration of Gambara's literary genius. However, understood in relation to Colonna and Gambara's second exchange in which the two women share their various experiences of seeking to turn away from amorous verse to instead focus on holy matters, the religious references become clear: Bertani is responding to Gambara's expressed spiritual change by supporting and further substantiating her addressee's recent transformation.

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[113] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 114.

[114] Stella, "Lucia Bertani dell'Oro (1521–1567)," 123.

[115] In his *Stanze*, Pietro Bembo refers to Petrarch with this same phase in a section that discusses the power of love. He writes, "sì come ebb'ei, di sì leggiadri et tersi / concenti il maggior Tosco addolcir l'aura, / che sempre s'udirà risonar Laura." *Prose e Rime*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti, 2nd ed. (Turin: Union Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1966), XXII.6–8.

Following in theme with Bertani's second poem to Gambara, the sixth poem in the *Rime diverse*, attributed to Marguerite de Navarre, also known as Marguerite d'Angoulême (1492–1549), and addressed to Colonna, extols the marchesa's spirituality.[116] As sister to King Francis I of France, Marguerite was even more highborn than Colonna. The inclusion of a sonnet by Marguerite, author of the *Heptaméron* and one of the most important figures of the French Renaissance, indicates the *Rime diverse*'s transnational outreach to connect women from different geographical areas within Europe. The sonnet depicts the difficulty the poet experiences in her faith and characterizes Colonna as a spiritual guide.

> Felice Voi, che con gli spirti ardenti
> avete il cor al mio Signor rivolto,
> et l'accendete ogn'uno a star raccolto
> in Lui, che verso Noi tien gli occhi intenti.
> Misera Me ch'a passi infermi, et lenti
> seguito ho Lui, che me sprezzato ha molto:
> ond'hor del van disio, fallace, et stolto
> l'alma si pente, et trae sospir cocenti.
> Pregate Voi, che de gli eletti sete
> per Me de' Cieli il Re, che la sua mano
> mi tenga sopra, et mi raccolga in seno.
> Et poi che scorto il vero lume avete,
> fate, ch'anchor non sia per gli altri vano,
> ma, ch'il provi ciascun chiaro, et sereno.[117]

Marguerite sets up a direct contrast between her unsteady religious journey with respect to Colonna's spiritual devotion. Whereas in the first quatrain Marguerite describes Colonna's strength of inspiring worship of God in others ("avete il cor al mio Signor rivolto, / et l'accendete ogn'uno a star raccolto"), in the second quatrain the poet discusses her personal religious failings and God's subsequent scorning of her ("Misera Me ch'a passi infermi, et lenti / seguito ho Lui, che me

[116] Navarre's sonnet, along with another penned by her, were originally published by Anselo Giaccarello in 1542. However, the attribution of these two sonnets to Navarre has never actually been verified. Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*, 113.

[117] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 11.

sprezzato ha molto"). This antithesis functions as a preamble for Marguerite's subsequent request of the marchesa: She asks Colonna to pray for her as she has now repented of her vain desires ("ond'hor del van disio, fallace, et stolto / l'alma si pente, et trae sospir cocenti"). She therefore points to Colonna, whose heart is turned towards God, as a positive spiritual mentor to her and to others.[118] Unlike Gambara and Bertani who seem not to have had any previous connection, Colonna and Navarre were epistolary friends. Though they never met in person, they corresponded a few times during the 1540s, and their missives were published in a volume of collected letters titled *Lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi huomini, et eccellentissimi ingegni, scritte in diverse materie: Libro primo* (1542). Colonna even responded to Navarre's wish to receive a copy of the marchesa's poetry when she sent the queen a bound manuscript of a selection of her published and unpublished sonnets.[119]

One of Navarre's missives to Colonna affirms that laudatory letters exchanged between women secure ties between them.[120]

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[118] In another poem Navarre addresses to Colonna, she draws an implicit parallel between Colonna and the Virgin Mary through a reference to Genesis 3:15. As Brundin argues, she evokes the image of a woman crushing a serpent beneath her foot "which associates her subject [Colonna] with God's words to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, predicting the coming of a second Eve [Mary] who will stamp the sin of the first beneath her foot in a gesture of emancipation and salvation." *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*, 113.

[119] In fact, her gift manuscript to Navarre along with another she sent to Michelangelo around the same time seem to be the only occurrences in which she took an active role in the dissemination of her poetry. Abigail Brundin, "Vittoria Colonna and the Virgin Mary," *The Modern Language Review* 96, no. 1 (2001): 61.

[120] Most of their exchanges were spiritual in nature. For example, in a letter to Navarre, Colonna explains the importance of female moral and spiritual guides for women and designates her friend as the one to follow:

> Havendo noi bisogno di questa lunga e difficil via della vita di guida, che ne mostri il camino con la dottrina, e con l'opre insieme ne inviti a superar la fatica; e parendomi che gli esempii del suo proprio sesso a ciascuno sian più proportionati, et il seguir l'un l'altro più lecito; mi rivoltavo alle donne grandi d'Italia, per imparare da loro et imitarle: et benché ne vedessi molte vertuose, non però giudicava che giustamente l'altre tutte quasi per norma se la proponessono, in una sola fuor d'Italia s'intendeva esser congioncte le perfettioni della volontà insieme con quelle de l'intelleto. Vittoria Colonna to Marugerite d'Angoulême, 15 February 1540, Rome, as transcribed in Barry Collett, ed., *A Long and Troubled Pilgrimage: The Correspondence of Marguerite d'Angoulême and Vittoria Colonna, 1540–1545* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 125.

> Alla qual cosa è necessaria la continuanza delle vostre orationi & le frequenti visitationi delle vostre utili scritture, le quali io vi prego che non vi anoii di continuare: imperò che l'amicitia, cominciata per la fama, è tanto accresciuta per haverla veduta nelle vostre lettere reciproca, che più che giamai desidero di haverne, & ancor più di esser così aventurosa che in questo mondo possi di voi udir parlare della felicità dee l'altro, & se in questo qui conoscete ch'io vi possa far qualche piacere, io vi prego, mia Cugina d'impiegarmi, come vostra sorella; perciò che di cosi buon cuore vi sodisfarò, come ne l'altro desidero & spero vedervi eternalmente.[121]

Navarre explicitly uses the term *amicitia* to describe the relationship developing between her and Colonna over their epistolary exchanges. Their relationship that first began through mutual respect—Navarre uses the term *fama* to convey their shared sentiment—grew deeper because of the flattery they exchanged in their letters. In other words, their mutual esteem expressed in their correspondence influenced a friendship between them, a fact Navarre further confirms when she closes her letter with the sign off, "vera amica." The female admiration and emulation evident in the Colonna-Gambara exchanges and the poems of Bertani and Navarre function similarly. Collected together in the *Rime diverse*, their poems unveil a literary community of women poets who, though they may have never had the opportunity to meet or collaborate in person, were able to establish contact with each other, form literary ties, and discuss personal concerns.

B. Funerary Verse Dedicated to Female Friends

The funerary lyric featured in the *Rime diverse* recounts the tragic experience of losing a close female friend. In their elegiac poems addressed to their deceased friends, Olimpia Malipiero (ca.1523–1569) and Livia Pii (fl.1550–ca.1580) detail the emotional trauma inflicted on one's psyche in the aftermath of a friend's death and their respective ways of finding solace. Whereas Petrarch grieves the loss of Sennuccio by weaving him into the narrative about Laura, portraying him as a witness to the poet's affection for her and as a sharer of love's torments, Malipiero and Pii eliminate

[121] Marguerite d'Angoulême to Vittoria Colonna, March 1540, Paris, as transcribed in Collett, 128. Marguerite learned Italian as part of her humanistic education, and her earliest writings in fact show her fluency in the language. Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna*, 142.

the love story and do not depict either of their friends in relation to a beloved. Instead, the female friend is the sole subject of their verse.

The *Rime diverse* spotlights the poetry of Malipiero with a mini-*canzoniere* of thirty-three compositions (thirty-one sonnets, one madrigal, and one *sestina*), the second greatest number of poems attributed to a single author in the collection. Her literary debut in the *Rime diverse* helped Malipiero gain recognition; from that point onward, forty of her poems were published between the years 1559 and 1568 in other anthologies such as the *Rime di diversi nobili toscani* (1565) and *Tempio della divina Signora Geronima Colonna d'Aragona* (1568). What little is known about Malipiero concerns her upbringing. As the nineteenth-century historian Emanuele Antonio Cicogna discovered, Malipiero was of Venetian-Florentine roots: her father, Leonardo Malipiero, came from a patrician Venetian family and her mother had natal ties to the Pisani family in Florence.[122] Though Malipiero was born in Venice, she reluctantly spent most of her life in Florence, as her family was exiled from the maritime city for reasons unknown.[123] She only returned to Venice in the last years of her life before she died from an illness.

Malipiero's mini-*canzoniere* in the *Rime diverse* is unique in that largely absent from it are poems that recount a tale of love's torments. Instead, she recurrently uses the motif of being lost at sea in a storm—a common Petrarchan trope to describe the harsh psychological effects of being in love—to communicate her experience of homesickness, exile, and longing for Venice.[124] The poems that make up her small collection can be classified into the following groupings: autobiographical,

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[122] Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni Veneziane*, vol. 5 (Venice: Orlandelli e Picotti, 1824), 57–58.

[123] While the grounds for the family's exile remain unknown, there exist a number of letters written by Malipiero's father Leonardo to Cosimo I de' Medici, whom Malipiero celebrates in a number of her own poems, requesting protection. For more on their epistolary exchange see Clara Stella, "Tra 'Vinegia' e Arno: la biografia in versi di Olimpia Malipiero," *Il Campiello* 2 (2017): 7–31.

[124] Stella, 16.

celebratory, funerary, and religious verse. Her funerary lyric, which in Domenichi's selection includes seven sonnets and one *sestina*, are of utmost interest since Malipiero writes somberly and lovingly about a female friend who seems to have been especially close to her, making women's friendship a chief theme of her oeuvre.[125]

Malipiero's elegiac verse appears sequentially in a single group, numbered by modern scholars as sonnets 173 to 180. Though some like Clara Stella believe these poems treat various women, it seems likely that they could also be written about one female friend in particular. While for most of the sequence Malipiero does not name the deceased in question, in the closing sonnet of the sequence, "Privo di stelle 'l cielo, et del mar l'onde," she names the friend as Minia. The sonnets that precede "Privo di stelle" (sonnets 173 to 179) leave the female friend unnamed, but Malipiero implements repetitive imagery to characterize her, illustrating that she, Minia, could indeed be the subject of these compositions as well. Understood as poems written specifically about Minia, Malipiero's mini-*canzoniere* then contains within it a smaller collection of lyric poems whose narrative highlights the love for a close friend as though she were Malipiero's beloved and the tortuous journey of losing her, subverting the typical Petrarchan storyline. And, unlike Petrarch's *in morte* verse dedicated to Sennuccio that inserts the friend as an integral piece to the puzzle of love, Malipiero eliminates the heterosexual love story, denoting the heightened significance of friendship in a woman's life overall.

In most of the lyric in this sequence, Malipiero describes her friend as a heavenly being, often referring to her through celestial imagery, immediately evident in the sonnet that opens the selection of poetry dedicated to the late Minia. Malipiero begins the sonnet by celebrating her friend's exceptional beauty and virtue, claiming they are unique to their world. However, the poem

[125] Stella indeed notes that Malipiero uses her funerary poems to contemplate the fleetingness of life. 26.

quickly turns from praise to tragedy, as Malipiero explains that Minia's rare and splendor characteristics explain the reason why the figure of death took her away.

> Giovane illustre, da' celesti chori
> qui fra noi scesa, sì leggiadra e bella,
> di virtù ornata, et carca di Tesori,
> ch'alluma 'l mondo, come viva stella:
> nè più si vide in questa etate, o in quella
> bellezza senza par, divin splendori,
> honesti sguardi, angelica favella
> poser le gratie in lei tutti gli honori,
> con gli altri Morte, a tanta gloria attenta
> mirò l'andar celeste, et disse: 'Mai
> cosa rara qua giù durar non suole'.
> Così detto, avventò 'l colpo, che spenta
> fè l'alma luce di quei chiari rai,
> e privò 'l Mondo del suo vivo Sole.[126]

Light visuals pervade the sonnet as Malipiero portrays her friend, whom she does not name, as both a bright star and as a sun whose rays illuminate the world around her.[127] She repeats this bright imagery in later poems in the sequence, a tool to signal the poems' discussion of the same person. For instance, the sonnet 176 in the *Rime diverse* again includes the simile of the friend as a star: "Quest'anima beata, et gloriosa, / in cielo ascesa, come viva stella."[128] The equation of the friend to the "Sole" in the last line of "Giovane illustre, da' celesti chori." moreover, echoes a conventional metaphor of Petrarch's verse, and later, of Vittoria Colonna's poetry, used in reference to their beloveds, Laura and Colonna's husband. Here though, Malipiero attributes the image to her friend, an adaptation that implicitly equates the loss of a beloved to that of a friend. Malipiero's language to depict her friend is also laudatory, reminiscent of the way women poets gave and reciprocated

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[126] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 133.

[127] Later in the sequence, Malipiero also depicts her as an "alma" who looks down from heaven onto her and her friends: "Alma, che di la sù noi miri in terra / con speme ancor di rivederti in cielo, / poi ch'in te oscura, et sventurata notte, spense la luce d'ogni nostro giorno, / o cruda, acerba, et dispietata morte, / che noi di ben privasti, et lei di vita." Domenichi, 136.

[128] Domenichi, 134.

compliments to each other. For instance, Malipiero writes that she is unlike any other from their era, a verse that parallels the first line of Veronica Gambara's opening sonnet to Colonna ("nè più si vide in questa etate"). Because the above poem is also elegiac, Malipiero's praise of her deceased friend embellishes the narrative of loss that unfolds over the rest of the sequence. Only at the end of the poem does she introduce death as the story's primary antagonist, personifying the figure through dialogue and action. This evocation and personification of death as cruel is commonplace in Petrarch's *in morte* verse about Laura.[129] In Malipiero's sonnet, death sent the blow that took Minia's life, causing her light that brightened the sun's rays to extinguish. Death indeed is to blame for depriving the world of Minia's luminous presence, a point that reoccurs in the poems to follow.[130]

The figure of death appears another time in "Ahi lasse, che per sempre sconsolate" (*Rime diverse* 178), a sonnet that describes the coming together of a female community to grieve the loss of Minia. In contrast to the previous poem in which Malipiero presents the figure of death as a villain whose actions are responsible for Minia's passing, here she characterizes death positively in an exchange between a group of inconsolable women and the deceased herself.

> Ahi lasse, che per sempre sconsolate,
> triste rimaste siam, colme d'affanni,
> et hai perché nel più bel fior de gl'anni
> chiudesti a noi le luci tue beate?
> Ahi che troncata, et svelta è ad ogni etate,
> l'alta sua gloria, hai de gli aurati panni
> che farem noi, che con sì dolci inganni,
> lasciasti senza te noi sfortunate?
> 'Donne, deh non turbate il mio riposo,
> mirate il cielo, ove io son lieta, e bella
> adorna del celeste, e immortal sposo.
> Fummi a l'uscir di sì grave procella
> del viver di là giù tanto noioso,
> amica Morte, e non malvagia, et fella.'[131]

[129] See for example *RVF* 269, 270, 281, 283, 300, 326, and 332.

[130] See for example the opening lines of "Alma, che di la sù noi miri in terra," partially quoted in note 89.

[131] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 135.

The perspective of the poem begins with that of the multitude of women; the first two quatrains, each beginning with "Ahi," are apostrophes by the female group, directed toward the absent friend. In their address to her, they share their sorrow and frustration through their posing of unanswerable questions, displaying their search for meaning and comfort in the aftermath of her death. In the last sestet, the absent friend, Minia, speaks in order console her friends, showing Malipiero's use of the rhetorical trope prosopopoeia. Here, Minia explains that she has undertaken a spiritual journey and is now inhabiting the heavenly skies with Christ. Most importantly, she characterizes death as an "amica," refuting the notion of its wickedness as previously expressed in "Giovane illustre, da' celesti chori." In portraying death as an ally and not an enemy, Minia asks her friends to accept her fate in a welcoming manner in order to find solace in the fact that she is now safe in heaven. This exchange continues the narrative of Minia's death. However in this sonnet, Malipiero not only reveals her personal grief, but depicts the mourning of a larger group of women to demonstrate the sorrow felt in a close-knit female community when a fellow companion passes on.

In addition to portraying the friend as an angelic figure, Malipiero recurrently expresses the loss of Minia through the rhetorical device of the *adynaton* (*adynata* in the plural), also known as *impossibilia*; the *adynaton*, used by many classical poets, as well as by Petrarch and Dante in love poetry, is a figure of speech in the form of a hyperbole taken to such extreme lengths as to denote a complete impossibility.[132] In the two sonnets, "Turbossi il ciel, la terra, et gli elementi" and "Privo di stelle 'l ciel e del mar l'onde," Malipiero utilizes *adynata* in apocalyptic imagery in order to aptly depict the difficult experience of living in a world without her closest female friend, following Petrarch who, too, implements the *adynaton* in *RVF* 218, a sonnet that anticipates Laura's death and

[132] For more on the rhetorical device of the *adynaton* see Caron Ann Cioffi, "Criseyde's Oaths of Love: Do They Really Belong to the Tradition of Lying-Songs?," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87, no. 4 (1988): 522–34.

describes the disaster that will ensue on earth once she dies.[133] In the narrative of these sonnets, however, Minia has already passed, so the natural world is already in total disarray. While the first poem is from the perspective of a group of women who mourn the loss of Minia, the second sonnet is from that of the poet herself.

> Turbossi il ciel, la terra, et gli elementi;
> tremaro i monti, e di lor corso i fiumi
> vidi arrestar, le Tigri Hircane i dumi,
> et i figli lasciar mesti, e dolenti.
> L'aria s'accese di sospir cocenti,
> di voci horrende, e mille humidi lumi
> persi in memoria di quei bei costumi,
> et sparsero dolor, grida, e lamenti.
> Lassi, diceano, homai con voci meste:
> 'Che fia di noi? che senza lei rimasti
> Siam qual greggia smarrita in valle oscura?
> Chiudendo tu quelle due luci honeste,
> crudele invida morte; a noi troncasti
> la dritta via, ch'al ciel' ir n'assicura.'[134]

> Privo di stelle 'l cielo e del mar l'onde
> cangiar vedransi tutti in pietra dura,
> e al dolce tempo l'aura fresca e pura,
> foco e fiamma spirar d'ambe le sponde;
> ed alla terra i fior, l'erbe e le fronde
> mancare, il dì mutarsi in notte oscura,
> e gli elementi varïar natura,
> e qui nove produr piaghe profonde;
> gl'augei, le fiere, gl'uomini e gli dei,
> ciechi di mente e co' desiri ingordi
> l'un l'altro roder senza restar mai,
> e 'l mondo tutto in sempiterni guai
> vedrasi, e giunto 'l fin de' giorni miei

[133] In Petrarch's sonnet, the figure of Love tells the poet what will happen once she dies: "'Come Natura al ciel la luna e 'l sole, / a l'aere i venti, a la terra erbe et fronde, / a l'uomo et l'intelletto et le parole, / et al mar ritollesse i pesci et l'onde: / tanto et più fien le cose oscure et sole / se Morte li occhi suoi chiude et asconde.'" Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 375. Petrarch also utilizes the *adynaton* elsewhere, such as in *RVF* 22, in which the speaker employs this rhetorical device to express the impossibility of embracing his beloved, and in RVF 66, a sestina in which the poet writes that before he sees Laura without her usual emotional coldness, the rivers, seas, and lakes will dry up on earth.

[134] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 134.

pria che, Minia gentil, di voi mi scordi.[135]

While in the first sonnet, the sky, earth, and elements are disturbed as the mountains shake, ferocious Hyrcanian tigers roam the land, and the courses of rivers stop, in the second the sky is starless, the ocean's waves turn to stone, and the fresh, untainted breeze bursts into sudden flames.[136] To make these ideas more pronounced, Malipiero employs enjambments and asyndeta to visually construct these apocalyptic words, reflecting disorder in the arrangement of the poems' words as well. Not only does Malipiero paint the natural realm in a state of confusion and ruin but Malipiero also underscores the unstable condition of the animals, humans, and gods who inhabit this world, using Dantean and Petrarchan imagery to do so. For instance, in the first sonnet, the voices and sighs belonging to a group of mourners are pained and woeful, and their eyes are also full of tears ("mille humidi lumi"), recalling the group of women from Malipiero's "Ahi lasse, che per sempre sconsolate" who here now resemble the *peccatori* of the *Inferno*. As a collective, they again mourn the loss of this nameless woman, vocally blaming death, personified once again as the true foe of the poem for taking her away from them.[137] In their direct address to the figure of death, the group explains that Minia has an utmost importance in their lives, serving them like a guiding light through a dark valley. This address recalls of course Petrarch's *in morte* verse about Laura—*RVF* 358 and 363 in particular—in which the poet asks death why he has deprived the world of its light (Laura). Their speech also evokes the opening of the *Inferno* when the poet-pilgrim, lost in the *selva oscura*, meets Virgil, the difference here being that the mourners no longer have their guide and feel her absence.

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[135] Domenichi, 138.

[136] The lines of this poem borrow heavily from Petrarch's *RVF* 360, a canzone in which the poet confronts the figure of love.

[137] The portrayal of death as cruel appears once more in the sestina, the penultimate poem of this sequence.

In the second sonnet, Malipiero speaks in the first person singular to say all of these apocalyptic things will happen (the sky will become starless, the ocean's waves will all turn to stone and so on) before she will forget Minia. Malipiero utilizes a Dantean allusion again to describe what would happen to the inhabitants of this dystopic world; they would become crazed, blinded from reason, and would indulge in gluttonous desires. She implicitly cites Ugolino in line eleven to further illustrate the loss of one's rational mind in this chaotic, violent world. Similar to the way in which Elisabetta Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este use epistolary writing as a means of bridging geographical gaps, Malipiero utilizes a language of desire through the *adynata* to assure Minia, whom she finally names in the second poem, that she will always remember her and feels disoriented without her.[138] The withholding of Minia's name until this point could function as an appeal to Malipiero's female readership. In not naming her, she fashions Minia into a universal figure to which her readers who may have also experienced the loss of a close female friend can relate. These impossible words created through the *adynata* in these two lyric compositions moreover imply that a world without female friendship is one in utter chaos. For Malipiero, women's friendship therefore forms part of the order of the cosmos, an argument typically applied to homosocial ties, but here is being appropriated to philosophize about female bonds.

In contrast to Malipiero's funerary poetry, Livia Pii's verse dedicated to the loss of her friend Camilla interprets friendship on a more spiritual plane. In a substantive contrast to Malipiero who characterizes Minia as someone who is safe and blissful in heaven but detached from earthly life, Pii portrays Camilla as an angelic figure who possesses salvific powers and acts as an intermediary between the poet and God. Not much is known about Pii's biography except that she was a

[138] Calling out the name of the friend acts as a metamorphic act of summoning as the poet attempts to bring closer what is being called through language. See Angela Capodivacca, "*Le Amiche Carte*: Gaspara Stampa and Mirtilla," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Unn Falkeid and Aileen Feng (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016), 121.

noblewoman from Bologna and was married to Alessandro d'Annibale Poeti, a soldier in the service of the Venetian republic.[139] In the *Rime diverse*, the Bolognese poet is the author of four sonnets and the addressee of another by Diamante Dolfi. Her two friendship sonnets describe Pii's spiritual journey in light of her friend's death. The first "Altro rettor del ciel, s'humile, et pia" reflects Pii's state of mind in the moments leading up to Camilla's death. The poem in fact is a plea to God to keep her friend alive, especially since she symbolizes the light and honor of the world that would suffer great harm as a result of her death.

> Alto rettor del ciel, s'humile, et pia
> preghiera honesta in Te pietate accende,
> hor benigno rimira al mal, ch'offende
> quella, ch'al pregio di virtù m'invia.
> Disperdi il gelo, et spegni l'aspra, et ria
> fiamma, che le sue membra agghiaccia, e incende;
> che se Camilla hora a Te l'alma rende,
> pur troppo danno (lassa) al mondo sia.
> Ch'Ella sola è 'l suo honore, Ella è 'l suo lume;
> in Lei virtute, et honestate alberga,
> e ogni bellezza, e ogni gentil costume.
> Deh come sia, ch'io viva, et ch'alto Io m'erga,
> s'hora avvien, che le vaghe altiere piume,
> onde mi levo al ciel, Morte disperga?[140]

Pii directs her verse to God, begging him to take pity on her by extinguishing the "mal" or illness that afflicts her friend. The severity of Camilla's ailment is suggested through the rhetorical device of antithesis in lines four and five. In a striking redeployment of the Petrarchan antithesis of fire and ice, Pii juxtaposes the frost that freezes and the flame that ignites her limbs in order to express the dire situation her friend is in, making the poet's prayer seem especially urgent. Another clue that reveals Camilla's close proximity to death appears midway through the poem when Pii explains to

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[139] Giovanni Fantuzzi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi* (Bologna: Stamperia di San Tommaso d'Aquino, 1781), 7:41.

[140] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 109.

God the extreme loss the mortal world would feel if her friend's soul yields itself to him, for Camilla serves as a model of virtue, honesty, and honor to many. In this way, Pii situates Camilla as a mentor figure, using light imagery similar to that of Malipiero's, and she frames her death as a choice that rests in the hands of God. The closing rhetorical device additionally unveils the effect this woman's mortality would have on the poet herself; she asks death—a figure once again characterized as an active agent—how could she live if death disperses the lofty wings which rise her up to heaven? In other words, how can she continue on the right path if her friend, her spiritual guide, were to die.

In the second sonnet to Camilla, "Alma beata che già al mondo involta," the narrative has fast-forwarded to after her death, showing the poet's search for meaning in the aftermath of her passing. The poem is directed to Camilla herself, as Pii asks for help in her personal journey towards God.

> Alma beata che già al mondo involta
> nel tuo bel ma mortal corporeo velo
> mi fosti un tempo, or mi sei guida al cielo,
> del terren nodo innanzi tempo sciolta;
> mentre che al sommo Sol tutta sei volta,
> piena di ardente e di verace zelo,
> odi i sospir ch'io spargo e il duol ch'io celo,
> rimira in Lui che il tutto e vede e ascolta.
> Deh! il mio gran male ora il tuo ben non sceme,
> ma ti muova a pietà, che sol me sdegna
> Morte, per non por fine alla mia guerra.
> E s'ancor m'ami in ciel, come già in terra,
> impetra dal Signor (bench'io sia indegna)
> ch'io goda l'uno e l'altro volto insieme.[141]

The poem's sharing of themes and language with the previous sonnet points to a continuation of the poet's grief now that her friend has departed, making it appear that the two lyric compositions are in connected to each other. Though Pii does not refer to Camilla by her name, she addresses her friend

[141] Domenichi, 110.

as an "alma beata," presumably the same *alma* from the previous poem.[142] In describing her friend as a blessed soul ("alma beata"), Pii understands her personal relationship in the Christian tradition of friendship. Numerous points in the verse illustrate the poet's journey towards God as one full of pain and suffering. Because death—personified as a character who wields power—refuses to end her life, Pii looks to her friend in heaven as a source of relief and support. Similar to many Christian thinkers including Augustine and Aquinas who understood the importance of friendship as a medium to connect to God and his love, Pii creates a triangular relationship between herself, the friend, and God. In doing so, she once again places her friend in the role as the guide, both on earth and in heaven. Her friend's dual role between these two worlds reflects the transcendent quality of friendship that acts as the means for Pii to unite with God.

C. Playing with Petrarchan Conventions of Amorous Verse to Form a Female Support Network

The consecutive poems by Giulia Braccali de' Ricciardi, Cornelia Brunozzi Villani, Maria Martelli de' Panciatichi, and Selvaggia Bracali de' Bracciolini in the *Rime diverse* exist in dialogue with each other, with two sonnet exchanges between Villani and Panciatichi—which anchor the sequence—in addition to two addresses, one by Ricciardi to Villani, and another by Bracciolini to Panciatichi. No biographical information about theses poets is known other than the fact that they are all from Tuscany. The presentation of their work in Domenichi's anthology reflects, as Diana Robin argues, the lively discussions that would have occurred between literary salon participants. Robin in fact points to their exchanges and addresses as an example of a *réseau* in which intellectual women on the page actively engage with each other. Additionally, in her short analysis of their lyric

[142] Though as Virginia Cox suggests we cannot know for sure the identity of the "alma beata" since not enough is known about Pii's life, we can assume it is a friend or relative since her husband outlived her. Moreover, the endings of the quatrains have grammatical feminine endings that also agree with "alma," such as "sciolta" and "ascolta," possibly another clue that shows the "alma beata" is indeed a woman. *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*, 347.

compositions, she notes that in the two back and forths between Villani and Panciatichi, the women "cast themselves as a pair of Petrarch lovers: Cornelia is the pursuer—ardent, hurt, angry by turns—chasing her beloved hopelessly, while Maria Martelli plays the 'Laura' role."[143] I agree with Robin that the undertones in the way they express admiration for each other are certainly erotic. However, I also find it possible to read their use of amorous language as a way for them to bond as friends and engage with each other in a playful manner.

Ricciardi's opening poem of the section dedicated to Villani shares qualities with some of the *in morte* verse previously examined, especially in its argument that the addressee of the poem acts a spiritual example whose presence on earth becomes hard to live without. The difference here is though is that this poem does not treat Villani's death, as she has not died. Rather, Ricciardi's verse presents Villani as a positive living exemplum whose presence lights the earth and would be missed if she were to pass.

> Veggio coperte sotto un chiaro velo
> quante virtuti il ciel può mai donare;
> meravigliomi ben come illustrare
> s'habbia la terra, et farsi oscuro il cielo?
> Amor, fede, bellezza, et d'honor zelo
> chiuse in voi sono, a Noi per dimostrare
> la vera gloria, che nel cielo appare,
> senza, temer giamai caldo, nè gielo.
> Et quando diverrà il bel corpo terra,
> oscure nubi havrem, la sù sia chiaro;
> o giorno spaventoso, a chi qui resta.
> Ond'Io prego il Signor, che gli sia caro
> l'alma discior, che la mia spoglia serra
> prima, ch'Io dopo voi sia sola, et mesta.[144]

While in the first quatrain the speaker observes that the earth is illuminated and heaven is darkened—one of the many antitheses of the poem—and muses how that is so, she also says that

[143] Robin, *Publishing Women*, 64.

[144] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 37.

the light on earth comes from virtues that heaven bestows. The sonnet then becomes laudatory in the second quatrain as the poet states that Villani embodies the virtues of love, faith, beauty, and zeal for honor, which all demonstrate to others the glory that heaven encompasses. Though she does not say it outright, Ricciardi implicitly suggests that Ricciardi's embodiment of these heavenly virtues explain the earth's luminosity. In other words, earth is as bright as heaven because of Villani's presence. As a result, the speaker adds that when Villani dies, the earth will grow dark, and heaven light, an echo of *RVF* 338 in which the poet laments Laura's death, writing that the world has now lost its sun ("senza sole il mondo / oscuro e freddo") and conversely, heaven has become more beautiful ("e 'l ciel, che del mio pianto or si fa bello").[145] Just as Petrarch writes about his beloved, Ricciardi, like many of the poets examined earlier, treats Villani in this same intimate way. For instance, in the last *terzina,* she asks God to let her die before Villani ("che la mia spoglia serra prima") since she does not wish to be left on earth alone without her. In this moment, Ricciardi implicitly suggests the union of her and Villani's souls in heaven, image that represents their bond as transcendent and eternal.

Villani's poem directed to Panciatichi appears next. Rather than present the women's two exchanges in turns, Domenichi places Villani's two poems next to each other and Panciatichi's two responses follow thereafter, a clear deviation from the presentation of the Colonna-Gambara exchanges. This first sonnet pays tribute to Panciatichi's beauty and wise character by comparing her to ancient mythological figures. Villani ultimately builds up her subject, setting her high on a pedestal, to suggest that anyone whom she gazes upon will become one of love's slaves.

> Se la figlia di Leda hebbe già il vanto
> di quante furon mai leggiadre, et belle;
> Voi sol, saggia MARIA, siete di quelle
> da non le invidiar tanto, nè quanto:
> ché 'l bel vostro leggiadro, unico, et santo

[145] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 535.

volto s'alza per fama oltre le stelle,
nè credo tal mai ne pingesse Apelle,
o Prasitelle, o s'altri seppe tanto,
che le rose vermiglie infra la neve
son sì ben poste a gli amorosi lampi,
che fanno invidia al padre di Fetonte.
O beltà soprahumane, altere, et pronte,
chi sarà quel, ch'a rimirarvi scampi,
et non resti d'Amor suggetto in breve?[146]

Thick with ancient Greek allusions, Villani's poem lauds Panciatichi as an exceptional woman; she is so wise, becoming, and charming that the even the ancient Greek artists, Apelles and Praxiteles, never portrayed such an extraordinary subject in their artwork. The calling out of Maria's name in line three contrasts the omission of Helen's and Helios's names, whom Villani references through genealogical descriptors as the daughter of Leda and father of Phaeton, as if to say that the only one worthy of naming in the poem is Maria herself. As examined earlier with the Colonna-Gambara sonnets, this kind of praise by one woman of another was commonplace among female intellectuals. Villani's lyric correspondence with Panciatichi differs, however, in its overt inclusion of amorous language to denote admiration. For instance, Villani places an emphasis on her subject's eyes, characterizing them as loving beams that conjure up envy in Helios, presumably because they outshine even the sun. In medieval and Renaissance philosophy, the process of falling in love is linked to sight, as gazing into a beloved's eyes catalyzes enamorment. Petrarch expresses this mechanism through the metaphor of being bound by Laura's eyes in *RVF* 6: "Era il giorno ch' al sol si scoloraro /per la pietà del suo fattore i rai, / quando i' fui preso, et non me ne guardai, / ché i be' vostr' occhi, donna, mi legaro."[147] Villani, too, references this exact experience in her exclamation to

[146] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 38.

[147] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime Sparse" and Other Lyrics*, 41.

Panciatichi in the last *terzina* where she states that no one can resist her gaze nor can anyone help falling under love's spell.

Villani continues to pay compliments to her subject in the second sonnet of the sequence; however, it is here that the Petrarchan framing of the lover (the poet) and beloved (the poem's love object) presents itself more strongly. The speaker now portrays her personal, torturous experience of setting eyes on Panciatichi who now plays the role of the emotionally cold and indifferent lover, a classic prototype in Petrarchan lyric. The tale recounted here reveals a continuation from the previous sonnet, especially in its last lines, stating that anyone who falls in love with Panciatichi would become a subject of love, which now includes Villani.[148] Perhaps this continuity explains Domenichi's placement of these poems one after the other, so that readers could easily follow the narrative of tortuous love that unfolds.

> Lassa, di chi doler mi deggio homai;
> o del ciel, che vi diè tanta bellezza,
> o pur del vostro cor pien di durezza
> che si diletta mantenermi in guai?
> L'un fatto v'ha quadrella chiari rai,
> tal che a mirargli n'ha ciascun vaghezza;
> l'altro a chi v'ama mostra tanta asprezza,
> ch'aspero, e duro sì, mai no 'l pensai.
> Doler adunque sol di Voi mi deggio,
> che quanto più mia fe' cresce, et l'ardore,
> più va scemando in Voi donna pietate.
> Anzi crescendo in Voi vien crudeltate;
> tal che speranza, più non ha il mio core,
> poi che si vede andar di male in peggio.[149]

The poem is clearly a lament, but it is also a repackaging of the conventional Petrarchan conflict between the ardent lover and the cruel, indifferent beloved. Through the manipulation of

[148] Thus, the "quel" in line 13 of the previous sonnet could be read as either masculine or feminine, which would include Panciatichi, suggesting that this verse reflects the poet's own desire, not just anybody's.

[149] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 39.

archetypical conventions of Petrarchan poetic love discourse, Villani describes her precarious mental state caused by her desire and Panciatichi's hard-hearted resistance. We see this in the opening lines, in which the speaker asks whether she should bemoan the heavens for endowing Panciatichi with so much beauty ("o del ciel, che vi diè tanta bellezza") or complain of Panciatichi's heart, which she characterizes as full of hardness ("del vostro cor pien di durezza"). The indecision of which is worse, heaven or her heart, becomes the argument of the sonnet. Villani continues this discussion in the second quatrain, evoking the image of the dart ("quadrella"), a standard trope for being struck by love. Like many moments in the *Canzoniere*, such as *RVF* 70, 71, 152, and 153, Villani's sonnet portrays her amorous experience as one of pain: as her trust and ardor for Panciatichi grow, her beloved's compassion dwindles and the cruelty within her increases, causing the poet in the end to abandon hope.

As noted earlier, women Petrarchists often subverted the gender paradigm of heterosexual amorous verse by placing themselves, as women, in the role of the desiring subject and casting men as their love objects. In this instance, the process is taken one step further, since the beloved, like the poetic "I," is also gendered female. Laudomia Forteguerri's love sonnets for Margherita of Austria that also appear in the *Rime diverse*, use this same framing, which Konrad Eisenbichler notes is unusual in the history of Italian Renaissance lyric. The reader of Forteguerri's poems, and by extension of Villani's poems, "is aware that both the lover and the beloved are women and is thus made cognizant of same-sex desire expressed in terms and structures typical of contemporary Petrarchan poetry."[150] While the images of same-sex affection and eroticism are clear, Villani's

[150] Konrad Eisenbichler, "'Laudomia Forteguerri Loves Margaret of Austria,'" in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 286. In his chapter on Forteguerri in a book published a year after the above cited article, Eisenbichler further contemplates the reasons for the sensual *frisson*, as he defines it, evident in her poems to Margaret of Austria. He considers the possibility that perhaps the love poems were politically motivated, constituting "a calculated effort on Laudomia's part to attract imperial favor and gain support for the Forteguerri clan and

motive for expressing sentiments nevertheless still remains ambiguous. Panciatichi's two replies, however, provide insight into the women's appropriation of heterosexual love discourse as a mode to applaud each other's skill as writers. The erotic undertones in their poems therefore act as a way to play and to have fun with Petrarchan conventions to express mutual regard and esteem.

Rather than remain the silent beloved as is often the case with Laura, Panciatichi responds to her admirer and the love troubles she describes. While Panciatichi's first reply, "Per quelle dolci rime anch'Io m'accorsi," continues the love narrative of Villani's second sonnet, her second response, "Cornelia mia, ben lode assai conviensi," instead answers her interlocutor's first address in its reciprocation of female adoration. Unlike the Colonna-Gambara exchanges in which each *proposta* is followed by its *risposta*, Domenichi configures Panciatichi's replies as a chiasmus.

> Per quelle dolci rime anch'Io m'accorsi
> del desir vostro pien d'ardente affetto;
> Onde per trarvi fuor di rio sospetto,
> a la penna la man veloce porsi.
> Com'a destrieri a Me son sproni, et morsi
> i vostri cenni, ond'obedir' aspetto;
> et col cor fatto a Voi fido ricetto
> non resto punto a voler vostri in forsi.
> Et, se non v'ho versi soavi scritto,
> nasce dal timor rio, ch'è meco anchora,
> che non v'annoi il viver mio prescritto.
> Qual fu di Cresso quella felice hora,
> che Ciro il liberò dal fuoco afflitto,
> chiedend'Io tal mercè; mio cor v'honora.[151]

> CORNELIA mia, ben lode assai conviensi
> a chi sa dolce in voce il ver narrare;
> ma a chi 'l descrive, è lecito adornare,
> et a miglior scrittori ogn'hor'attiensi.
> Però Tu con parole, et alti sensi
> ti levi fuor del volgo, et sai mostrare
> la virtù rara, che qual gemma appare

their Noveschi political faction in Siena." *The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 134.

[151] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 39.

in bella donna, et rende i pregi immensi.
Tornami a mente, quanto Io desiai
veder del valor tuo la minor parte;
et habbi un tempo in ciò contrari venti:
hor sono in porto, et più non bramo homai;
ma sol convien, ch'attenda ad honorarte,
fin che saran questi miei lumi spenti.[152]

In the first poem, Panciatichi quells Villani's worry of unrequited affection, but does so through allusions to their shared status as writers of poetry. In the poem's opening verses, she acknowledges that it is through her interlocutor's sweet rhyme that she learns of the affliction Villani's desire causes her. She then depicts herself, pen in hand, as a poet too, who in this instance uses lyric to assure Villani that her affection is safely guarded in her heart. However, Panciatichi assumes the inferior position, as she positions herself as the less-skilled writer and her correspondent as their guide; she obeys Villani, and as noted in line four, her verses were composed quickly, a point she returns to at the end of the second poem when she cites fear that Villani will find her verse boring as a justification for her lyric compositions not being as "soavi" as those of her addressee.

Though Panciatichi downplays the erotic language in this first sonnet, she reinstates it in the second to laud Villani's writing prowess, a decisive difference from the latter's laudatory poem in which she primarily contemplates and celebrates Panciatichi's beauty. Her tone is more intimate now, as she calls out to her admirer as, "Cornelia mia," a naming process that not only imitates Villani's inscription of Panciatichi's first name, Maria, but also evokes Petrarch's addresses to Sennuccio. Moreover, similar to the way that Bembo in his exchange with Gambara "represents Gambara's seductive power as deriving from her poetry and from her intellect," Panciatichi celebrates Villani's skill as a writer as her most attractive quality.[153] She singles out her "voce" and

[152] Domenichi, 40.

[153] Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*, 272.

"parole" as representative of her intellect, which differentiates her from the crowd and garners her eternal fame. Panciatichi even envisions her friend as following in the footsteps of the greatest writers, men and women included since the plural is ungendered ("migliori scrittori"), to further denote her exceptional literary status. The repeated references to poetry and fame across these two poems demonstrate how Panciatichi channels the admiration Villani delivers through erotic language to transform their discussion into one about women's writing. Through the support she supplies in her address, Villani validates her friend's status as both a virtuous woman—a typical prerequisite for any woman author—and as a writer.

The Villani-Panciatichi exchanges demonstrate the way women poets experiment Petrarchan form in a spirited fashion to express esteem for and promote one another. The final lyric composition of the sonnet suite, Bracciolini's laudatory poem for Panciatichi, in fact reemphasizes the importance of a female support network. Though she does not situate her address as a Petrarchan love poem, the poem's overall message promotes the coming together of women to honor Maria, an uplifting conclusion to the section.

> Ben ti puoi dir felice, e al mondo sola
> patria, che nel tuo nido alberghi tale
> MARIA d'ingegno, et di beltà immortale,
> di cui su in ciel l'eterna fama vola,
> tal ch'a Minerva il seggio, e 'l nome invola,
> a lei d'ogni virtute essendo uguale;
> nè teme di cupido arco, nè strale,
> che pudicitia in Lei tien norma, et scola.
> Questa è degna di lode, et di trofei,
> che la sua gratia, e 'l chiaro suo splendore
> gli huomini vince al mondo; e in ciel gli Dei:
> et però fide mie compagne, et sore,
> rallegrianci con Flora per costei
> del sesso feminil gloria, et honore.[154]

Bracciolini's poem closely follows Lucia Bertani's address to Vittoria Colonna and Veronica

[154] Domenichi, *Rime diverse*, 40.

Gambara. Whereas Bertani states that her role models surpass Sappho and Corinna, Bracciolini evokes Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, and Flora, the goddess of flowers, to say the same about Panciatichi. In contrasting her to one of the most important mythical figures however, she makes a weightier comparison that functions to mythologize her addressee. For instance, lines two through four that pay compliments to Panciatichi's intellect and immortal beauty ("ingegno" and "beltà immortale"). This sonnet also has an interesting set of addresses. The first two quatrains are addressed to place of Maria's birth ("al mondo sola / Patria")—which can call itself fortunate for harboring Panciatichi whom will bring the city fame. In contrast, the last tercet is directed toward a community of women—similar to Bertani's poem once again—whom the poet describes intimately as her trusted female companions and sisters. The gendering of this group as female is noteworthy, since they stand in stark contrast to the men and gods Bracciolini depicts just before. Just as the authors in this sequence revere each other through lyric address, the poem summons a sisterhood to celebrate Panciatichi as the perfect model for the female sex.

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The friendship lyric in the *Rime diverse* demonstrates how lyric poetry acted as a medium to both celebrate women's friendship and weave close literary ties among women. The sonnet exchanges and addresses within this all-female lyric anthology illustrate the creation of a literary world whereby female intellectuals approach each other as equals and not only express mutual admiration but more importantly foster connections with each other. In this protected space, they can experiment and play with Petrarchan form to mourn their friends, share their worries, bounce ideas off one another, and generally engage in intimate conversation, a central social activity to female friendship that women were always attempting to reconstruct through writing.

CHAPTER 3. REVISING THE HEROIC FRIENDSHIP TRADITION: MARGHERITA SARROCCHI AND *LA SCANDERBEIDE*

The aim of this chapter is to understand how much the friendship *topos* in heroic poetry informs Margherita Sarrocchi's portrayal of female friendship in her seventeenth-century text, *La Scanderbeide* (1623).[1] Though Sarrocchi was not the first to depict women's bonds in a heroic poem, she was the first to give it prominence. This chapter opens with a brief discussion of the prevalence of heroic poems in Renaissance Italy, highlighting their hybrid nature between the romance and epic modes, and then moves to a discussion of women's participation as authors in a literary tradition that was typically gendered male. Then, by engaging with classical and Renaissance models of friendship in canonical authors like Homer, Virgil, Statius, Ludovico Ariosto, and Torquato Tasso, I trace the formation and development of friendship as a prominent literary theme in heroic poetry.

One of the pertinent changes that Renaissance writers made to classical portrayals of same-sex friendship was the inclusion of a heterosexual love plot, a common feature of medieval texts from the courtly tradition.[2] While in Renaissance heroic poems the additional romance storyline does not deter male bonding, the heterosexual union typically replaces the bond that forms between

[1] I use the term heroic poetry to express a larger conception of this poetic tradition to indicate how it builds from and fuses together a variety of other literary traditions. My view aligns with Kenneth Borris' definition of the term: "'heroic poetry' denotes the Renaissance conception expansion of epic to include romantic, biblical, and other variants: [instead] 'epic' designates classical or classicizing exemplars; 'romantic epic' the especial confluence of epic with chivalric romance; and 'heroic romance' the broader mixtures of epic with the varieties of romance" Kenneth Borris, "Allegory," in *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Catherine Bates (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 602.

[2] Though an overview of male friendship in the *chanson de geste* and the romance traditions is beyond the scope of this chapter, as E. Joe Johnson argues, male friendship in French epics and romances often compete with a heterosexual love story. As is the case with the French epic, *Ami et Amile*, male bonding wins out over the love story even though both friends die, while in the Arthurian romance, *Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion*, the friendship between the two male protagonists is extinguished so that heterosexual desire can take its place. Thus, in both cases, male-male relations fail to integrate into society and are associated with "violence, social disruption, and ultimate failure." E. Joe Johnson, *Once There Were Two True Friends: Idealized Male Friendship in French Narrative from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment* (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 2003), 5. For more on male friendship in these medieval traditions see Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 87–136; Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1995), 145–172.

two female characters. More than that, heroic female friendships develop, and even dissolve, because of their connection to a male character. However, as I argue in this chapter, Margherita Sarrocchi rewrites this prototype of heroic female friendship to suggest that women's bonds are strong enough to begin and flourish without the company of a male character. In Sarrocchi's narrative, when a male knight does indeed come along and begins a love story with one of the female friends, the bond between the two women remains intact—thus, the women's friendship does not threaten the heterosexual union.

I. Heroic Poetry in Renaissance Italy

Italian Renaissance heroic poetry represents a fusion of multiple literary genres: it builds on, rewrites, imitates, and combines the traditions of ancient epic, ancient Greek romance, medieval romance, and the *chansons de geste*.[3] For this reason, various scholars define these poems as "romance-epics."[4] In writing these hybrid poems, Renaissance writers allowed the two traditions of epic and romance to openly engage and compete with each another.[5] Epic in the Western tradition begins with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, followed by Virgil's *Aeneid*.[6] As Adeline Johns-Putra aptly

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[3] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 191. Moreover, medieval romance, also known as chivalric literature, is typically sorted into the three cycles: the matter of Rome, the matter Britain (Arthurian or Breton cycle), and the matter of France (Carolingian cycle). The matter of Rome narrates stories of the Trojan War, Alexander the Great, and other ancient heroes of Rome while the matter of Britain tells of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Lastly, the matter of France, made famous by its sub-genre, the *chansons de geste* ("heroic songs"), include narratives about the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne, his knights (especially Roland), and his campaign against the Saracens. The *chansons de geste* are also categorized as Carolingian epics, or more generally as medieval French epics, because they sway more towards epic than romance in focusing less on the individual, and more on a collective group.

[4] Dennis Looney, *Compromising the Classics: Romance Epic Narrative in the Italian Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 15. See also Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Italian Renaissance Epic," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94; Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: From Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3; Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52.

[5] Fuchs, *Romance*, 66.

[6] Nevertheless, while the *Odyssey* shares an epic form with the *Iliad*, its difference in subject matter—a poem not about war, but about an individual's return journey home— has led to a long-standing debate of whether the *Odyssey* is more of a romance than an epic. Moreover, the understanding of the *Odyssey* as a romance and

summarizes:

> The Homeric poems precede the very concept of epic, and hence define it. Such is the case with the earliest epic theory, inaugurated by Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is only with Virgil's attempts to emulate Homer in the *Aeneid*, and thus to translate the Homeric poems into a Roman context, that the epic tradition begins in earnest.[7]

While Homer's and Virgil's poems presented worthy subject matter to treat in verse—war, homecoming, and the foundation of a nation—Aristotle's treatise theorized epic as a fixed genre, outlining general characteristics of its form, such as a suitable length and an appropriate meter. Epic narrative and structure mostly revolve around "effective quests, corporate achievement, and the heroic birth of nations."[8] Their plots are unitary and actively move towards a predetermined end, the "telos." Moreover, as described by Aristotle, their storylines strive to strike a balance between what is plausible and what is marvelous. In contrast, romance typically features a wandering hero/knight whose individualistic desires guide her or his *quête*. Romance narrative is circular with digressions that lead into new, separate storylines, like erotic interludes or martial obstacles, that ultimately interrupt or delay the primary plot. In fact, as Fuchs states the main feature of romance is its "dilation or postponement of the object of desire rather than its achievement."[9] Additionally, the intervention of magic or the supernatural is common in romance, featuring figures like

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the *Iliad* as an epic has led to an overlying discussion that stems from "a determination to see the two Homeric poems as rootedly distinct from each other: the *Iliad* shows fighting, and heroic going-on, so it is epic; the *Odyssey* relates wanderings, magical adventures abroad, and a final comic reunion in the Hero to his wife and home, so it is a romance." Burrow, *Epic Romance: From Homer to Milton*, 2. For more on this discussion, see Adeline Johns-Putra, *The History of Epic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 9. For more on the *Odyssey* as romance see John Dean, "The *Odyssey* as Romance," *College Literature* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 228–36; Fuchs, *Romance*, 13–15; Hubert McDermott, *Novel and Romance: The "Odyssey" to "Tom Jones"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 1–22.

[7] Johns-Putra, *The History of Epic*, 7.

[8] Fuchs, *Romance*, 66.

[9] Fuchs, 15.

enchantresses who spellbind and hold captive the wandering hero.[10]

Theories and arguments outlining the differences between epic and romance were well-discussed topics in Renaissance Italy, especially since heroic poetry remained a popular literary form throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The following texts along with their publication dates highlight this point: Luigi Pulci's *Morgante* and the first two books of Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* (1484), Ludovico Ariosto's first edition of the *Orlando furioso* (1516), Moderata Fonte's *Floridoro* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Margherita Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide* (1623), and Lucrezia Marinella's *Enrico* (1635).[11] While an evident gap appears between the publication dates of Ariosto's and Tasso's poems, this lapse does not signify a decrease in the genre's popularity. In fact, between these years, the production of heroic poems still flourished; for instance, Gian Giorgio Trission wrote *La Italia liberata da' Gothi* (1547–1448), Bernardo Tasso composed his *Amadigi* (1560), and Giarldi Cinzio published his *Ercole* (1557).[12] Nevertheless, out of all the poems published during this period, Ariosto's and Tasso's poems were the most influential because, as Rinaldina Russell explains, the *Furioso* and *Liberata* represented two different models of heroic poetry by which a work would be judged.[13] Contemporary critics of Ariosto such as Giovanni Battista Giraldi (1504–1573) and Giovambattista Pigna (1529–1579), who were also supporters of Ariosto's poem, believed the *Furioso* adhered closer to the romance genre, finding much of its

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[10] Fuchs, 66.

[11] Boiardo's *Innamorato* and Ariosto's *Furioso* "were the first best-sellers ever in Italian literature, with sales in the sixteenth century handily surpassing those of the Bible." Valeria Finucci, "Moderata Fonte and the Genre of Women's Chivalric Romances," in *Floridoro: A Chivalric Romance*, by Moderata Fonte, ed. Valeria Finucci, trans. Julia Kisacky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

[12] Moreover, Marina Beer estimates that between the years 1501 and 1600, about 625 heroic poems were published. *Romanzi di Cavalleria* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1987), 230.

[13] Rinaldina Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," in *Scanderbeide*, by Margherita Sarrocchi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 18.

influence in chivalric literature, with a plot that alternates between the deeds of Charlemagne's paladins and the romantic endeavors of Arthurian knights.[14] Other neo-classicists who closely followed Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica* like Camillo Pellegrino (1527–1603), believed in classical epic poetry's superiority over chivalric romance, finding the *Furioso*'s structure problematic because of its interweaving plot lines and numerous digressions.[15] The combination of the complaints made about the *Furioso* and the publication of the *Liberata* in 1581 led to a full-blown debate, pitting the two poems against one another to discern which of the two heroic poems was a better vernacular model to follow.[16]

In writing the *Furioso*, Ariosto was continuing where Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* left off, borrowing many of the same characters and plot threads. For both these texts, but even more so in the *Furioso*, there is a tension between martial duty and erotic detour that inherently structures the narratives of these poems.[17] Though the backdrop of the *Innamorato* focuses on the struggles of Charlemagne's knights against pagan forces, the poem primarily follows a well-known martial hero, Orlando (Roland), taken from the *chanson de geste* tradition, whose story centers on his enamorment with Angelica, the Indian princess from Cathay. This fifteenth-century work is important in the

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[14] Giraldi and Pigna exchanged letters between 1548 and 1554 defending Ariosto's poem, which were then collected into a pamphlet, and probably appended to or included with Giraldi's *Discorsi intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (1554). These letters primarily defend Ariosto's poem against detractors who believed that the *Furioso* could not be considered a serious piece of literature because it did not adhere to Aristotle's *Poetics*. For details of Girladi and Pigna's arguments see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 957–71.

[15] Translations into Latin of Aristotle's *Poetics* led to its rediscovery during the sixteenth century in Italy. For example, in 1536, Alessandro de' Pazzi translated the text into Latin. For more on Pellegrino's belief in the *Liberata*'s superiority over the *Furioso* see Weinberg, 991–1000. Moreover, as Albert Ascoli writes, "for orthodox classicists, the choice of the pluralistic and digressive romance would come to represent an illicit deviance from the epic norm." Albert Russell Ascoli, "Introduction," in *The Quest for Epic and Romance*, by Sergio Zatti, trans. Dennis Looney and Sarah Hill (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 16.

[16] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 80. For more on the quarrel over Ariosto and Tasso see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 954–1073.

[17] Fuchs, *Romance*, 67.

study of Renaissance heroic poetry because it is the first to fuse together Carolingian and Arthurian cycles.[18] Much like the *Innamorato*, the *Furioso* is a carefully constructed web of plots and digressions, consisting of three main narrative threads: the conflict between Charlemagne's knights and the Saracen forces, the seemingly never-ending love-saga between Bradamante and Ruggiero whose eventual marriage is to found the Este dynasty, and most notably, Orlando's pursuit of Angelica, who symbolizes elusive desire, and his subsequent descent into madness. Even more so than Boiardo, Ariosto pushes to the extreme the technique of *entrelacement*, a narrative tool from the French romance tradition that "involves the multiplication of narrative threads through the interweaving of encounters and conflicts among various characters."[19] While the *Furioso* seems to privilege romance in the first half of the poem, it evolves into a vehicle for "a 'closed,' and therefore 'epic'" ending.[20] Ariosto's "grafting" of classical epics with chivalric romance, to use a term from Daniel Javitch, displayed his mastery of two literary worlds, though it frustrated some of his

[18] As Brady Spangenberg notes, "rather than depicting a harmonious relationship confluence of Carolingian martial pursuits and Arthurian romantic endeavors, Boiardo plays these two plot sequences against each other, the one serving as a distraction or deviation from the other and vice versa." "Delay the War But Not the Sex: Boiardo on Action and Time," *Arthuriana* 20, no. 1 (2011): 97. Further detailing how the *Innamorato* borrows from both Carolingian and Arthurian cycles, Norris J. Lacy explains, "the framework of the poem is essentially Carolingian, recounting the struggle of the Christian forces of Charlemagne with those of the pagan Agramante. However, the focus of the romance is on the Arthurian elements, including the innumerable fantastical adventures of knights-errant, magic fountains and enchanted forests, and particularly love, which has frequently been seen as the motive force behind a highly energized series of complex `episodes, commencing with that of the hero-protagonist, Orlando." "Boiardo, Matteo Maria," in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (London: Routledge, 2013), 43. See also Peter Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of "Orlando Furioso"* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

[19] Sergio Zatti, *The Quest for Epic: From Ariosto to Tasso*, ed. Dennis Looney, trans. Sally Hill and Dennis Looney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 17.

[20] Looney, *Compromising the Classics*, 15. David Quint similarly argues, "Ariosto *intends* his poem to divide into two equal parts. [It] jettisons pure romance midway in order to proceed to an epic closure." *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 84. See also David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem," *MLN* 94, no. 1 (1979): 77–91.

contemporary readers in search of a more unitary, epic plot.[21] Nonetheless this technique of mixing two modes, in combination with the inclusion of a wide array of characters from all backgrounds who do not conform to their normal social standards, allowed Ariosto to unveil the non-binary complexity of his literary world, while surpassing older literary traditions by creating a new, altered form.[22]

While the *Furioso*'s fictional world is loosely based on Charlemagne's eighth-century wars against the Saracens, Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* uses the First Crusade as its historical backdrop, placing the strife between Christian knights and Saracen warriors at the forefront and delineating a clearer opposition between the "good" and the "bad." The *Liberata* follows the knights of the Crusade who overcome their army's initial setbacks and problems of disunity to ultimately succeed in capturing Jerusalem together, their longtime awaited goal. Utilizing a remote historical event, like the capturing of Jerusalem, to ground a narrative allows the poet certain mimetic liberties: the historical event should be recognizable to audiences, but far enough back in time to permit artistic freedom while maintaining elements of verisimilitude.[23] Tasso's poem has a much stronger Christian telos than Ariosto's; it not only details the Christian effort to retake Jerusalem, but also its "subject matter conjoined historical credibility with the Christian marvelous—consisting in miracles, visions, and interventions of angels and demons."[24] With regards to the use of romance elements, Tasso had contradictory opinions. On the one hand he critiqued romance structure, arguing in his *Discorsi*

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[21] Daniel Javitch, "The Grafting of Virgilian Epic in *Orlando Furioso*," in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 56–76.

[22] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 80–81.

[23] In Virginia Cox's words, selecting a historical subject matter for a heroic poems entails "choosing episodes from history sufficiently recent and well documented to ensure the reader's credence yet sufficiently distant to permit of discreet fictional embellishment." *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 168.

[24] Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 18.

dell'arte poetica (1587) that romance's construction is monstrous for the way in which multiple storylines constantly interrupt and weave in and out of the narrative, so much so that they resemble the snakelike creature wrapped around one of the sinners found in canto 25 of Dante's *Inferno*:

> se questi poemi son molti e distinti di natura, come si prova per la moltitudine e distinzion delle favole, ha non solo del confuso, ma del mostruoso ancora il traporre e mescolare le membra dell'uno con quelle dell'altro, simile a quella fera che ci descrive Dante:
>
> Ella abbarbicata mai non fue
> ad arbor sì, come l'orribil fera
> per l'altrui membra avvittichiò le sue. [25]

On the other hand, Tasso believed that love, a theme strongly rooted in the romance tradition, was a permissible and even worthy subject to treat in a heroic poem. In a 1576 letter to Luca Scalabrino, a philosopher and respected critic, Tasso writes, "[i]o voglio defender contra tutto il mondo, chè l'amore è materia altrettanto eroica quanto la guerra; e 'l difenderò con ragione, con autorità di Aristotele, con luoghi di Platone che parlano chiaro chiaro chiaro, chiarissimamente chiaro."[26] As Jo Ann Cavallo notes, "what he [Tasso] objected to in romance was not its central elements of love and magic, but rather the technique of interlacing that overtaxed the reader's memory and the poet's intervention in poems and elsewhere which upset the sense of verisimilitude created by a consistent third-person narrator."[27] Thus, Tasso finds a middle ground between these two beliefs, allowing his knights to fall in love, but ensuring his plot is unitary so that the romance episodes do not deter from the primary plotline. To do so, he lessened the number of narrative digressions in an attempt to keep the core of the poem's plot linear and converted romance episodes into epic unity, so that they are "straightened out" to fit in with the main narrative subject of the *Liberata*: the Christian

[25] 3/18/20 *3:32*:00 PM

[26] Tasso to Scalabrino, Rome, 9 April 1576, as quoted in *Torquato Tasso: Lettere*, ed. Ettore Mazzali, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 54.

[27] Jo Ann Cavallo, "Tasso's Armida and the Victory of Romance," in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 107.

capture of Jerusalem. These two different models of Ariosto and Tasso are crucial for understanding the ways in which later poets like Margherita Sarrocchi would adopt their modes and style.

The *Scanderbeide* also belongs to a group of heroic poems authored by women, which was initiated with the publication of Moderata Fonte's unfinished text, *I tredici canti del Floridoro* in 1581. As of today, six sixteenth- and seventeenth- century heroic poems have been attributed to Italian women writers.[28] Included with Fonte's and Sarrocchi's poems are Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino* (1560), Lucrezia Marinella's *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (1635), Barbara Albizzi-Tagliamochi's *Ascanio errante* (1640), and Francesca Turina's recently discovered and unpublished *Il Florio* (1640).[29] The extent to which the earlier female-authored poems influenced Sarrocchi's is hard to determine. However, Moderata Fonte was well known outside of Venice, so Sarrocchi may have been at least familiar with the *Floridoro*.[30] Additionally, there are striking similarities between Sarrocchi's and Marinella's poems as they both take on historical subjects and feature prominent female friendship. While an in-depth study comparing these female-authored heroic poems is for further research, it is safe to say that the texts named above can be grouped together as they constitute a small *oeuvre* or micro-tradition of women writers who either attempted or succeeded in writing a full heroic poem– therefore their importance cannot be overlooked.[31]

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[28] In addition to these six texts, we know of several other unfinished attempts at epic including Maddalena Salvetti's biblical-chivalric poem *David* and an untitled poem by Laura Battiferra based on material from the Old Testament. Isabella Andreini, Veronica Franco, and Maddalena Campiglia were also said to have been working on their own epic poems during the early to mid-1590s, though nothing remains of their attempts. There may be more that have yet to be discovered. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 151.

[29] There has been recent scholarly debate as to whether d'Aragona is the true author of the poem. John McLucas and Julia L. Hairston attribute authorship to d'Aragona, while Virginia Cox is wary of making any absolute claim. See John McLucas, "Renaissance Carolingian: Tullia D'Aragona's 1560 *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino*," *Olifant* 25, no. 1–2 (2006): 314; Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 312 n167.

[30] As I will note later in my discussion of the *Scanderbeide*, there is an excerpt in Sarrocchi's poem that bears close resemblance to the stanzas that open the fourth canto of the *Floridoro*.

[31] In delineating a micro-tradition of female epics, we still should be careful: "Un'epica femminile, allora—cioè, non solo un'epica scritta da autrici anagraficamente donne—ma un'epica che incorpora una prospettiva

Before the publication of the abovementioned poems, women's relationship to heroic poetry was mainly as readers. These poems were extremely popular among their female readership despite the fact that there were a number of moralists who found them unsuitable and improper for women's minds.[32] Nevertheless, this did not stop women from reading such texts nor did it stop them from reflecting on them, evident in Laura Terracina's *Discorso sopra tutti li primi canti d'Orlando furioso* (1550), a verse commentary on the *Furioso* that was printed thirteen times after the original edition published in Venice. Finucci argues that Terracina's work could arguably be considered a chivalric romance though there is no original plot or new independent story line.[33] Instead, Terracina uses the first line of each canto in the *Furioso* to develop an argument that centralizes a woman's point of view on the issue at hand, making her work a "platform for feminist criticisms of her society."[34] Indeed, Terracina makes it clear that her reading of the *Furioso* is from the perspective of a woman and that she has women's interests at heart.[35]

Moreover, writing a heroic poem, like most writing in the Renaissance, was considered a masculine endeavor: the celebrated models to follow were all written by male writers (Homer, Virgil,

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distinta da quella dell'epica tradizionale, maschile? Qui bisognerebbe andare cauti, anche perché gran parte della produzione epica di questo periodo rimane ancora solo parzialmente esplorata, e perciò non siamo pienamente in grado di generalizzare sulle norme di *gender representation* vigenti nella produzione epica degli uomini." Virginia Cox, "Prefazione," in *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento: "L'Enrico" di Lucrezia Marinelli* (Leonforte (Enna): Insula, 2010), 13. Even though there are still a number of poems that remain undiscovered, I find that these women can be grouped together for they seem to share a similar goal in challenging traditional gender ideologies at play in the canonical male-authored works.

[32] In the fifth chapter of his manual, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, on how to raise a Christian woman, Juan Luis Vives, a Spanish humanist whose manual was published in forty editions and translated into six languages, including Italian, argues that women's minds become especially unchaste if they read chivalric romances. See Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 73–79.

[33] Finucci, "Moderata Fonte and the Genre of Women's Chivalric Romances," 20.

[34] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 128.

[35] For more on Terracina's protofeminist reading of the *Furioso* see Virginia Cox, "Women as Readers and Writers of Chivalric Poetry in Early Modern Italy," in *Sguardi sull'Italia. Miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari*, ed. Gino Bedoni et al. (Leeds: Society for Italian Studies, 1997), 134–45; Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 126–57.

Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso) and not only did it require being a skillful poet, but it also meant writing battle scenes of epic proportion and recounting heroic deeds of chivalric knights.[36] More generally, the mere idea of attempting to write such a text was understood as an ambitious project; if you succeeded, it would become the work that would bring fame to your name for eternity— give you the laurel crown. Therefore, it was believed that writing a heroic poem required "particular virility," especially if you were attempting to write in the style of Tasso, who adhered more closely to the classical epic tradition of Homer and Virgil. [37] Moreover, its two principal themes, love and war, were considered ones that only men could successfully write about, and for various reasons, were considered problematic topics for women: writing a romance in the tradition of chivalric literature was too lascivious while writing about war was too much of a public endeavor.[38] Love and war therefore could make a woman's mind unchaste and/or lead her to transgress beyond the domestic realm of the home. Thus, the participation of women as writers in this genre is particularly noteworthy. Their works provide a new insight into the genre as they destabilize and completely dismantle the notion that heroic poems "necessiterebbero di mentalità e attitudine maschili per essere prodotti."[39]

A. The Friendship Tradition in Heroic Poetry

In depicting the theme of friendship, Margherita Sarrocchi was following in a long tradition of writers who featured in their writings the duty, devotion, and love that warriors and knights feel for one another. Undoubtedly, heroic poems celebrate friendship; there are many memorable scenes

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[36] Finucci, "Moderata Fonte and the Genre of Women's Chivalric Romances," 19.

[37] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 166.

[38] Gerry Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

[39] Laura Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento: "L'Enrico" di Lucrezia Marinelli* (Leonforte: Insula, 2010), 22.

from these classical and Renaissance texts that underscore the strong sentiments shared in a *coppia eroica,* in addition to the deep sense of loss and anguish felt when one friend in a pair perishes. Friendship as a literary trope has found a home in heroic poetry since antiquity, beginning in the Western tradition first with Homer's *Iliad* (IX–VIII century BC) and following centuries later with Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC) and Statius' *Thebaid* (80–92 AD).[40] In most classical epics, these heroic bonds traditionally exist between male warriors, with the exception of Virgil's Camilla and Acca. It would not be until later that Renaissance authors like Ariosto, Tasso, Sarrocchi, and Marinella would incorporate more instances of female friendship into their poems. Even though there are more portrayals of female friendships in Renaissance heroic poems, scenes of male friendship still occur much more frequently, leaving us room to speculate why that is the case and whether the representations of the two differ in nature and style.

Placing Sarrocchi's depiction of *amicizia eroica* alongside those of her predecessors will help us understand how she cites or revises her antecedents, making it imperative to first outline the beginnings and the evolution of the friendship trope in the classical epic tradition. This will also serve to better place Sarrocchi among her predecessors and contemporaries, as well as to better understand her contribution to heroic poetry overall. First, I will turn to male models of friendship found in the classical epics of Homer's *Iliad* (IX– VIII century BC), Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC), and Statius' *Thebaid* (80–92 AD). I will then consider Renaissance revisions of male bonds found in

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[40] Scholars like Gregory Jusdanis have also included the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, often considered one of the earliest known works of literature, as a starting point for tracing the theme of friendship in the epic genre. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the first recorded epic, written between 2000 BCE and 1700 BCE in ancient Mesopotamia. It chronicles the story of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, known by his people as a cruel despot, who becomes close friends with Enkidu, a wild man created by the gods to keep Gilgamesh in check. Enkidu unfortunately dies midway through the poem and Gilgamesh mourns excessively for his friend, a *topos* that will recur in classical and Renaissance heroic poetry. For more on Gilgamesh and Enkidu see Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Gregory Jusdanis, *A Tremendous Thing: Friendship from the "Iliad" to the Internet* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Hope Nash Wolff, "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Heroic Life," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, no. 2 (1969): 392–98.

Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516–1531) and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), before moving to the next section in which I will examine models of female heroic friendship.

i. Models of Male Friendship in the Classical Epic Tradition

The male bonds of Achilles and Patroclus (*Iliad*), Diomedes and Odysseus (*Iliad*), Euryalus and Nisus (*Aeneid*), and Dymas and Hopleus (*Thebaid*) stood as exemplary instances of heroic friendship for Renaissance authors to emulate because of their vibrant depictions of one man's loyalty and love for one another during times of war. Maria Cristina Cabani categorizes these classical prototypes of friendship into three groups: *gli amici amanti, la coppia epica,* and *la coppia "pietosa." Gli amici amanti*, modelled on the friendships of Achilles and Patroclus and Nisus and Euryalus, represents a pair of friends who are inseparable and share a strong sentimental bond that often exhibits traits of same-sex love, hence the designation of *amore* in Cabani's grouping. *La coppia epica* instead refers to the tradition inaugurated in Greek by Diomedes and Odysseus, a pair of heroic men who recognize the valor, courage, and loyalty in one another, and team together for the sake of executing a night expedition with a concrete goal in mind. Similarly, what could be considered a subdivision of the previous model, *la coppia "pietosa,"* corresponds to a bond that forms during the mission of an especially selfless pursuit, like that between Dymas and Hopleus, who in Book 10 of the *Thebaid* build a relationship with each other because they have likeminded goals of recovering the bodies of their deceased kings.

While these categories may seem helpful, they may also be too constricting. Some depictions of heroic friendships often fit into more than one of these classifications. For example, while many have commented on the erotic nature of Nisus and Euryalus' friendship, this pair could also classify as a *coppia epica*, since most of the narrative development of their relationship occurs in Book 9 when they embark on a night raid. Instead of categorizing these classical epic friendships into types, we might also understand these classical episodes of friendship thematically. By focusing our readings

on the themes that these renderings of heroic friendships embody, we may find stronger intertextualities among the works themselves, a tool that will become especially useful when examining Sarrocchi's poem.

First, this section will outline the two different kinds of male friendship found in Homer: the idea of the friend as another self, exemplified in Achilles and Patroclus's bond, and the shared military obligation that ties two warriors together, found in Odysseus and Diomedes' pairing. Next, this section will examine Nisus and Euryalus to highlight the detriments of material and personal gain that ail their bond, before turning to the pair of Hopleus and Dymas, which positively refigures the Virgilian episode to underscore the themes of selfless devotion and self-sacrifice. The similarities and differences among these pairs will be highlighted to note how friendship in heroic poetry is a continuously modified *topos*.

As Richard Martin remarks in his introduction to Richmond Lattimore's translation of the *Iliad*, the theme of companionship plays a crucial role in the overall vision of the poem.[41] The companionship between Achilles and Patroclus is one of the most celebrated in Western literature, for it reveals the positive and negative emotions that can arise between two friends over the course of their close-knit relationship. The sentiments that Achilles and Patroclus feel for each other and their deep emotional attachment to one another are unmatched by any other friendship in the poem.[42] Unlike the partnering of Diomedes and Odysseus that ensues from military duty and obligation in Book 10, Achilles and Patroclus share an emotionally-rooted bond that bears resemblance to a relationship between lovers, a fact that was noted and interpreted as early as the

[41] Richard P. Martin, "Introduction," in *The Iliad of Homer*, by Homer, ed. and trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 21.

[42] We find other relationships in the *Iliad* that evoke similar characteristics, namely the relationships between mother and son, or husband and wife like Thetis and Hecuba for their sons, Andromache for her husband, Briseis for the fallen Patroclus.

fifth century BC in the works of Aeschylus, Aeschines, and Plato.[43] While we may find homoerotic tendencies in the bond between Achilles and Patroclus, we cannot interpret their relationship as being fundamentally so. Instead, the key thematic issue that emerges from their bond is the reciprocal respect they have for one another and the understanding of the friend as another self, both defining aspects of a type of "honorable, even glamorous tradition of heroic comradeship."[44]

Throughout the poem, Patroclus is described as Achilles' *philos* or "companion," by both Achilles himself and the narrator:

> "But what pleasure is this to me since my dear companion has perished,
> Patroklos, whom I loved beyond all other companions,
> as well as my own life. I have lost him…"[45]
>
> "I must die soon, then; since I was not to stand by my companion
> when he was killed. And now, far away from the land of his fathers,
> he has perished, and lacked my fighting strength to defend him." (18.98–100)
>
> […] only Achilleus
> wept still as he remembered his beloved companion, nor did sleep
> who subdues all come over him, but he tossed from one side to the other
> in longing for Patroklos […] (24.2–6)

As Gregory Nagy explains, the use of the word *philos* means that "Achilles considers Patroklos to be

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[43] There was much debate in antiquity on whether Achilles and Patroclus shared a pederastic relationship, a sexual relationship between an older man and a younger boy. However, there was never agreement on who was the man and who was the boy. Homer describes Patroclus as being older than Achilles, for example, while Aeschylus's tragic play *Mymidons* (500 BC–400 BC) represents Achilles as the older lover of the pair, and Plato's *Symposium* (385-370 BC), through the voice of Phaedrus, depicts Achilles as the younger one in the relationship. Meanwhile in Aeschines' speech, *Against Timarchus* (364 BC), he finds Achilles and Patroclus' relationship to be loving, noble, and virtuous. Manuel Sanz Morales and Gabriel Laguna Mariscal, "The Relationship between Achilles and Patroclus According to Chariton of Aphrodisias," *The Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (May 2003): 292.

[44] David M. Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 101. David Konstan also argues that "a perceived ambiguity between erotic and friendly affection maybe be a consequence simply of the poem's emphasis on Achilles' passion—a fervent complex of love, guilt, and grief-- rather than on common expectations of a friend's obligations." *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.

[45] Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 18.80-82.

the most *philos*, 'near and dear,' of them all,"[46] which is evident in the intimate language Achilles uses to describe him. Achilles and Patroclus' friendship predates the events of the poem, as the two were raised in the same household: Patroclus' father gave him away to Peleus, Achilles' father, after he had slain another youth. Peleus, in turn, provided the young Patroclus with shelter and named him Achilles' "henchman" (23. 84–90), a word whose meaning is close to "squire."[47] More than a henchman, Patroclus is Achilles' personal *therapōn* or attendant and ritual substitute, a role that requires that he take care of Achilles. Being Achilles' *therapōn*, by definition, means that Patroclus must take care of Achilles and attend to him, which we often observe Patroclus doing. For example, in Book 9, Patroclus mixes and pours wine for Achilles (9.202–204) and later in the same book he prepares a meal for Achilles and his guests (9.206–215). However, as Nagy has pointed out by tracing the etymology of the word to its early Indo-European origins from Anatolian languages and the Greeks' subsequent borrowing of the word, being someone's *therapōn* more importantly signifies that you are their ritual substitute and their other self. Therefore, Patroclus in being Achilles' *therapōn* "is doomed to die as the other self of Achilles."[48]

The death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector is one of the *Iliad*'s climactic points; it motivates Achilles' decision to fight alongside the Greeks, chiefly to avenge the death of his faithful companion, even in knowing that his participation in the war will later cost him (Achilles) his life. On the one hand, the death of a friend serves as a strategic narrative device, by leading to the final

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[46] Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 166.

[47] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, 40. Konstan also notes that "henchman" does not necessarily signify a lower social status. In his role as his *therapōn*, Patroclus fulfills various duties for his companion. For example: Patroclus sets the table and makes drinks at the request of Achilles when Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix arrive at Achilles' tent (9.202–4). He even prepares the bed for Phoenix when he needs to stay the night (9.620–2).

[48] Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, 147.

scenes of the poem in which Achilles kills Hector. On the other hand, in killing the friend, the author kills half of the self which then later needs to be redeemed, a trope that then becomes implemented and repeated in many epics to follow. As Richard Martin argues, "in the battle scenes of the *Iliad*, the closeness of male friends, with the consequent desire to take revenge for a companion's death, is regularly the prime motivation for one warrior to attack another."[49] This is the course of action Achilles takes after he has transformed his inconsolable grief into vengeful anger. When Achilles learns of Patroclus' death in the beginning of Book 18, he is overtaken by a "black cloud of sorrow" (18.15) and enacts public displays of anguish: he falls to the floor, tears at the dirt on the ground, pulls out his hair, and lets out a shrieking cry that his mother, Thetis, a sea nymph, hears in the depths of the ocean (18.15–35). James Winn perceptively states that this particular scene is written as though it is describing the death of Achilles himself.[50] In fact, Achilles' sorrow continues throughout the rest of the poem; in Book 24, he cannot sleep and instead stays up weeping while thinking of his faithful dead companion.

If the coupling of Achilles' outward display of grief and Patroclus' act of wearing Achilles' armor did not already hint at the idea that Patroclus symbolizes Achilles' other self and vice versa, it becomes more apparent when Patroclus' ghost visits Achilles in his sleep with two final requests. Patroclus first begs Achilles to hold his funeral as soon as possible so that his soul can pass through Hades' gate. Secondly, and most importantly, Patroclus asks Achilles to ensure that his ashes are buried in an urn along with those of Achilles himself: "...do not have my bones laid apart from yours, Achilles, / but with them, just as we grew up together in your house...let one single vessel, the golden two-handled / urn the lady your mother gave you, hold both our ashes" (23.82–83, 91–92).

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[49] Martin, "Introduction," 2011, 21.

[50] James Anderson Winn, *The Poetry of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 156.

Friendship in the *Iliad* not only underscores the intimacy that can be had in close relationships, but it also teaches that such bonds, like that between Achilles and Patroclus, extend beyond the mortal life—they are everlasting and eternal. Moreover, the intense despair and grief experienced after a friend dies are important features of heroic friendship. In literary friendships after Homer, as we will observe, more often than not, at least one of the friends dies, if not both, making friendship in heroic poetry extremely vulnerable to loss.

The intimate nature of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship represents a type of heroic comradeship that starkly contrasts with those that instead form out of dire military necessity, like that of Odysseus and Diomedes in Book 10 of the *Iliad*. Odysseus and Diomedes' night raid, also known as the Doloneia, transpires out of a moment of desperation for the Greeks as they are losing many men in battle and have not yet been successful in convincing Achilles to join the war.[51] The events of the Doloneia begin when Diomedes, in response to Nestor's question of whether anyone is willing to sneak into the Trojan camp to spy on their enemies, volunteers himself. Diomedes asks to bring the valiant Odysseus along with him, to which Odysseus happily agrees, highlighting the shared goals of obligation that can bring two men together. In his speech to Nestor, Diomedes stresses the importance of having two men execute a mission in order for it to be successful: "When two go together, one of them at least looks forward / to see what is best; a man by himself, though he be careful, / still had less mind in him than two, and his wits have less weight" (10.224–226). As Odysseus and Diomedes journey into the night, a doubling of images occurs; the narrator describes

[51] Scholars have argued about the Doloneia's relevance to the rest of the poem. While some contend that it feels narratively misplaced and believe that Homer wrote it as a separate composition and inserted it into the *Iliad* at a later point in time, others find it to be structurally and thematically congruent with the poem. Whether Homer originally intended the Doloneia to be part of his poem or not, it nonetheless bears importance in establishing a recurring scene in which two warriors pair together, out of necessity for the future of their army, in order to carry out a military pursuit in the middle of the night. For an argument that the *Doloneia* is narratively misplaced see R. M. Henry, "The Place of the Doloneia in Epic Poetry," *The Classical Review* 19, no. 4 (1905): 192–97. For a discussion that argues for the Doloneia's narrative importance to the *Iliad* see Robert Rabel, "The Theme of Need in *Iliad* 9–11," *Phoenix* 45, no. 4 (1991): 283–95.

their movements and actions in tandem, emphasizing "the close harmony in which these two heroes think and act."[52] For example, before the two embark on their assignment, Odysseus and Diomedes pray to Athena one after the other, demonstrating their piety (10.278–294). The climax of the Doloneia occurs when they meet and capture Dolon, a cowardly and greedy Trojan, who has also been sent by his men to carry out an identical mission for the Trojans. Under the intimidation of Odysseus and Diomedes, Dolon quickly reveals details about the Trojan camp, evidently betraying his men and aiding the two Greeks in stealing Rhesus' beautiful horses and killing a dozen Thracians, Trojan allies, in their sleep. During their nocturnal sortie, Odysseus and Diomedes continuously work as a team: Diomedes, with the help of Athena, slaughters men in order to help Odysseus get away with untying Rhesus' horses. Odysseus and Diomedes do not spare Dolon's life and the two men return to their home camp and are celebrated as heroes, boosting the overall morale of their men.

Even though Odysseus and Diomedes' actions may be questionable for modern readers, Homer's narrator notes that the Trojans seem to carry out a similar mission, portraying a shared motive by both sides to gain an advantage over the other. However, unlike the heroic portrayal Homer paints of Odysseus and Diomedes, he characterizes Dolon negatively, underlining the fact that Dolon, unlike Odysseus and Diomedes, does not pray to any god and agrees to his mission under the condition that Hector promises him Achilles' gold chariot, horses, and glory (10.321–323). In contrast, Odysseus and Diomedes are represented in a much more positive light: Odysseus is "illustrious" (10.339), "patient" (10.498), and "resourceful" (10.382); Diomedes is "powerful" (10.456) and "brilliant" (10.502).[53] The apparent contraposition of Odysseus and Diomedes'

[52] Rabel, "The Theme of Need in *Iliad* 9–11," 288.

[53] Sergio Casali notes through the apparent contrast between Diomedes and Odysseus' mission, and Dolon's, Homer's Doloneia is "constructed as an opposition of two sides" in which "a pro-Greek chauvinism" is

character with that of Dolon is important for understanding the development of the bond between the two Greeks. Moreover, the foundation of their relationship is their shared duty to their men. They work together for the advantage of the Greeks, which subsequently leads them to success. Instead, Dolon operates alone, selfishly seeking personal gain and glory. Diomedes' earlier assertion that two men working together is better than one then carries more weight here; it alludes to the understanding that goals shared between two are more honorable and successful than individualistic pursuits, a moral lesson that recurs in the episode of Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus. If anything, the escapade of Odysseus and Diomedes stands as an exemplary mission. The two act heroically by helping their men and keeping their focus on the shared goal of improving the military situation of the Greeks. Neither of them dies and Homer praises their actions. In all, they are a success story to which many of the subsequent pairs will fall short.

The nocturnal sortie of the two young Trojans, Nisus and Euryalus, in Book 9 of the *Aeneid* has been described as a dramatic episode of friendship and as "one of the great tragic stories of Vergil's epic."[54] Although the story of the two Trojans is well known, a brief summary of the events leading to their death is in order: the two ill-fated friends venture into the middle of the night on an impossible mission of sneaking into the Rutulian camp. Their hope is to find and alert Aeneas (their leader), who has been away, that Turnus has waged war against the Trojan camp and that their men are in great danger. As the two friends make moves into the Rutulian camp, they succeed in massacring many sleeping soldiers, but are subsequently discovered by Volcens, the cavalry captain

revealed. "Nisus and Euryalus: Exploiting the Contradictions in Virgil's 'Doloneia,'" *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 102 (2004): 323.

[54] George E. Duckworth, "The Significance of Nisus and Euryalus for *Aeneid* IX-XII," *The American Journal of Philology* 88, no. 2 (1967): 24. Like Homer's Doloneia, there has been much debate about whether Virgil composed the scene to be part of the *Aeneid* or as a separate composition, a self-contained story. See Philip R Hardie, "Introduction," in *Aeneid. Book IX*, by Virgil, ed. Philip R Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–34.

of the Rutulians, and are both killed; Euryalus is killed first, Nisus' death follows shortly after, and as he is dying, Nisus throws his body atop the body of his deceased companion. Most readers respond sympathetically to their story because Virgil employs language of love and affection to portray Nisus and Euryalus' relationship during their escapade.[55] Meanwhile critics have focused their attention on the "complexities within this episode and have discussed the less positive aspects of the two main characters."[56] Even though Virgil clearly draws inspiration from Homer's exemplars of heroic friendship, he also rewrites Nisus and Euryalus' story to underscore how their desire for fame and glory, as well as their own personal decisions, can interfere with their public duty, leading them to a disastrous fate. Ultimately, Virgil's representation of epic friendship begs the question, is friendship or love for a friend compatible with honorable heroism?

The events of the night sortie in Book 9 of the *Aeneid* closely follow Homer's Doloneia, but the intimate nature of Nisus and Euryalus' bond bears more similarity to Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, making Virgil's rendering of the night-raid scene a combination of these two Homeric models. Yet, unlike Homer's text that celebrates Achilles' and Patroclus' sameness and praises Diomedes and Odysseus' success, the *Aeneid* instead cautions against naivety and friendships that promote individualistic pursuits. Readers first meet Nisus and Euryalus in Book 5, four books before the infamous night raid, when the two companions participate in a footrace as part of a series of competitive games that are being held to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the death of Anchises, Aeneas' father. In their introduction, Virgil's narrator highlights Euryalus' youth and good looks, as well as the fact that Nisus deeply loves him: "Nisus and Euryalus foremost […] Euryalus

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[55] John F. Makowski, "Nisus and Euryalus: A Platonic Relationship," *The Classical Journal* 85, no. 1 (1989): 1.

[56] Barbara Pavlock, "Epic and Tragedy in Vergil's Nisus and Euryalus Episode," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-)* 115 (1985): 207. In contrast, other scholars have treated the episode more positively. See Peter G. Lennox, "Virgil's Night-Episode Re-Examined (*Aeneid* IX, 176–449)," *Hermes* 105, no. 3 (1977): 331–42; Agatha Thornton, *The Living Universe: Gods and Men in Virgil's "Aeneid"* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1976).

famed for beauty and flower of youth, Nisus for tender love for the boy."[57] Euryalus' youthfulness is further accentuated in Book 9; he is described as "a boy who showed on his unshaven cheek the first bloom of youth" (127).[58] Even though the narrator later comments that the two's love for one another is reciprocal, "a common love was theirs" (127), Nisus' feelings for Euryalus, which many note are homoerotic in nature, are the ones that are more explicitly expressed.[59] Euryalus is, in contrast, often described passively, as the recipient of Nisus' love. Euryalus does not once verbalize his sentiments for Nisus, which is not to say that he does not care for him, but this silence leads us to question whether their feelings for one another are fundamentally mutual since the examples of Achilles and Patroclus, and Diomedes and Odysseus, underscore the importance of reciprocity: Diomedes and Odysseus' mission is successful because the two work in tandem while Achilles and Patroclus' mutual respect and love for one another is what makes their friendship eternal. Nisus and Euryalus' night raid, instead, highlights a conflict of interest for the two friends, whose selfish aspirations ultimately lead to their deaths.

Even though Nisus presents his idea for the night raid as an imminent duty on his part to deliver a message to Aeneas, he is primarily motivated by his desire to achieve glory. In his speech to Euryalus, in which he first explains his plan, he asks: "Do the gods, Euryalus, put this fire into hearts, or does his own wild longing become to each man a god? Long has my heart been astir to

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[57] Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6.*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, vol. I, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 493. "Nisus et Euryalus primi [...] Euryalus forma insignis viridque iuventa / Nisus amore pio pueri" (Virgil, 5.295–97).

[58] Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7–12. Appendix Vergiliana.*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, vol. II, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 127. "[O]ra puer prima signans intosa iuventa" (Virgil, 9.181).

[59] "[H]is amor unus erat" (Virgil, 9.182).

dare battle or some greet deed, and it is not content with peaceful quiet" (127).[60] Humility does not ground Nisus' character; he understands his desire for glory and fame to be "a wild longing" and in order to obtain them, he must be a successful warrior and slay as many enemies as possible, a belief of his that is further elucidated when he speaks to the Trojan council about his proposal.[61] In the council meeting, Nisus declares that the he and Euryalus will find Aeneas only after slaughtering many and will return with booty. During the mission itself, Nisus' thirst for killing and glory are summed up in an extend Homeric simile, taken and revised from the Doloneia, in which he is compared to a lion preying on sheep: "Just so, an unfed lion, rioting through full sheepfolds—for the madness of hunger constrains him—mangles and rents the feeble flock that is dumb with fear, and growls with blood-stained mouth" (139).[62] Nisus' desire to attain glory through killing Rutulians in their sleep influences Euryalus, who wants to be repaid for his actions not only through eternal fame, but also through material gain.

Euryalus' priorities of glory and material gain are reflected in his relationship with Nisus and in particular, in the meeting of the Trojan council and during the night raid itself. In response to Nisus' proposition of the plan, Euryalus insists that he cannot let Nisus embark on the journey alone because he, too, wants to participate in the venture. Nisus' yearning for glory motivates Euryalus' decision to partake in the mission, possibly alluding to the idea that a negative quality in a friend can encourage that same immoral quality in the other. In fact, during the night raid itself, Euryalus' violence is portrayed so excessively that Nisus needs to intervene: "Nor less is the slaughter of

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[60] Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7–12. Appendix Vergiliana.*, II:127. "[D]ine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, / Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido? / aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum invader magnum / mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est" (Virgil, 9.184–187).

[61] Indeed, Pavlock argues that Nisus "acknowledges the *dira cupido* that drives him to seek opportunities for enhancing his reputation." Pavlock, "Epic and Tragedy in Vergil's Nisus and Euryalus Episode," 210.

[62] "[I]mpastus ceu plena leo per ovilia turbans /suadet enim vesana fames) manditque trahitque/ molle pecus mutumque metu, fremit ore cruento" (Virgil, 9.339–341).

Euryalus; he too, all aflame, rages, and falls on the vast unnamed multitude before him...when Nisus briefly sparks thus—for he saw his comrade swept away by reckless lust of carnage" (139).[63] Euryalus' lack of self-control and longing for fame illustrates his immaturity. Additionally, at the Trojan council, Ascanius offers lavish gifts to Nisus and Euryalus for their efforts. He enumerates a long list of valuable objects to give to the two warriors, including precious family heirlooms belonging to his father and other items that are not even in the Trojan's possession. Pavlock persuasively argues that Ascanius' offering "perhaps only encourages the materialist desire that lead Euryalus to the disastrous events later in the episode."[64] When we compare the gifts that Nestor promises to Diomedes and Odysseus in the Doloneia to those that Ascanius assures, they are significantly different in value. Ascanius' gifts are much more similar to those that Hector bestows on Dolon, who as we noted earlier was described as greedy and selfish.[65] Euryalus' lust for material possessions is even more emphasized when he steals gear, a sword belt, and a helmet off of two Rutulians, Rhamnes and Messapus, whom he first kills. Virgil's narrator notes that his actions here are heedless, which is then confirmed when the light of the moon reflects off his stolen helmet, giving away his position to the enemy and resulting in his death.

The death of Euryalus is the climax of the episode, just as Patroclus' death is the culminating event in the *Iliad*. Just moments before Euryalus' death, Nisus sees his friend in danger, and he questions whether he should stick to the original mission and find Aeneas, since he has not been discovered by the enemy yet, or go back and save his friend (9.390–91). He chooses the latter,

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[63] "[N]ecminor Euryali caedes; incenus et ipset / perfurit ac multam in medio sine nomine plebem […] breviter cum talia Nisus (sensit enim nimia caede atque cupidine ferri)" (Virgil, 9.342–43, 353–54).

[64] As Pavlock comments, "[a]t this point he [Nisus] has totally lost sight of his public mission, since he could have continued on his journey to Aeneas but instead chooses to try to save his friend or to die 'gloriously.'" Pavlock, "Epic and Tragedy in Vergil's Nisus and Euryalus Episode," 212.

[65] See Casali, "Nisus and Euryalus." for an argument comparing Nisus and Euryalus with Dolon.

placing his personal affection for Euryalus over his public duty.[66] In addition to highlighting the negative traits of the two companions, Virgil also slightly modifies the events of the Doloneia to suggest that Nisus and Euryalus were always doomed to fail. For example, the two are an "impatient pair,"[67] which differentiates them from Diomedes and Odysseus who are portrayed as much more strategic. Moreover, unlike the pious Diomedes and Odysseus, who pray to Athena before they embark on their assignment, only Nisus prays to Diana, and he does so only once he has found himself in danger. Not only are Nisus and Euryalus impatient, headless, desirous of glory, impious, but their friendship brings out their worst qualities. In this light, it is possible to read the Nisus and Euryalus episode with some ambivalence. Virgil ends the episode with the following famous apostrophe to the two fallen warriors: "Happy pair! If my poetry has any power, no day shall ever blot you from the memory of time, so long as the house of Aeneas dwells on the Capitol's unshaken rock, and the Father of Rome holds sovereign sway!" (145).[68] It is unclear whether Virgil was celebrating the two friends or mocking them. As John Makowski observes, we cannot "deny the subtlety or ambiguity always present in Vergilian depiction of tragedy."[69] Within their complexity and despite their questionable actions, Nisus and Euryalus' story demonstrates the strong love felt in a warrior friendship.

In contrast to the expedition of Euryalus and Nisus, the nocturnal sortie of Statius' Dymas and Hopleus elucidates themes of devotion, self-sacrifice, and a type of piety that "represents the

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[66] Pavlock, "Epic and Tragedy in Vergil's Nisus and Euryalus Episode," 212.

[67] Lennox, "Virgil's Night-Episode Re-Examined (*Aeneid* IX, 176–449)," 9.311.

[68] "Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt, / nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo, / dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxim / accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit" (Virgil, 9.446–49).

[69] Makowski, "Nisus and Euryalus," 11.

special bond of loyalty between the ruler and his followers."[70] In Book 10 of the *Thebaid*, two Argive squires (fighting men of lower rank) unite to retrieve the corpses of their dead masters, Tydeus (father of Diomedes) and Parthenopaneus. The mission of Hopleus and Dymas is part of a larger night raid narrative in which other men from the Argive camp enter into the Theban camp to slaughter men in their sleep. However, the murder and slaughter of Theban men at the hands of the Argive soldiers are not the focus of the episode; the shared effort of Hopleus and Dymas to find the bodies of their masters features front and center. Unlike Virgil's pair whose task is motivated by glory, fame, and the promise of material gain, Dymas and Hopleus are moved by grief and fidelity, pledging to save their masters from dishonor by providing them with a proper burial. In fact, the two are first described as being "both dear to their kings, companions of their kings, grieving and indignant to live after their deaths."[71] The two friends are not described in relation to one another. While Nisus compromises the expedition in attempt to save Euryalus, thus emphasizing the compassion he feels for his friend, Hopleus and Dymas put their leaders above their own relationship. This change in motivation for the night raid is a modification Statius makes to the Virgilian episode. Virgil was undoubtedly one of Statius' professed models for his epic poem.[72] However, as David Vessey argues, "neither the episode of Hopleus and Dymas nor the *Thebaid* as a

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[70] Donka D. Markus, "Transfiguring Heroism: Nisus and Euryalus in Statius' *Thebaid*," *Vergilius* 43 (1997): 57.

[71] P. Papinius Statius, *Thebaid, Books VIII-XII: Achilleid*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 151. "[D]ilecti regibus ambo, / regum ambo comites, quorum post funera maesti vitam indignantur" (Statius, 10.348–350).

[72] In the epilogue of this scene, Statius cites Virgil as his model when he mentions how Dymas and Hopleus are to join Nisus and Euryalus: "You too will outlive the mindful years, consecrate, though my songs rise from a lesser lyre, and perhaps Euryalus shall not scorn your attendant shades and Phrygian Nisus glory shall grant you entry" (158). "[V]os quoque sacrati, quamvis mea carmina surgant / inferior lyra, memores superabitis annos. / forsitan et comites non aspernabitur umbras / Euryalus Phrygiique admittet Gloria Nisi" (Statius, 10.445–48).

whole are in any real sense Vergilian."[73] In fact, Statius rewrites Virgil in the Dymas and Hopleus episode by demonstrating how a pair of friends can remain so loyal and devout to their cause without jeopardizing the mission itself or letting their relationship interfere with it. Again, as with the other pairs of friends, we find slight modifications to highlight different aspects of these episodes. In the examples of Dymas and Hopleus, it becomes clear that pious love for a higher figure unites two men of lower rank.

One of the key differences in Statius' construction of the Dymas and Hopleus episode is the way in which the two friends first present their reasoning for participating in the Theban night raid. In contrast to Nisus' speech on glory and fame that entices Euryalus to join him, Hopleus begins by challenging Dymas' loyalty to his king:

> "Have you no care for your slain king now that he is gone, famed Dymas? Already perhaps birds and Theban dogs have him. What will you bring back to your country then, men of Arcady? See, an angry mother comes before you as you return: where is his body? But in my heart Tydeus ever rages, lacking a grave, even though his limbs are tougher and his broken years less lamentable. Yet would I go and search the cruel field at random all over, or break into the midst of Thebes."[74] (151–52)

Through the dominance of rhetorical questions that guide his speech, Hopleus disputes Dymas' faithfulness to his leader. He simultaneously employs a language of pathos, alluding to the worst-case scenarios ("perhaps birds and Theban dogs have him" or "see, an angry mother comes before you as you return: where is his body?") he would be responsible for if he so carelessly leaves his master's body to rot in the Theban camp. Additionally, Hopleus describes how his own sentiments

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[73] David Vessey, "*Pierius Menti Calor Incidit*: Statius' Epic Style," *ANRW II* 32, no. 5 (1986): 2965–66. For example, while Virgil's poem tells of the foundation of Rome and celebrates Aeneas as its hero and founder, the *Thebaid* explores the plagued origins of the troubled house of Oedipus and its self-destructive end.

[74] "[N]ullane post manes regis tibi cura perempti, / clare Dyma, teneant quem iam fortasse volucres / Thebanique canes? patriae quid deinde feretis, / Arcades? en reduces contra venit aspera mater: / funus ubi? At nostro sempre sub pectore Tydeus / saevit inops tumuli, quamvis patientior artus / ille nec abruptis adeo lacrimabilis annis. / ire tamem saevumque libet nullo ordine passim / scrutari campum, mediasve irrumpere Thebas" (Statius, 10.352–59).

for Tydeus rouse his own desire to find his master's body, stating that he would go to the ends of the earth to retrieve him—as if to show that his behavior is exemplary and that Dymas should act in a similar manner. The fierce loyalty Hopleus professes in this speech sparks like feelings in Dymas, who declares: "I swear by these wandering stars, by the shade of my leader, godlike to me, my mind, alas, is as yours. In the dejection of my grief I have long sought a companion" (153).[75] Recognizing that their objective to find the bodies of their leaders is the same, Dymas and Hopleus solidify the foundation of their relationship, moving themselves forward to act in unison to find the bodies of Tydeus and Parthenopaneus.

As the plot of their expedition develops, Statius details Hopleus and Dymas' behavior, that unlike the actions of Virgil's pair "eliminate even the remotest possibility for calling into question the moral standing of his heroes."[76] For example, before the two take off, Dymas prays to the moon. In this instance, Dymas repeats the behavior of Diomedes and Odysseus in the Doloneia, both exemplifying his piety and inherently correcting Nisus' mistake of waiting too late to offer prayer to Diana. Even though Diana rewards Dymas' piety by shedding light on the corpses of Tydeus and Parthenopaneus, whom the two men successfully find without delay and throw over their backs, we soon learn that their mission will fail since "the Fates love not the pious and Fortune rarely goes hand in hand with great attempts" (154).[77] As K. F. L. Pollman notes, "the failure of the expedition is already predicted here, but clearly is not the responsibility of the two squires."[78] While Euryalus' stolen helmet gives away his position and simultaneously reinforces the idea that his greed will bring

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[75] "[P]er ego haec vaga sidera iuro, / per ducis errantes instar mihi numinis umbras, / idem animus misero; comitem circumspicit olim / mens humilis luctu, sed nun prior ibo" (Statius, 10.360–63).

[76] Markus, "Transfiguring Heroism: Nisus and Euryalus in Statius' *Thebaid*," 58.

[77] "[I]nvida Fata piis et Fors ingentibus ausis rara comes" (Statius, 10.384–85).

[78] K. F. L. Pollmann, "Statius' *Thebaid* and the Legacy of Vergil's *Aeneid*," *Mnemosyne* 54, no. 1 (2001): 19.

about his death, Statius does not allude to any mistake made by Hopleus or Dymas that would make us question their character or reveal their location to the Thebans. The Thebans instead casually stumble upon the two, killing Hopleus first who, "falls, not yet unmindful of his great leader, and dies holding him" (154).[79] Shortly after, the Thebans catch Dymas who is compared to a protective lioness that actively chooses to save her cubs rather than attack her hunters, once again emphasizing his fierce loyalty to Tydeus.[80] When Amphion gives Dymas the option to reveal all he knows about the plans of the Argive men in exchange for being set free to bury his leader, Dymas does something unexpected: he commits suicide. Right before he plunges his sword into his chest, he cries out, "Was this wanting to crown my calamities, that I should turn traitor and dishonour Argos in her trouble? Nothing is worth that price, nor would he himself wish to be buried thus" (156).[81] Dymas' suicide is Statius' biggest revision to the episode; instead of committing treason, Dymas dies for his commander, knowing that this is what Tydeus would have wanted him to do. Again, Statius is stressing the unwavering loyalty these men feel towards their leaders, in contrast with Virgil's depiction of Nisus and Euryalus, who lose sight of their duties due to their greed and love for one another.

ii. Revisions of Male Friendship in Renaissance Heroic Poetry

[79] "[L]abitur egregii nondu ducis immemor Hopleus, / exspiratque tenens" (Statius, 10.402–403).

[80] "So a lioness that has newly whelped, beset by Numidian hunters in her cruel den, stands upright over her young, gnashing her teeth in grim and piteous wise, her mind in doubt; she could disrupt the groups and break their weapons with her bite, but love for her offspring binds her cruel heart and from the midst of her fury she looks round at her cubs" (156). "[U]t lea, quam saevo fetam pressere cubili/ venantes Numidae, nats erecta superstat,/ mente sub incerta torvum ac miserabile frendens;/ illa quidem turbare globos et frangere morsu/ tela queat, sed prlis amor crudelia vincit/ pectora, et a media catulos circumspicit ira" Statius, *Thebaid, Books VIII-XII*, 10.414–419.). This also contrasts with the lion similes we find in the *Iliad* and in the *Aeneid* which are used instead to describe the ferocity of Diomedes and Nisus.

[81] "[S]ummumne hoc cladibus…/deerat ut afflictos turparem ego prditor Argos?/ nil emimus tanti, nec sic velit ipse cremari" (10.436-438).

The male bonds of Odysseus and Diomedes, Achilles and Patroclus, Euryalus and Nisus, and Dymas and Hopleus were imitated and rewritten in the poems of Italian Renaissance authors like Ariosto and Tasso. As with the classical examples, the episodes of friendship in Italian Renaissance heroic poems also directly reference their predecessors and simultaneously revise them to include subtle nuances that change the significance of each bond. Before identifying the rare instances of *amicizia femminile*, it is imperative to first examine the revisions made to male friendship in Renaissance heroic poems. Turning briefly to the famous instances of male comradeship in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532) and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata (*1581), this section will act as a bridge to the next and will help set up the treatment of female friendship in Sarrocchi.

Both the *Furioso* and the *Liberata* feature prominent episodes of friendship, primarily set against the backdrop of a night sortie or some other kind of mission, thus continuing the tradition outlined in the classical epics. Notably missing in the *Furioso* and the *Liberata* is a friendship as narratively prominent as that of Achilles and Patroclus, perhaps due to the much wider influence Virgil had during the Renaissance than Homer. Similarly, it is not the death of a friend, like that of Patroclus, that sparks the poem's climax in either the *Furioso* or the *Liberata*. Instead, climactic moments in both Renaissance poems center either on problems of love (i.e. Orlando's madness that comes as a result of his unrequited love for Angelica or Tancredi's accidental killing of his beloved, Clorinda) or in gruesome yet successful battle scenes in which Christians defeat Saracens (i.e. Rodomonte's death in the *Furioso* and the capture of Jerusalem in the *Liberata*). Scenes of friendship occur during specific episodes in Renaissance heroic poems, echoing those of Diomedes and Odysseus, Nisus and Euryalus, and Hopleus and Dymas, demonstrating how Ariosto and Tasso were continuing the tradition initiated by their models. However, the Renaissance mission-based friendships differ from their predecessors because in each episode a heterosexual romance plot is

added in. In other words, while the *Furioso* and *Liberata* focus on friendships that transpire against the backdrop of a pursuit or mission, they also include a heterosexual love story.

In the *Furioso*, the night sortie of Cloridano and Medoro into the Christian camp arises because of their wish to bury the body of their dead lord, Dardinello, who has been killed by Rinaldo. The two soldiers are Saracens; Medoro is a young, handsome foot soldier and Cloridano is an older, wise archer. Their night raid unfolds as they sneak into the Christian camp, kill various Christian paladins in their sleep, and successfully find the body of Dardinello with the help of Diana (to whom Medoro prays). Their escapade is cut short when dawn breaks and Zerbino, a Christian knight, and his men spot the two friends in their camp. Cloridano, thinking Medoro is behind him, drops Dardinello's body and flees for safety, only to turn back without hesitation once he realizes his friend is in grave danger. Unfortunately, Cloridano's decision to save Medoro leads to his own death, leaving Medoro wounded and alone in the Christian camp, until Angelica, the poem's most pursued love object, arrives and saves him. The Cloridano-Medoro episode has obvious Virgilian and Statian echoes that the earliest commentators of the *Furioso* could readily identify.[82] Ariosto models the characterization of Cloridano as an archer on Virgil's Nisus and that of Medoro as a younger, handsome boy on Virgil's Euryalus. Additionally, Cloridano and Medoro's movements in the Christian camp, their trying escape, Medoro's wounds, and Cloridano's death, imitate the events that transpire between the Virgilian pair. From Statius, Ariosto instead borrows the fierce loyalty Medoro and Cloridano have for their dead leader, Dardinello, and their motive to recover his corpse in order to give him a proper burial.[83] While scholars today have conflicting understandings about the

[82] Daniel Javitch notes that Lodovico Dolce was one of the first to comment Ariosto's borrowing of Statius and Virgil. "The Imitation of Imitations in *Orlando Furioso*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 212.

[83] In fact, Javitch finds the scene to be more than an imitation and writes that the Cloridano and Medoro episode is an example in which Ariosto "imitates texts that are themselves imitative" (217). That is, Javitch analyzes the scene as an imitation of an imitation since Ariosto imitates Statius, who in turn, was imitating Virgil, his own predecessor.

significance of Ariosto's rewriting of Virgil and Statius in the Cloridano and Medoro episode, what concerns us most here is the way in which their friendship is represented and whether the modifications Ariosto made to the episode reflect any changing notion of heroic friendship in the Renaissance.[84] The Cloridano-Medoro episode also includes an important narrative revision that will be pertinent when examining the examples of female friendship. Unlike our previous classical models, which primarily end with both friends dying tragically or with one friend dying and the other seeking revenge, in the Ariostan rendition, only Cloridano dies, and Medoro not only lives, but is inserted into a love story with Angelica that restores a major plot line of the *Furioso*.

Ariosto begins the episode by telling readers that the story of the two Moors stands as a rare example of "vero amore":

> Duo Mori ivi fra gli altri si trovaro,
> d'oscura stirpe nati in Tolomitta;
> de' quai l'istoria, per esempio raro
> di vero amore, è degna esser descritta.
> Cloridano e Medor si nominaro,
> ch'alla fortuna prospera e alla afflitta
> aveano sempre amato Dardinello,
> et or passato in Francia il mar con quello.[85]

Some critics have viewed this "vero amore" as ambiguous, while others believe that the "vero amore" signifies that the episode centers not only on Cloridano and Medoro's *amicizia*, but also on their shared *fedeltà* to Dardinello ("aveano sempre amato Dardinello").[86] In fact, the two Moors unite

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[84] For an array of interpretations of the episode see Maria Cristina Cabani, *Gli amici amanti: coppie eroiche e sortite notturne nell'epica italiana* (Naples: Liguori, 1995); Wiley Feinstein, "Ariosto's Parodic Rewriting of Virgil in the Episode of Cloridano and Medoro," *South Atlantic Review* 55, no. 1 (January 1990): 17–34; Thomas M. Greene, *The descent from heaven: a study in epic continuity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Walter Moretti, "La storia di Cloridano e Medoro," *Convivium* 37 (1969): 543–51; Barbara Pavlock, *Eros, Imitation, and the Epic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 147–86.

[85] Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 18.165.

[86] Saccone writes, "[l]'espressione, 'vero amore' è ambigua. Essa infatti si può riferire sia (1) al rapporto trai i due compagni; sia (2) a quello tra essi e Dardinello, loro signore; sia (3) ad ambedue le relazioni." "Cloridano e Medoro, Con alcuni argomenti per una lettura del primo Furioso," *MLN* 83, no. 1 (January 1968): 92.

on this expedition with a shared goal in mind: saving Dardinello's body from dishonor. Sharing ambition and having likeminded goals are defining aspects of Ariosto's portrayal of friendship, a characteristic previously seen in the Odysseus-Diomedes and Hopleus-Dymas episodes. Though Medoro feels more strongly about Dardinello than Cloridano ("ma quel meschin, che 'l suo signor più amava") and is the one to initiate the mission, Cloridano too expresses interest in carrying out such "lodevol pruove" (18.171.3). Medoro's *amor* and *fede* inspire Cloridano to act with him.

However, Cloridano has an additional motive in accompanying his friend that more closely reveals the dynamic of their friendship: the wise archer does not want to part ways with his beloved friend if he dies. He has a personal, and even physical attachment, to the young foot soldier. Informing Medoro of his decision to join him, Cloridano asks: "Qual cosa sarà mai che piú mi giove, / s'io resto senza te, Medoro mio? / Morir teco con l'arme è meglio molto" (18.171.5–7). Cloridano's language is personal and affectionate here, and in this way, it departs from classical precedents. For example, in Nisus' speech to Euryalus in which he attempts to convince his friend not to join him, Nisus does not express how he *himself* would feel if he lost Euryalus, but instead communicates the grief Euryalus' death would cause the young warrior's mother. Nisus also brings attention to Euryalus' youth, proclaiming that it would be unjust if he were to die, because he is so young. Nisus names external factors and people other than himself that would be affected if Euryalus were to perish. Cloridano in contrast, makes it more personal. He uses his relationship with Medoro to convey his apprehension about Medoro entering the Christian camp by himself, revealing the inner psychology of friendship through his own perspective.

Barbara Pavlock reads Cloridano's character as being erotically attracted to Medoro, which is an indisputable element of their relationship.[87] Throughout the remainder of the episode, Ariosto's

[87] Pavlock, *Eros, Imitation, and the Epic Tradition*, 177–78.

narrator continually highlights Cloridano's fondness for Medoro. Medoro is characterized three times as "'l suo [Cloridano's] Medoro" (18.190.2, 19.5.7, 19.15.8) and when Cloridano realizes he has left Medoro behind, Cloridano "pare aver lasciato a dietro il core" (19.4.4). Furthermore, Cloridano's actions towards Medoro mirror his affectionate language; as soon as Cloridano realizes Medoro is in danger, he turns back into the labyrinthine wood to save him even though it will lead to his downfall: "…ne la torta via / de l'intricata selva si ravvia /e torna di sua morte in su la traccia" (19.5.1–3). Unlike Nisus, Cloridano does not have to deliberate on whether to turn back for Medoro. Even though Medoro's feelings for Cloridano are never explicitly addressed, at the end of the episode, which occurs in the beginning of canto 19, after Angelica heals him, Medoro buries not only the body of Dardinello, but also that of Cloridano: "E Cloridan col re fe sepelire" (19.25.5). Not many scholars focus on this detail; perhaps it seems insignificant in the larger Angelica-Medoro narrative but, this one phrase reveals important details. It suggests that Medoro holds Cloridano and Dardinello equally dear to his heart. Additionally, these words indicate that Cloridano's night expedition was a success; though Cloridano dies, Dardinello's corpse receives proper burial. And finally, this short phrase ends the Cloridano-Medoro episode, giving way to the important love narrative between Medoro and Angelica that will ensue.

The introduction of Angelica as Medoro's savior and eventual spouse is a complete deviation from classical models that modifies our understanding of heroic friendship. In the classical examples, the night raid concludes either as a success with the two warriors returning to their camp, or more frequently as a failure, culminating in the death of one or both friends. In Ariosto's version however, Medoro survives, but his survival is made possible only by Angelica's arrival. Moreover, it is Angelica's healing of Medoro that allows him to carry his mission to completion: only after he is fully restored to health can Medoro bury Dardinello and Cloridano. Angelica therefore plays an important role in the Cloridano-Medoro episode; she helps Medoro fulfill his act of loyalty not only

to his lord, but also to his friend. Narratively speaking, there is a connection between a tale of friendship and a story of love in the *Furioso*, a similarity we will find in Tasso and Sarrocchi. It is the episode of friendship that leads to an episode of love, making the transition between the two more significant especially since, as readers of the *Furioso* are aware, Angelica and Medoro's love story is the catalyst event that sparks Orlando's madness in canto 23, the exact mid-point of poem. Moreover, through this narrative progression, Ariosto displaces the homoerotic love shared between two men with heteroerotic, more gender normative passion.

If in the *Furioso* a friendship gives way to a romance plot, then in Tasso's *Liberata*, it is friendship that helps lead out of a "dangerous" love story. Friendship in Tasso uniquely demonstrates how male bonds can help correct the actions of a wandering knight who has chosen love over war. Cantos 14 through 17 of the *Liberata* follow the voyage of two Crusaders, Carlo and Ubaldo, who embark on a lengthy mission to free their friend from the tight reigns of love. Their sea voyage, in addition to the challenges they face to reach Rinaldo are, as Anthony Welch states, the *Liberata*'s "closest analogue to the wanderings of Odysseus."[88] The events of Carlo and Ubaldo's expedition transpire as the *guerrieri* receive guidance from two different mentors, Ascalona and Fortuna, and subsequently travel to an enchanted island, set as one of the Canary Islands or "Isole Fortunate." On the island lies the palace of Armida, a beautiful "pagan femme fatale,"[89] who has lured and captured one of the stars of the Christian Crusade, Rinaldo. Even though love is not to blame for Rinaldo's initial retreat away from the Crusade, his reveling in every sensual and material pleasure with Armida is representative of a chivalric knight who prioritizes his private desires over

[88] Anthony Welch, *The Renaissance Epic: The Oral Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 37.

[89] Jane Tylus, "Reasoning Away Colonialism: Tasso and the Production of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *South Central Review* 10, no. 2 (1993): 100.

his public (both martial and religious) duty.[90] It is therefore the duty of Carlo and Ubaldo to save Rinaldo from error (Armida) and bring him back to participate in a worthier, more noble cause that is fighting in the Crusade.

Carlo and Ubaldo's escapade, like many of the others in the heroic friendship *topos*, is founded in their duty and common goal to complete an assigned mission, which in their case is retrieving Rinaldo. However, the mission-based friendship that Carlo and Ubaldo establish functions to combat forces of romance, which in the context of the poem are understood as dangerous for they cause a leading Crusader to stray away from his duty. Throughout the events of their expedition, before reaching Rinaldo, Carlo and Ubaldo face numerous obstacles that clearly recall the various impediments Homer's Odysseus encounters on his long journey home after the Trojan war. In the case of the hindrances that lay in Carlo and Ubaldo's path, they are all created by Armida's magic and they work to challenge the men's honor, valor, and duty as knights of the Crusade. Their successes in combatting these hurdles represent instances in which their cause prevails over Armida's, further demonstrating how forces of romance are acceptable in Tasso's heroic poem when they are kept at bay. After having defeated a serpent, lion, and group of monsters, and resisting the urge to drink out of the laughing fountain ("il fonte del riso"), Carlo and Ubaldo meet two beautiful maidens splashing around in the water, figures evidently reminiscent of the Sirens Odysseus and his men meet in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*. Like Odysseus who places balls of wax in his companions' ears, knowing that the Sirens and their song are perilous, the two *guerrieri* are aware of the danger of the maidens' song. Together, they cry out in unison: "Or qui tener a fren

[90] Rinaldo fled the Christian camp due to an internal conflict that was purposefully stirred up by Pluto, events detailed in canto 5. Jo Ann Cavallo writes, "[a]t this point in the narrative, Rinaldo has severed his ties to the Crusading movement and reverted to the status of independent knight errant. Thus, when he subsequently frees the knights imprisoned by Armida, he is acting as an autonomous knight errant in an enchanted romance landscape." *The Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso: From Public Duty to Private Pleasure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 191.

nostro desio/ ed esser cauti molto a noi conviene: / chiudiam l'orecchie al dolce canto e rio/ di queste del piacer false sirene."[91] The two friends together exhibit restraint and control even before hearing the two damsels speak. And when one of the two women attempts to encourage them to take off their armor and become warriors of love, "guerrier qui d'Amor sarete" (15.63.8), Carlo and Ubaldo ignore their pleas: "[m]a i cavalieri hanno indurate e sorde / l'alme a que' vezzi perfidi e bugiardi / e 'l lusinghiero aspetto e 'l parlar dolce / di fuor s'aggira e solo i sensi molce" (15.65.5–8). Both Carlo and Ubaldo lead by good example, they are model knights who know how to face temptation. The act of experiencing these impediments together as a *coppia* is what best prepares them to tackle their task at hand—saving Rinaldo.

Jonathan Combs-Schilling argues that Carlo and Ubaldo's voyage is an instance "in which the journey of a character enacts a structural shift" in the poem.[92] The physical movement of Carlo and Ubaldo's bodies into Armida's universe is a physical embodiment of the poem's shift from romance to epic as they help steer Rinaldo back on course to fight in the Crusade. To this argument, I would add that this shift from romance to epic occurs because of Ubaldo and Carlo's collective efforts to secure Rinaldo's return to the Crusade or, as David Quint argues, the boat of Fortuna and Carlo and Ubaldo's mission overall "become an essential part of the epic machinery that drives forward to the providential goal and narrative end point of Tasso's poem."[93] There are no two other men in the Christian camp more fit for the job as honor specifically calls on them: "a tai messaggi l'onorata cura / di richiamar l'alto campion si diede" (14.29.1–2). Therefore, when Ubaldo shows Rinaldo the shield, reflecting an emasculated image of Rinaldo to himself, and makes a speech to the

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[91] Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Franco Tomasi (Turin: BUR Classici, 2009), 15.57.3–6.

[92] In his words, the movement of Carlo and Ubaldo into Armida's realm "traverses the textual distance between epic and romance." Jonathan Combs-Schilling, "Weaving the Crusades: Bodies of Interlace in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *MLN* 127, no. 1 (January 2012): 7.

[93] Quint, *Epic and Empire*, 250.

enamored knight questioning his virtue, integrity, and fortitude as a man, it is effective. In his speech, Ubaldo is not shy to call Rinaldo's character and duty as a knight into question, something only a friend can inspire and motivate:

> "Va l'Asia tutta e va l'Europa in guerra:
> chiunque e pregio brama e Cristo adora
> travaglia in arme or ne la siria terra.
> Te solo, o figlio di Bertoldo, fuora
> del mondo, in ozio, un breve angolo serra;
> te sol de l'universo il moto nulla
> move, egregio campion d'una fanciulla.
>
> Qual sonno o qual letargo ha sì sopita
> la tua virtute? o qual viltà l'alletta?
> Su su: te il campo e te Goffredo invita,
> te la fortuna e la vittoria aspetta.
> Vieni, o fatal guerriera, e sia fornita
> la ben comincia impresa; e l'empia setta,
> che già crollasti, a terra estinta cada
> sotto l'inevitabile tua spade." (16.32–33)

Ubaldo's tactic of making apparent Rinaldo's neglect of duty and his fall into "ozio," "sonno," and "letargo" exhibits Ubaldo's understanding of the obligation and path that a knight must prioritize. Similarly, his urgent call to Rinaldo to leave these slothful behaviors behind and get back to the more important matter at hand ("Su su: te il campo e te Goffredo invia, / te la fortuna e la vittoria aspetta"), appeals to the arms over love cry he is attempting to make. All of it works. Almost instantly, Rinaldo realizes his error, letting reason and anger simultaneously take over as he then flees from Armida's garden with "la nobil coppia" (15.7.1). Carlo and Ubaldo successfully complete their mission, evident in their return to the Christian camp in the middle of canto 17. A. Bartlett Giamatti reads Carlo and Ubaldo's journey in a similar fashion to Combs-Shilling, though he analyzes their mission in relation to his view of the City versus Nature. For Giamatti, the City (Jerusalem)

"represents the center of man's duty"[94] and Nature (Armida's palace and garden) is "a place for the evasion of that duty and for the pursuit of personal comfort and satisfaction."[95] In this struggle of City vs. Nature, Carlo and Ubaldo act as "agents for proper moral values,"[96] who transport Rinaldo out of Nature, and thus out of sin and pleasure, and back into the City, and therefore into duty and morally guided life. Combs-Schilling and Giamatti's assessment of the Carlo-Ubaldo scene helps reveal Tasso's understanding of heroic friendship. In understanding Carlo and Ubaldo's mission as symbolic of Tasso's move away from romance and movement towards epic, these two scholars implicitly place friendship as an active contributor to this narrative change.

The importance of Carlo and Ubaldo's journey to save Rinaldo is further elucidated when the narrator notes that their mission is willed by God, a Tassian revision to the friendship *topos* and a revision of the pagan gods' role in classical epic. In the previous examples of mission-based friendships, warriors pray to pagan gods to help them achieve their goal, but the gods do not decree the mission themselves. Meanwhile in Tasso, God, through the spirit of Hugo, Goffredo's dearest friend, initiates Carlo and Ubaldo's mission, making the bond between Carlo and Ubaldo sacred. For example, in canto 14 it is God who sends Goffredo a dream including visions of heaven. In that dream, Hugo's heavenly spirit counsels Goffredo, urging him to pardon Rinaldo and send two men to save him:

> "ché 'l vostro Pietro, a cui lo Ciel comparte
> l'alta notizia de' secreti sui,
> saprà drizzare i messaggieri [Carlo and Ubaldo] in parte
> ove certe novella avran di lui,
> e sarà lor dimostro il modo e l'arte

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[94] A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 183.

[95] Giamatti, 183. Moreover, Laura Benedetti argues that the city represents a masculine Christianity while the forest figures as a feminine force of nature that must be defeated. See Laura Benedetti, *La sconfitta di Diana: Un percroso per la "Gerusalemme liberata"* (Ravenna: Longo, 1996).

[96] Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, 192.

di liberarlo e di condurlo a vui.
Così al fin tutti i tuoi compagni erranti
ridurrà il Ciel sotto i tuoi segni santi." (14.18)

Tasso moralizes the mission to save Rinaldo by describing it with Christian rhetoric. Carlo and Ubaldo are not named in this *ottava,* but they are characterized as "messaggieri," likening them to God's angels. And as God's messengers, Carlo and Ubaldo help correct Rinaldo's errant behavior by ensuring he fight again under Goffredo's "segni santi." Fighting in the Crusade is a nobler cause than Rinaldo's current actions, an idea that is fortified just one canto later in which Tasso provides yet another instance in which Carlo and Ubaldo's mission is presented through Christian language. Fortuna, the second of Carlo and Ubaldo's guides, warns the two friends not to steer off the task at hand in search of individualist pursuits:

"A voi per grazia e sovra l'arte e l'uso
de' naviganti ir per quest'acque è dato,
e scender là dove è il guerrier rinchiuso
a ridurlo dal mondo a l'altro lato.
Tanto vi basti, e l'aspirar piú suso
Superbir fora e calcitrar co 'l fato." (15.40.1–6)

In her speech, Fortuna presents a moral dichotomy to the two knights with "grazia" on the one side and "superbir" on the other. "Grazia" or God's grace is the good, guiding force that will bring them to Rinaldo, while "superbir" or pride is the devilish enticement from which they must abstain. Carlo and Ubaldo's journey is then also a spiritual, Christian journey, straightening Rinaldo's path and ultimately steering him away from the influences of romance.

While Ariosto and Tasso follow classical examples of heroic friendship, especially those based in missions, they also rewrite them to fit better with their poems: Ariosto personalizes Cloridano and Medoro's relationship through Cloridano's perspective and Tasso uses Christian rhetoric to spiritualize the bond between Carlo and Ubaldo. The one characteristic that Ariosto and Tasso's representations of friendship have in common, which does not stem from classical examples, is the addition of romance into episodes of *amicizia*. In Ariosto, an episode of friendship

leads to an episode of romance. Moreover, it is the love interest, Angelica, who helps Medoro fulfill his act of duty to both his leader and his friend. In Tasso, friendship rescues one from romance, and additionally, moves the poem's plot away from the romance interlude of Armida's garden. The addition of a love story to heroic friendship will become ever more pertinent in the following discussion of female friendship in Renaissance heroic poems. As we will see, *amicizia femminile* becomes intertwined with heterosexual romance narratives and in the case of Sarrocchi, female friendship also undergoes a religious conversion, Christianizing the female bond à la Tasso.

iii. Classical and Renaissance Depictions of Female Heroic Friendship

While the vast majority of friendships represented in classical epics occur solely between male characters, Italian Renaissance heroic poems revise the tradition by featuring female friendships much more frequently. There is only one example of a female friendship in a classical epic, that between Virgil's Camilla and Acca; meanwhile in Renaissance poems, we find close rapports among Ariosto's Bradamante and Melissa, Tasso's Clorinda and Erminia, and most importantly, Sarrocchi's Silveria and Rosmonda.[97] Even Lucrezia Marinella's heroic poem, *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato*, published twelve years after the *Scanderbeide,* includes a female comradeship between two women warriors, Meandra and Emilia.[98] Though some of the female heroic bonds are not detailed at length, making it somewhat difficult to plumb their depths, they are not peripheral to the plot. While the previous two sections investigated how to define friendship through an examination of male bonds in classical and Renaissance heroic poetry, this section aims to include and incorporate its female

[97] M.C. Howatson writes that female friendship in antiquity is primarily found in women's lyric poetry; he does not even mention instances of it in classical epics: "female friendship is known, insofar as it is known at all, almost entirely from early lyric poetry (monody especially; see also Sappho) which attests emotional interdependence and intensity, reflecting the seclusion of women's lives." *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 256.

[98] Sarrocchi's representation of female friendship most likely inspired Marinella's portrayal. However, because Marinella wrote after Sarrocchi, her representation will not be discussed in this chapter.

counterparts that have been mostly overlooked. Because the ultimate focus of this chapter is Sarrocchi's representation of the close relationship that forms and develops between Silveria and Rosmonda, a cursory outline of other female bonds in this literary tradition is essential. This section identifies its general characteristics to determine whether there are any comparable aspects to male friendship. Most importantly, this discussion will conclude our survey linking heroic poetry to the theme of friendship to help us better comprehend from which authors Sarrocchi drew inspiration and why her contribution to the *topos* is so innovative.

Categorizing the types of female bonds in classical epic poems and Renaissance heroic poetry is possibly even harder to do than it is for their male equivalents. As examined in the earlier two sections, much of the male bonding in these poems occurs under the circumstances of a night raid or some other form of an important mission. The only example that does not correspond to this kind of characterization is that between Achilles and Patroclus. In contrast, there is only one example of a mission-based female friendship from Curzio Gonzaga's lesser-known poem, *Il fido amante* (1582),[99] while the other female friendships in Ariosto, Tasso, and Sarrocchi are similar because they all somehow link to larger heterosexual romance narratives and include a triangular relationship between two female friends and one male love interest.[100] Comparable to the ending of Medoro and Cloridano's episode, which paves the way for the love story between Medoro and Angelica, the friendships between Bradamante and Melissa, Clorinda and Erminia, and Silveria and Rosmonda, lead to heterosexual romance narratives for Bradamante, Clorinda, and Rosmonda.[100] Since most of the examples of female friendship link to stories of romance, one of the research questions of this

[99] Curzio Gonzaga's depiction of female friendship primarily follows the events found in the Nisus-Euryalus and Cloridano-Medoro episodes. For an in-depth discussion of how Gonzaga revises his predecessors to include an example of an *amicizia eroica* between two women warriors see Cabani, *Gli amici amanti*, 55–68.

[100] And of course, Bradamante and Ruggiero's love story is a key epic element of the *Furioso* as it brings the poem to a close and establishes the Este dynasty.

section is to understand how the two are fundamentally connected. Indeed, the prevalence and intermingling of love narratives with those of female bonding seems to be a commonplace convention in Renaissance heroic poems. This leads us to speculate why this relation between friendship and romance was not as frequent for most male friendships. Even though Virgil's Camilla and Acca is the one example that does not fit into either category of mission-based friendship or friendship that leads to romance, it is a good place to begin our discussion. Not only is it the first example of a friendship that occurs between two women warriors in a heroic poem, but also the character of Camilla serves as a prototype for the figure of the Renaissance *guerriera*—the character type who figures prominently as a participant in female friendship.

Throughout the *Aeneid*, Virgil uses *amicus* (the male Latin noun form of friend) a total of twelve times and not once does he employ its female declension *amica*, revealing the dominance of language depicting male friendship found in his epic poem.[101] However, Virgil does suggest an amicable relationship between two women in Book 11, and though he does not use *amica* or *amicae* to describe the women and their relationship to each other, he does employ a language of sameness and duty, two important criteria of Roman understandings of friendship. Virgil's female friendship occurs between Camilla, the poem's illustrious virgin warrior queen, and her trustworthy companion, Acca. Acca is not the only female character to whom Camilla is connected; in fact, Camilla belongs to a larger female network that gives her never-ending support. While Acca plays a very minor role in the *Aeneid*, Camilla is one of the poem's chief female characters whose traits, appearance, and role became precedents for the characterizations of the women warriors in Renaissance heroic poetry. In fact, Bradamante, Clorinda, and Rosmonda are all modeled after Camilla in some way or another, and like Camilla, they too participate in friendships with other women, establishing a link between

[101] David Meban, "The Nisus and Euryalus Episode and Roman Friendship," *Phoenix* 63, no. 3/4 (2009): 241.

women warriors and women's friendship.

Camilla is a fierce virgin Volscian warrior queen who instead of dedicating her time to domestic arts, devotes her energy to the battlefield. Readers first meet Camilla at the very end of Book 7, with a lengthy introduction given by Virgil's narrator:

> To crown the array comes Camilla, of Volscian race, leading her troop of horse, and squadrons gay with brass—a warrior maid, never having trained her woman's hands to Minerva's distaff or basket of wool, but hardy to bear the brunt of battle and in speed of foot to outstrip the winds. She might have flown over the topmost blades of unmown corn, and not bruised the tender ears in her course; or sped her way over mid sea, poised above the swelling wave, and not dipped her swift feet in the flood. All the youth, streaming from house and field, and thronging matrons marvel, and gaze at her as she goes; agape with wonder at how the glory of royal purple drapes her smooth shoulders, how the clasp entwines her hair with gold, how her own hands bear a Lycian quiver and the pastoral myrtle tipped with steel.[102]

Virgil creates a striking portrait of Camilla in these lines that "introduces the element of wonder, of fantasy, of hope rather than reality."[103] He highlights her physical capabilities (she can sprint faster than the wind and is so light-footed that she can run on water or over ears of corn without disturbing them) and her regal appearance (he describes her elegant purple robes that are adorned in gold), contrasting her warrior like traits with her royal roots to emphasize her exceptionality. There is another set of conflicting images at play in this first characterization of Camilla, presenting her as an androgynous figure, a trait that is repeated in Renaissance portrayals of women warriors. As Valeria Viparelli aptly notes, Virgil contrasts her feminine and masculine attributes to underline the different roles she plays: "her femininity is underlined by her *leuis* (smooth) shoulders that carry the

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[102] Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7–12. Appendix Vergiliana.*, II:59. Hos super advenit Volsca de gente Camilla / agmen agens equitum et florentis aere catervas, / bellatrix, non illa colo calathisve Minervae / femineas adsueta manus, sed proelia virgo / dura pati cursuque pedum praevertere ventos. / illa vel intactae segetis per summa volaret / gramina nec teneras cursu laesisset aristas, / vel mare per medium fluctu suspensa tumenti / ferret iter celeris nec tingeret aequore plantas. / illam omnis tectis agrisque effuse inventus / turbaque miratur matrum et prospectat euntem, / attonitis inhians animis ut regius ostro / velet honos levis umeros, ut fibula crinem / auro internectat, Lyciam ut gerat ipsa pharetram / et pastoralem praefixa cuspide myrtum" (Virgil, 11.803–17).

[103] W.P. Basson, "Vergil's Camilla: A Paradoxical Character," *Acta Classica* 29 (1986): 58.

royal mantle (7.815); her hands are *femineae* (feminine), even though they hold weapons, not spindle and distaff (7.806); and her feet are *celeres* (swift), prodigiously rapid, like those of the mythic Atalanta."[104] The portrayal of Camilla as a hybrid figure, one whose physicality oscillates between feminine and masculine qualities, as noted above, emphasizes the uniqueness of her role as a woman warrior who inspires awe and wonder in those around her. What is interesting about Camilla is that she appears especially striking to married women, evident in the image Virgil paints of matrons running out of their houses to admire the young warrior queen ("as Camilla passes, all the young pour out from field and house; the matrons crowd and marvel, staring, in astonishment"). Similarly, in Book 11, Virgil notes that Camilla refused offers of marriage despite the fact that many mothers wanted her as their daughter-in-law (11.581–82), underscoring Camilla's rejection of marriage and motherhood, her loyalty to Diana, and her appeal to women. In describing Camilla in relation to married women, Virgil creates a dichotomy between the two, showing that they represent two very different kinds of femininity that are incompatible with one another— the virgin warrior on the one hand and the wife/mother on the other. This clear demarcation of woman warrior and wife/mother disappears with Ariosto's Bradamante, whose role as female knight merges with her responsibility in being the progenitrix and founder of the Este dynasty, which clearly requires a marriage.

As a follower of Diana, the virgin archery goddess, Camilla belongs to a group of virgin maidens who are united in their devotion to the huntress and to chastity. It is therefore not surprising that out of all the women in the *Aeneid*, it would be Camilla to have a female friend as she is often portrayed in relation to other women, whether it be to a group of virgin huntresses, a group of women fighters, or Diana herself.[105] The first relationship described between Camilla and another

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[104] Valeria Viparelli, "Camilla: A Queen Defeated, Even in Death," *Vergilius (1959-)* 54 (2008): 12.

[105] Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 73.

female character is that between her and Diana, which is revealed in the beginning of Book 11 during a conversation between Diana herself, and Opis, one of Diana's companions who like Camilla is also a virgin woman.[106] Virgil uses the dialogue between Diana and Opis to describe Camilla's upbringing and Diana's *amor* for Camilla. In doing so, he portrays another female-female relationship between Opis and Diana, further highlighting the interconnectedness of Diana's female network to which Camilla belongs. Moreover, Diana and Opis' dialogue, a conversation between two women, helps create a clearer picture of Camilla's background and character. The story Diana tells to Opis about Camilla's life "not only considerably enhances Camilla's splendour, beauty and charm but also introduces the reader to the pastoral environment of her childhood, a world of wonder and fantasy."[107] In a flashback narrative, Diana narrates Camilla's harsh childhood, the fact that Camilla was raised on the milk of a wild mare, and how the culmination of these events led to Diana's becoming Camilla's protector and to Camilla's becoming Diana's follower.

More than a friend, Diana is Camilla's protector, as she is to the other women who remain loyal to her and to their virginity. In her speech to Opis, Diana also uses fond words to describe her relationship with Camilla: "Camilla is marching to the cruel war, O maiden, and vainly girds on our arms, Camilla, whom I love as none besides. For no new love is this that has come upon Diana nor sudden the spell wherewith it had stirred her heart" (273).[108] The affectionate language Diana uses to depict her relationship with Camilla is very explicit, and is more evident in her Latin use of "cara mihi" and "amor," portraying the intimacy between the two women. Even later in her speech, Diana

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[106] "Meanwhile in heaven's halls Latona's daughter addressed swift Opis, one of her maiden sisterhood and sacred band, and opened her libs to these words of sorrow" (273). "Velocem interea suppers in serious Opim, / unambiguous ex virginibus sociis sacraque caterva, / compellabat et has trusts Latonia voces ora dabat" (Virgil, 11.532–34).

[107] Basson, "Vergil's Camilla: A Paradoxical Character," 59.

[108] "[G]raditur vellum ad crudely Camilla, /o virgo, et nostrils nequiquam cingitur arms, / cara mihi ante alias. neque denim nous site Dianae / venit amor subitaque animus dulcedine movie" (Virgil, 11.535–38).

repeats her love for the young maiden: "I would that she had not been swept away in warfare such as this, nor tried to challenge the Teucrians: she would still be my darling and one of my companions" (277).[109] In these lines, Diana repeats "cara mihi," but she also places Camilla in her group of women followers, "una mearum," again reinforcing the community of women that accompanies Diana. As Lee Fratantuono notes, "because Camilla has remained faithful to her virginity, she is still under Diana's protection; she may have left the forest world of Diana's followers, but she is still dear to her patroness."[110] This is most evident at the end of Diana's speech when she tells Opis that because she foresees Camilla's death in combat, it is Opis's duty to avenge Camilla's death: "take these, and draw from the quiver an avenging shaft: with it may anyone, Trojan or Italian, who violates her sacred body with a wound pay me an equal penalty in his blood" (277).[111] Diana is "a goddess who loves a mortal and knows her tragic fate but can do nothing to prevent it."[112] Therefore by avenging her death and agreeing to give Camilla proper burial, Diana wants to ensure that Camilla's soul and body are redeemed. In these small acts, Diana demonstrates the unwavering loyalty and love she has for Camilla. Even though Diana and Camilla's relationship has a significant power differential, the intimacy they share stands as an important precursor to the friendship that is then portrayed between Camilla and Acca.

Camilla and Acca's friendship is described in a fleeting moment during the last instants of Camilla's life and though its characterization is brief, it is significant because it alludes to classical understandings of sameness in a female friendship and further highlights the affectionate language

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[109] "[V]ellum haud correpta fuisset / militia talk conata laces sere Teucros: / cara mihi comitumque foret nunc una mearum" (Virgil, 9.584–86).

[110] Lee Fratantuono, *Madness Unchained: A Reading of Virgil's "Aeneid"* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 339.

[111] "[H]aec cape et ultricem pharetra deprome sagittam: / hac quicumque sacrum violarit vulnere corpus, / Tros Italusque, mihi partier det sanguine poenas" (Virgil, 9.590–92).

[112] Suzanne Adema, *Speech and Thought in Latin War Narratives: Words of Warriors* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 287.

used to portray such a bond. In Book 11, Camilla joins Turnus and his military campaign against the Trojans. However, by the end of the book, she is defeated and dies tragically at the hands of Arruns, a Trojan ally. As Camilla is dying, she turns to Acca and speaks her last words. Acca is not mentioned specifically by name before Camilla's utterance, but she is part of Camilla's group of women who fight alongside her. While Acca is not part of the *Italides*, the three Italian women Virgil names as Camilla's right-hand women, she is the one Camilla *herself* calls out, signaling her as one of Camilla's most trusted confidantes.[113] Before Camilla addresses her friend, the narrator takes a brief moment to depict Acca in just one line: "one of her [Camilla's] age-mates, true to Camilla beyond all the others, sole sharer of her cares" (293).[114] Virgil's narrator describes Acca in relation to Camilla; he portrays her as *Camilla's* oldest friend, as the one who is most loyal to *Camilla.* More importantly, the line, "sole sharer of her cares," evokes Aristotle's and Cicero's theory of perfect friendship or *amicitia perfecta.* According to the two philosophers, perfect friendship is the most virtuous type of friendship and occurs because the two friends are so similar, meaning that they share all their ideas, feelings, and even fears with one another. Craig Williams notes that similarity was "a recurring motif in the idealizing of Roman friendship."[115] Though theories of ideal Roman friendship were exclusive to men, we find a gender reversal in Virgil that alludes to the possibility of women warriors obtaining this same kind of perfect friendship.

It is no wonder, then, why Camilla chooses to call out to Acca in her last moments: "[s]o far,

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[113] In the text, Camilla is accompanied by three Italian women like her whom Virgil explicitly names and describes as Amazonlike: "and round her are her chosen comrades, the maiden Larina, and Tulla, and Tarpeia, wielding an axe of bronze, daughters of Italy, whom godlike Camilla herself chose to be with her glory, good handmaids in both peace and war" (281). "[A]t circum lectae comites / Larinaque virgo / Tullaque et aeratam quatiens Tarpeia securim, / Italides, quas ipsa decus sibi dia Camilla / delegit pacisque bonas bellique minstras" (Virgil, 11.655–60).

[114] "[T]um sic exspirans Accam ex aequalibus unam / adloquitur, fida ante alias quae sola Camillae /quicum partiri curas, atque haec ita fatur" (Virgil, 11.820–22).

[115] Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 23.

sister Acca, has my strength availed; now the bitter wound overpowers me, and all around grows dim and dark. Hurry away, and bring to Turnus my latest orders: to take my place in the battle, and ward off the Trojans from the town. And now farewell!" (293).[116] Just as Diana instructs Opis to avenge Camilla's death, Camilla asks Acca to find Turnus to bring him the news of the Volscian defeat, highlighting the sense of trust existent in their bond. As many commentators have noted, Camilla's use of the word "sister" (*soror*) recalls and draws a parallel to Dido's address to her sister Anna in the beginning of Book 4, the same book in which Dido tragically kills herself.[117] Their names, Acca and Anna, also share a remarkable resemblance. While J.D. Reed aptly notes that the Acca-Camilla episode "helps gather and direct our sympathies in the same way that Anna's does at the death of Dido."[118] The scene also demonstrates the intimate word choice used to portray a female bond. In fact, in the literary Latin tradition, women's relationships to one another were either expressed through terms like *amica* or *amicitiae,* through synonyms like *familiaris, amor*, *necessaria*, and *soror*, or in narrative descriptions of women embracing and kissing one another.[119] Thus, Camilla's use of *soror* has literary and historical precedence, equating Camilla and Acca's friendship to a relationship between kin.

Bradamante is similar to Camilla in that she too is depicted in relation to a number of different female characters of the poem: she protects various women in need, becomes friends with

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[116] "[H]actenus, Acca soror, potui: nunc vulnus acerbum / conficit, et tenebris nigrescunt omnia circum. / effuge et haec Turno mandata novissima prefer: / succedat pugnae Troianosque arceat urbe./ iamque vale" (Virgil, 11.820–27).

[117] J. D. Reed, *Virgil's Gaze: Nation and Poetry in the "Aeneid"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 83; Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 74.

[118] Reed, *Virgil's Gaze*, 84.

[119] Williams provides examples of women writing letters to one another and utilizing the term *soror*. He also discusses friendship between women as seen in their inscriptions with the term *amicae* featuring prominently on epithets. Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 70–74.

Marfisa (her eventual sister-in-law) and forms a close bond with her fairy-godmother like figure, Melissa. Bradamante and Melissa's relationship can be characterized as a mentorship with hints of friendship qualities sprinkled in. Like Diana and Camilla, there is a clear power differential between the two: Melissa is a *maga* or sorceress while Bradamante is a valiant *guerriera*. Melissa, as the pupil of the ancient magician Merlino, functions to impart wisdom to Bradamante and guide her towards a dynastic destiny that features a marriage to Ruggiero and makes her the progenitrix of the Este family, the family line of Ariosto's patron, Ippolito d'Este. Without Melissa, Bradamante would not be able to fulfill her role as wife and mother, one that she desires, but that is also expected of her and requires that she give up her arms. Many have viewed Bradamante's surrendering of her *guerriera* status to become Ruggiero's wife and founder of the Estes as an exhibition of the strong patriarchal hold on Ariosto's poem; Margaret Tomalin notes, "the nearer she [Bradamante] gets to achieving her aim, the closer she becomes to losing her independence entirely."[120] Even Pio Rajna, one of the first to trace the important prehistory of the *Furioso* in the early twentieth century, criticized Bradamante's final domestication: "mi piace poco […] quando verso la fine del poema me la vedo diventare una buona figliuola qualunque, che non ha il coraggio di disubbidire alla mamma."[121] If we read Bradamante in this way, then Melissa inherently works to ensure Bradamante's loss of

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[120] Margaret Tomalin, "Bradamante and Marfisa: An Analysis of the 'Guerriere' of the *Orlando Furioso*," *The Modern Language Review* 71, no. 3 (July 1976): 540. Additionally, J Chimène Bateman writes, "contemporary feminist critics have also greeted Bradamante's transformation into epic matriarch with discomfort, albeit for contrasting reasons: it is the criteria for feminist heroine, rather than the criteria for epic heroine, that she is seen as failing to meet." "Amazonian Knots: Gender, Genre and Ariosto's Women Warriors," *MLN* 122, no. 1 (January 2007): 7. For more on the debate of Bradamante's domestication see Judith Bryce, "Gender and Myth in the *Orlando Furioso*," *Italian Studies* 42 (1997): 41–50; Wiley Feinstein, "Bradamante in Love: Some Postfeminist Considerations on Ariosto," *Forum Italicum* 22 (48–59): 1988; Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 227–53; Maggie Günsberg, "*Donna Liberata?* The Portrayal of Women in the Italian Renaissance Epic," in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Shirley W. Vinall (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 173–208.

[121] Pio Rajna, *Le fonti dell'"Orlando furioso": ricerche e studii* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1900), 54.

independence and enclosure in a society that relegated women's proper role to the domestic sphere. However, Bradamante's transformation is much more complicated than that, making Melissa's role equally so. As Deanna Shemek argues, while Bradamante does indeed marry, leaving her call to arms behind her, she also becomes the matriarch of the Estense family lineage, a feat that "allows her to negotiate a leap from the sealed world of romance into the open space of 'history.'"[122] More than that, in becoming the matriarch of the Estes, one of the families responsible for the burgeoning of art and culture in Renaissance Italy, Bradamante assumes one of the more powerful positions a woman in sixteenth-century Italy could attain. Understanding Bradamante through this lens permits us to see how Melissa's guidance plays a paramount role in the poem; the "benigna maga" is there to aid and guide Bradamante successfully to complete her dynastic destiny and enter into the realms of history. More than that, Melissa is also present to provide support to Bradamante when she is needed, adding a dynamic of friendship to their mentor-mentee bond.

Melissa and Bradamante's relationship chiefly functions as a mentorship, one in which Melissa, as a *maga*, guides and instructs Bradamante, her mentee, while *amicizia* comes second. Most of the language used to describe Melissa and Bradamante's relationship can be characterized as instructive. Paying particular attention to Melissa's role in Ruggiero's education, Albert Ascoli writes "with the help of Melissa, the series of moral and intellectual failures begins to be reversed and a series of seemingly productive educational moments is initiated."[123] Ascoli also notes that the verbs *mostrare* and *insegnare* appear frequently in Ariosto's description of Ruggiero's education given by Melissa and Logistilla. However, this instructive language appears first in the relationship between

[122] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 91.

[123] Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 138.

Melissa and Bradamante, especially in Merlin's Cave, the place in which Melissa and Bradamante first meet and Melissa reveals Bradamante's future Estensi descendants:

> "Io tanto ti sarò compagna e duce,
> che tu sia fuor de l'aspra selva ria:
> t'insegnerò, poi che saren sul mare,
> sí ben la via, che non potresti errare." (3.63.5–8)
>
> …ch'a Bradamante vien la dotta maga
> mostrando con che astuzia e con qual arte
> proceder de', se di Ruggiero è vaga. (3.66.2–4)
>
> "Ma perché il tuo Ruggiero a te sol abbia,
> e non al re Agramante, ad obligarsi
> che tratto sia de l'incantata gabbia
> t'insegnerò il remedio che de' usarsi." (3.71.1–4)

Melissa is aware of her role as Bradamante's guide or "duce" and the description of her as a "dotta maga," qualifies her for the position—she is learned and therefore has knowledge to give to Bradamante. As evident in the passages above, Melissa routinely utilizes language of instruction ("t'insegnerò") and her actions themselves are instructive ("la dotta maga *mostrando* con che astuzia"). Melissa's language is also reminiscent of Virgil's in the *Commedia* when he meets the pilgrim for the first time in canto 1. He too tells Dante that he will guide him through the labyrinth that is the Inferno: "ond'io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno / che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida, / e trarrotti di qui per loco etterno."[124] Though the scope of Bradamante and Dante's journeys varies significantly, the role that guidance and instruction plays is the same. The help of the mentor is an essential part of the process to bring one closer to their goal.

The importance of Melissa's role in the *Furioso* and her relationship to Bradamante, the poem's heroine, have primarily and appositely been outlined by Eleonora Stoppino in *Genealogies of Fiction*. In the fourth chapter, Stoppino argues that Melissa and Bradamante's relationship is founded

[124] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Robert M. Durling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.112–114.

through the exchanging of gifts which are coded female: Melissa, a woman, is the gift giver and Bradamante, also a woman, is the receiver. The giving and receiving function of their relationship is most evident when Melissa shares prophetic revelations about her progeny with Bradamante in Merlin's Cave in canto 3. This is one of Ariosto's major revisions. In previous heroic poems, genealogical prophecies are given to men by men (i.e. Book 6 of the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas journeys to the Underworld to learn of his male descendants from the ghost of his father, Anchises), but as Stoppino argues "by gendering the gift of prophecy and its caption as female, the poem reflects on the logic of the gift as an alternative to the logic of commerce, coded as male."[125] Interestingly, the language of exchange that Stoppino characterizes between the two women also recalls a taxonomy of friendship theorized by classical and Renaissance writers: sharing, giving, and reciprocal exchanging were signs of a healthy friendship.

The first time Melissa explains to Bradamante the purpose she (Melissa) will play in the *guerriera*'s life, she states "io tanto ti sarò compagna e duce." In fact, Melissa is not helping Bradamante out of self-interest; Melissa continually keeps in mind what is best for Bradamante. The same cannot be said for Ruggiero's wizard guardian, Atlante, who attempts to keep Ruggiero selfishly to himself by putting him in situations that work to evade his eventual conversion and marriage to Bradamante. As Donato Internoscia writes "Ariosto depicts Melissa as very helpful, sympathetic, [and] tender […] [Melissa] tries never to sadden [Bradamante], she suggests ways for her to reach her beloved, and even accompanies her through deep forests, to insure her safety."[126] Melissa is continually thinking about Bradamante and is often the one to console her:

Ma quella maga che sempre vicino

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[125] Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the "Orlando Furioso"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 117.

[126] Donato Internoscia, "Are There Two Melissas, Both Enchantresses, in the *Furioso*?," *Italica* 25, no. 3 (September 1948): 218–19.

tenuto a Bradamante avea il pensiero
quella, dico io, che nella bella grotta
l'avea de la sua stirpe instrutta e dotta; (7.38.5–8)

Quella benigna e saggia incantatrice,
la quale ha sempre cura di costei,
sappiendo ch'esser de' progenitrice
d'uomini invitti, anzi di semidei […] (7.39.1–4)

Ma quella usata ne le cose avverse
di non mancarle di soccorsi fidi,
dico Melissa maga, non sofferse
udirne il pianto e i dolorosi gridi
e venne a consolarla, e le proferse,
quando ne fosse il tempo, alti sussidi. (38.73.1–6)

Through this sampling of passages, we understand that Bradamante is evidently at the forefront of Melissa's worries. Melissa is not a bystander during the moments in which Bradamante needs a friend the most—she is there faithfully by Bradamante's side to console her and listen to her painful cries. Ariosto grounds Melissa's protection of Bradamante in relation to Bradamante's dynastic duty of becoming the "progenitrice d'uomini invitti, anzi i semidei." On the surface, this line exhibits Melissa's ulterior motive in helping Bradamante, grounding it in the historical purpose she will play in becoming the "progentitrice" of an important family. However, in this instant Ariosto is using Melissa as a mouthpiece to praise his patron, Ippolito, as Internoscia has previously observed.[127]

If Ariosto wanted, he could have clearly defined Melissa's role as Bradamante's guide and not also as her friend. Presumably, if she solely acted as Bradamante's mentor, Bradamante's progress towards her ultimate goal may have been harder to achieve; through the emotional support Bradamante receives from Melissa as her friend, the young woman warrior can more easily strive towards her main objective of marrying Ruggiero and establishing the Este dynasty. In fact, Virgil and Dante's relationship shows how Virgil's affection towards the pilgrim ultimately helps, not

[127] Internoscia, 219.

hinders, the pilgrim along his way. In a similar manner, Melissa is ensuring that Bradamante is on the right path so she cannot *errare*. Nevertheless, Ariosto does demonstrate that mentorship can be taken too far, as exemplified by Atlante's relationship with Ruggiero. Though he is more of a paternal figure, Atlante still qualifies as a mentor to Ruggiero. He cares too much for Ruggiero to a fault: he rejects his role as mentor and fiercely attaches himself to Ruggiero, doing all he can to selfishly keep him for himself and consequently putting Ruggiero in harm's way. The result is a Ruggiero *errante* who continuously needs saving and instruction. Melissa on the other hand, presents the perfect balance: she knows that being a good mentor involves being a good friend as well, which allows Bradamante to successfully move forward towards her dynastic destiny.

There is another relationship that figures more prominently as a friendship in the *Furioso* and that is the one Bradamante undertakes with Marfisa, her eventual sister-in-law. Many scholars have compared the two figures because they are the two female *guerriere* of the poem who starkly contrast one another. As Tomalin and Bateman argue, while Bradamante is more representative of a romance figure, Marfisa can be more closely characterized as an epic character.[128] The reason for this clear distinction is evident in the roles they enact in the *Furioso*: Bradamante (whose name includes the word "amante") is the example of an aristocratic woman who is to marry by the end of the poem while Marfisa (whose name is reminiscent of Mars, the god of war) stays true to her arms from beginning to end and displays no interest in love. Yet, the two eventually become friends. Their divergent paths—Bradamante's eventual role as married woman and Marfisa's as chaste Christian virgin (Marfisa undergoes a conversion near the end of the poem)—are akin to those Sarrocchi's two female friends follow.

[128] Even though it is Bradamante, as Shemek contends, that brings the *Furioso* towards its epic end. Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 77.

The character of Marfisa is extremely pertinent to our discussion because she is simultaneously a recreation of Virgil's Camilla and a predecessor of Sarrocchi's Silveria. Like Camilla and Silveria, Marfisa is one of the few characters in the poem who is not given a love story; she instead remains "relentlessly chaste" throughout the *Furioso*.[129] For Ita Mac Carthy, Marfisa uses her chastity not to improve her value in the marriage market like most Renaissance women, but instead to "remove herself from that patriarchal exchange of women from father to husband."[130] Indeed, Marfisa wards off advances from male characters, evident in Atlante's narration of her youth in which he reveals that she killed an Arab king who attempted to rape her, a narrative Sarrocchi also includes for Silveria. Additionally, Ariosto's narrator describes Marfisa as "la vergine Marfisa" (18.159.1) who on her helmet has an illustration of a phoenix to indicate "o pur sua casta intenzïon lodando di viver sempremai senza consorte" (36.18.3–4). The protection Marfisa has over her chastity, her disinterest in men, and her lack of a love story in the poem, closely aligns her with Virgil's Camilla, establishing Camilla as Marfisa's direct predecessor, a connection that both Mac Carthy and Thomas P. Roche have recognized.[131] These same characterizations also apply to Silveria: Silveria is not given a romance plot either and she too, proudly claims her virginity any chance she can get, thus creating a genealogy between the three women warriors. Indeed, there are other traits all three *guerriere*, Camilla, Marfisa, and Silveria, have in common: they were all raised suckling the milk of wild animals and they all inhabit spaces outside of the domestic sphere—they are free to roam.

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[129] Bateman, "Amazonian Knots: Gender, Genre and Ariosto's Women Warriors," 10.

[130] Ita Mac Carthy, "Marfisa and Gender Performance in the *Orlando Furioso*," *Italian Studies* 60, no. 2 (2005): 183.

[131] Roche understands Marfisa as a continuation and redemption of Camilla's character. In his words, "Virgil has no place for Camilla victorious, and so she is killed, but Ariosto, who chose an armed woman to be the dynastic heroine of his epic has a different answer to the problem because Marfisa has a place in his epic world." "Ariosto's Marfisa: Or, Camilla Domesticated," *MLN* 103, no. 1 (1988): 131.

While Camilla's female friendships start and end on good terms, Bradamante and Marfisa's relationship does not initially begin amicably. As a matter of fact, Bradamante and Marfisa start off as rivals, when Bradamante mistakenly believes rumors that Marfisa and Ruggiero are lovers and challenges her to a duel:

> o per dir meglio, esser colei che crede
> che goda del suo amor, colei che tanto
> ha in odio e in ira, che morir si vede,
> se sopra lei non vendica il suo pianto.
> Volta il cavallo, e con gran furia riede,
> non per desir di porla in terra, quanto
> di passarle con l'asta in mezzo il petto,
> e liberar restar d'ogni suspetto. (36.19)

> Forza è a Marfisa ch'a quel colpo vada
> a provar se 'l terreno è duro o molle;
> e cosa tanto insolita la accada,
> ch'ella n'è per venir di sdegno folle.
> Fu in terra a pena, che trasse la spada,
> e vendicar di quel cader si volle. (20.1–6)

As is evident from these *ottave*, Bradamante's anger is fueled by her jealousy of Marfisa. Bradamante attacks Marfisa in this canto not just once, but twice, to which Marfisa response with equal rage, showing how violence only spurs on more violence. The two become friends only after a voice from Atlante's grave reveals Marfisa and Ruggiero to be twins, no longer making Marfisa "a threat to Bradamante as she is no longer a threat the dynastic couple's union."[132] Again it's interesting to note that it is Atlante, a male character, who is called to bring about peace between the two women. In his revelation, Atlante also discloses the truth about Marfisa and Ruggiero's upbringing, namely the fact that they were born to Christian parents, which positively changes the nature of Bradamante and Marfisa's relationship. When Marfisa decides she wants to convert to Christianity and join Charlemagne's knights, Bradamante reacts with joy: "Oh come a quel parlar leva la faccia / la bella

[132] Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 78.

Bradamante, e ne gioisce! / E comforta Ruggier che cosí faccia / come Marfisa sua ben l'ammonisce" (36.79.1–4). Because Bradamante is one of Charlemagne's knights, she takes pride in the fact that Marfisa wants to join their side; in fact, it is Bradamante who takes Marfisa to Charlemagne himself and witnesses her conversion. Bradamante also recognizes that Marfisa's conversion brings Ruggiero's a step closer, thus making Marfisa an ally in her pursuit of a dynastic end with Ruggiero.

In discussing the attributes of their friendship, Bateman argues that Ariosto made a bold choice in "transform[ing] the theme of epic companionship, or male/male bonding into a relation between the dynastic hero [Bradamante] and a woman warrior [Marfisa]."[133] While Bateman's statement is true, unlike male heroic friendship which does not form due to the intervention of a female character, Bradamante and Marfisa's bond is demarcated by their connection to Ruggiero. Their friendship therefore does not exist freely or outside the constraints of a male presence. Marfisa and Bradamante do not become friends of their own accord; it is because of their shared interest in and connection to Ruggiero that the two women develop a closer union. Moreover, they develop a friendship because they will become family, a fact Ariosto's narrator affirms: "Bradamante e Marfisa, che contratta / col parentado avean grande amistanza" (38.7.3–4). Whereas Camilla and Acca's friendship recalls a familial bond (Camilla's use of the word "soror"), Bradamante and Marfisa's relationship actually classifies as one by the end of the poem. Both Melissa and Marfisa help Bradamante towards her dynastic end, showing the positive effects of women's bonds. Nevertheless, it is hard to overlook the centrality a male presence has in both relationships. Without Ruggiero and/or the need for Bradamante to marry him, these female friendships might not take place. In fact, Bradamante and Melissa's connection forms *after* Melissa reveals her future to Ruggiero.

[133] Bateman, "Amazonian Knots: Gender, Genre and Ariosto's Women Warriors," 10.

Similarly, Marfisa and Bradamante become friends only when Marfisa no longer presents a threat and Ruggiero begs the two to work together. Tasso portrayal of female friendship follows suit. Tasso too places a male character in the middle of Clorinda and Erminia's friendship, however instead of the male presence being the reason the friendship is formed, it is the reason the friendship becomes unstable, causing one to prioritize her love for a man over her friendship with a woman.

The brief passages that describe the friendship between Clorinda and Erminia are seldom commented on. There are only two *ottave* that explicitly portray the women's bond, giving the impression that female friendship is not one of the central themes of the *Liberata*. Nonetheless, its presence, though fleeting, in a heroic poem on which Sarrocchi modelled her own raises the question of whether there are direct correlations between Tasso's and Sarrocchi's depictions of *amicizia femminile*. Erminia and Clorinda's friendship is embedded in a larger love triangle, a structure we previously saw in Ariosto, and one we find in Sarrocchi. Thus, love-friendship triangle evident in the relationship between Bradamante, Marfisa, and Ruggiero is replicated in Tasso between Clorinda, Erminia, and Tancredi. However, the love-friendship triangle is messier and more complicated in Tasso than in Ariosto: Erminia and Clorinda are childhood friends, Erminia is in love with Tancredi, Tancredi is in love with Clorinda, and Clorinda falls in love with Tancredi only in the last moments of her life. Moreover, as pagan women, Erminia and Clorinda are initially on the wrong side of history (for Tasso), while Tancredi is one of the heroes of the Crusade. Clorinda does undergo a baptism and a complete conversion, but Erminia's conversion story in contrast is left ambiguous, leading scholars like Jane Tylus to believe that Erminia fails to convert.[134] In Kirsten Murtaugh's view, the Erminia-Tancredi-Clorinda triangle "is one of Tasso's most interesting resolutions of the conflict between epic and romance, between the abstract Aristotelian canons of

[134] Jane Tylus, "Imagining Narrative in Tasso: Revisiting Erminia," *MLN* 127, no. 1 (January 2012): 54–55.

unity of action and the proven success of variety in such predecessors as Boiardo and Ariosto."[135] Murtaugh's view on their triangular relationship is informed by her belief that Tasso develops the figure of Erminia to demonstrate how he selectively and consciously harmonizes romance within the epic telos of his poem. However, like Migiel who problematizes Erminia's character much more, seeing her excessive desire for Tancredi as one of her ultimate faults, I find that their triangular dynamic demonstrates the failings of friendship and the consequences of unrequited love. In contrast to the Bradamante-Marfisa-Ruggiero triangle that works to bring Ruggiero and Bradamante to their dynastic end, friendship and love in the Erminia-Tancredi-Clorinda relationship do not work harmoniously together. They instead facilitate one of the tragic climaxes of the poem, Clorinda's death, and leave Erminia and Tancredi alone.

As Lillian Robinson has noted and Migiel has affirmed, Clorinda and Erminia starkly oppose one another; like Marfisa and Bradamante, they represent two different kinds of femininity.[136] Like Camilla and Marfisa, Clorinda outright rejects the domestic role traditionally attributed to those of her same sex: "Costei gl'ingegni feminili e gli usi / tutti sprezzò sin da l'età più acerba: /a i lavori d'Aracne, a l'ago, a i fusi / inchinar non degnò la man superba."[137] She not only refutes, but completely despises any kind of work that would prevent her from following her true desire to be on the battlefield. Clorinda's pursuit of war, a traditionally masculine ambition, also neatly coincides with her appearance and sexuality, which are also not overtly feminized. Her armor conceals her sex (2.38.1–2) and she is a virgin who shows no interest in love or men. Erminia on the other hand, is a

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[135] Kristen Olson Murtaugh, "Erminia Delivered: Notes on Tasso and Romance," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 3 (1982): 13.

[136] It should be noted that while Marfisa and Clorinda have much in common, Bradamante and Erminia significantly differ from each other. Lillian S. Robinson, *Monstrous Regiment: The Lady Knight in Sixteenth-Century Epic* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 283.

[137] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 2.39.1–4.

character much more difficult to classify.[138] She is not a *guerriera*, but is both a *peregrina* and a healer, roles that oppose those of Clorinda.[139] Most importantly, while Erminia is also *vergine*, she is continually marked by her enduring, fervent love for Tancredi. Indeed, it is difficult for her to hide her feelings for the young Crusader, evident when Aladino, the Saracen king, points to Tancredi asking Erminia if she knows anything about him: "A quella, in vece di risposta, viene / su le labra un sospir, su gli occhi il pianto. / Pur gli spiriti e le lagrime ritiene, / ma non cosí che lor non mostri alquanto: / ché gli occhi pregni un bel purpureo giro/ tinse, e roco spuntò mezzo il sospiro" (3.18.3–8). The description of Erminia resembles that of a lovesick patient: her eyes quickly moisten at the thought of her beloved and she sighs out of either frustration or sadness for the fact that her love is unrequited. Erminia is a victim of love: her intense desire for Tancredi comes first as it drives her actions and movements in the poem.

Despite their differences in character, the two women are close to one another. Unlike Bradamante and Marfisa who become friends because of their amorous and familial relation to Ruggiero, Clorinda and Erminia's friendship predates either of their involvement with Tancredi, meaning they freely established their bond without the presence of a male character. Tasso's narrator quickly summarizes their story:

> Soleva Erminia in compagnia sovente
> de la guerriera far lunga dimora.
> Seco la vide il sol da l'occidente,
> seco la vide la novella aurora;
> e quando son del dì le luci spente,
> un sol letto le accolse ambe talora:
> e null'altro pensier che l'amoroso
> l'una vergine e l'altra avrebbe asceso.

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[138] Benedetti finds that Clorinda and Armida represent characters that adhere closer to literary models, while Erminia does not seem to have one specific prototype: "Armida, Clorinda, ed Erminia, dunque: la seduttrice, la guerriera e un personaggio più difficile da riportare ad un modello." "La sconfitta di Diana. Note per una rilettura della *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *MLN* 108, no. 1 (January 1993): 34.

[139] For Tasso's use on the word *peregrina*, see Tylus, "Imagining Narrative in Tasso: Revisiting Erminia," 46n5.

Questo sol tiene Erminia a lei secreto
e s'udita da lei talor si lagna.
Reca ad altra cagion del cor non lieto
gli affetti, e par che di sua sorte piagna.
Or in tanta amistà senza divieto
Venir sempre ne pote a la compagna
Né stanza al giunger suo giamai si serra,
siavi Clorinda, o sia in consiglio o 'n guerra. (6.79–80)

In these two *ottave,* Tasso describes Erminia as Clorinda's lifelong and childhood friend, similar to the short description Virgil gives of Acca as "one of her [Camilla's] age-mates." Though he implies their friendship runs deep ("in tanta amistà senza divieto"), there is something amiss between the two women. While they share physical closeness, meaning they give one another physical companionship, they do not share emotional intimacy—an element that is also missing in most of the male friendships.[140] On the one hand, Tasso uses romantic imagery of Clorinda and Erminia watching the sunrise and sunset ("Seco la vide il sol da l'occidente, / seco la vide la novella aurora") and sharing a bed ("un sol letto") to imply that the two women were always by each other's sides. On the other, there is an emotional disconnect between the two women, evident in the fact that Erminia does not fully disclose her thoughts or sentiments to Clorinda. More specifically, Erminia hides her deepest secret from Clorinda: her ardent love for Tancredi ("Questo sol tiene Erminia a lei secreto"). More than concealing, Erminia lies to Clorinda about the pain her passion is causing her ("Reca ad altra cagion del cor non lieto / gli affetti, e par che di sua sorte piagna"), perhaps revealing that Erminia does not sufficiently trust Clorinda to confide in her or she feels too guilty to admit it.

Along with secrecy, envy also characterizes Clorinda and Erminia's friendship, and its ugly manifestations put into question the sincerity of the two women's bonds. Erminia is envious of Clorinda. However, love is responsible for Erminia's envy, which prompts Erminia to make a

[140] As examined earlier, most of the male epic friendships center on action (the night raid), one's strong attachment for the other, or both.

decision that ultimately causes Clorinda's death—the stealing and wearing of Clorinda's armor: "Vennevi un giorno ch'ella in altra parte / si ritrovava, e si fermò pensosa, / pur tra sé rivolgendo i modi e l'arte/ de la bramata sua partenza ascosa. / Mentre in vari pensier divide e parte / l'incerto animo suo che non ha posa, / sospese di Clorinda in alto mira / l'arme e le sopraveste: allor sospira" (6.82). In this *ottava*, Tasso's third-person narrator describes Erminia, giving readers a bird's eye view of the *peregrina* when she first spots Clorinda's gear which spurs her idea to steal it (6.81). From this portrayal alone, we understand that Erminia is a conflicted woman ("in vari pensier divide" and "incerto animo") and sense that her next actions will be impetuous. To affirm her internal struggle, the narrative switches directly to Erminia's perspective. She begins a soliloquy an *ottava* later that reveals the detriments the love for Tancredi has caused her (6.82–88). While she recognizes the strong hold *Amor* has over her (she depicts love as a tyrant, "Amor tiranno" [6.87.2]), she also appears to be intoxicated with the agency it gives her ("Amor che le m'inspira" [6.88.6]). Love clouds Erminia's judgment while simultaneously moving her to action, making her envious of Clorinda and revealing her own self-loathing:

> "[…]O quanto
> beata è la fortissima donzella [Clorinda]!
> Quant'io la invidio! E non l'invidio il vanto
> o 'l feminil onor de l'esser bella.
> A lei non tarda i passi il lungo manto,
> né 'l suo valor rinchiude invida cella,
> ma veste l'armi, e se d'uscirne agogna,
> vassene e non la tien tema o vergogna.
>
> Ah perché forti a me natura e 'l cielo
> Altrettanto non fèr le membra e 'l petto,
> onde potessi anch'io la gonna e 'l velo
> cangiar ne la corazza e ne l'elmetto?
> Ché sì non riterrebbe arsura o gelo,
> non turbo o pioggia il mio infiammato affetto,
> ch'al sol non fossi ed al notturno lampo,
> accompagnata o sola, armata in campo.
>
> […] Ma lassa! i' bramo non possibil cosa,
> e tra folli pensier in van m'avolgo;

io mi starò qui timida e dogliosa
com'una pur del vil femineo volgo.
Ah! non starò: cor mio, confida ed osa.
Perch'una volta anch'io l'arme non tolgo?
Perché per breve spazio non potrolle
Sostener, benché sia debile e molle?" (6.82–83, 86)

As Erminia makes evident, she does not envy Clorinda for superficial reasons like "'l femminile onor de l'esser bella," but for the freedom of movement Clorinda is granted due to her life as a *guerriera*. She associates Clorinda's armor with autonomy whereas she links women's garb (that she herself wears) with imprisonment. Clorinda is also "free" in another sense; she, unlike Erminia, is not Love's prisoner—an image Erminia repeatedly evokes when describing her love for and relationship with Tancredi. Laura Benedetti writes that Erminia seeks to "rifutare se stessa" in her "desiderio […] di essere Clorinda."[141] Thus, in wearing Clorinda's armor, Erminia hopes to mimic Clorinda's perceived freedom and movement. Clorinda's armor allows Erminia to try on "[Clorinda's] personality and her freedom as well."[142]

Erminia's plan backfires as she is not prepared to take on Clorinda's role. In thinking she can sufficiently pass as Clorinda, Erminia "let[s] go of her sense of proportion and […] [gets] lost in adolescent fantasies."[143] Once Erminia exits the gates of Jerusalem, the reality that she cannot assume Clorinda's role makes itself clear: Erminia is ambushed by Poliferno, the son of the Christian warrior Clorinda previously killed, and she abandons her original plan, seeking refuge in the forest. Migiel notes that the consequences of Erminia's actions are "nearly disastrous" for her.[144] I would add that Erminia's decision is also *nearly disastrous* for Tancredi, her beloved, and *is* in fact disastrous

[141] Benedetti, *La sconfitta di Diana: Un percroso per la "Gerusalemme liberata,"* 85.

[142] Robinson, *Monstrous Regiment: The Lady Knight in Sixteenth-Century Epic*, 262.

[143] Robinson, 264.

[144] Marilyn Migiel, "Tasso's Erminia: Telling an Alternate Story," *Italica* 64, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 65.

for Clorinda, her supposed friend. Believing Erminia to be Clorinda, Tancredi follows her into the forest only to get lost and wander into Armida's palace where he is stuck for several cantos. Moreover, because Erminia has taken Clorinda's signature armor, Clorinda must dress in a new black suit of armor, one that the narrator notes is a bad omen: "Depon Clorinda le sue spoglie inteste / d'argento e l'elmo adorno e l'arme altere, / e senza piuma o fregio alter ne veste / (*infausto annunzio*!) ruginose e nere" (12.18.1–4, emphasis mine). As a result, no one recognizes Clorinda in her black armor, including Tancredi who unknowingly kills her even though he loves her.

In the *Iliad,* Achilles agrees to Patroclus' proposition to let him wear his armor and fight against the Trojans. The decision is tragic since Patroclus' wearing of Achilles armor leads to Patroclus' death, causing Achilles irreparable grief and anger. Erminia's theft of Clorinda's armor is a complete reversal of this Homeric episode: Erminia does not ask Clorinda to wear her suit, Erminia does not replace Clorinda on the battlefield, and Clorinda is killed as a result, not Erminia. Additionally, Erminia's reaction to Clorinda's death is never supplied. In fact, it is Argante, the Saracen knight who fought alongside Clorinda, who is most upset about Clorinda's death and, as a result, seeks vengeance against Tancredi for her death.[145] The next and last time we meet Erminia is in canto 19, seven cantos after Clorinda's death, when she finds a wounded Tancredi and restores him back to health. Clorinda is not mentioned during their interaction even though she undoubtedly connects them as Erminia's friend and Tancredi's beloved. Thus, Tasso's portrayal of female friendship is a dead end; it is a trustless friendship that inadvertently leads to the death of a friend. Its function is quite opposite to that of Carlo and Ubaldo's bond which helps rescue the friend from the dangers of a distracting love story. Erminia is instead depicted as a woman who cannot control her desires and uses the convenience of her friendship with Clorinda to follow her heart.

[145] In fact, Clorinda and Argante enact a night raid together. For a discussion on how Tasso revises the *topos* of the night raid to include a female participator. See Cabani, *Gli amici amanti*, 45–53.

In sum, each of these female friendships reveal that some of them parallel, at least in part, portrayals of male friendship. The language of similarity and sameness beginning with Homer's Achilles and Patroclus finds shape in both Camilla and Acca's portrayal and Erminia and Clorinda's. Moreover, the Renaissance inclusion of a heterosexual love story in the development and formation of male bonds also remains prevalent in the female counterparts. However, whereas male friendship in Renaissance heroic poems still exists outside of the romance bond, the female bonds of Bradamante and Melissa, Bradamante and Marfisa, and Erminia and Clorinda do not develop or exist without a connection to a male character, thereby making female friendship a relationship that is still controlled by a male figure. The following section will discuss Sarrocchi as an author, her works, and her source poets, in order to serve as introductory material before turning to an in-depth examination of Sarrocchi's portrayal of the female friendship between Silveria and Rosmonda.

II. Margherita Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, and Heroic Female Friendship

A. Margherita Sarrocchi: Life, Education, and Intellectual Circles

Extremely well known in Roman literary circles, Margherita Sarrocchi was a well-educated and well-connected woman who succeeded in establishing a place for herself among her male contemporaries through her erudition and sociability. She was born to a middle-class Neapolitan family around 1560 in Gregnano, a small town located on the mountainside of the Amalfi coast near Castellamare di Stabia. After her father's premature death, she moved to Rome under the care and protection of Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto (1514–1585), a close friend of her father's through whom Sarrocchi received a thoroughly humanist education.[146] He first placed her in the convent of Santa

[146] Sirleto was very reputable man in sixteenth-century Rome. He became a cardinal in 1565, was a prominent scholar of Counter-Reformation theology, and for a while was the custodian of the Vatican Library. He also was the main researcher on theological questions discussed at the Council of Trent and played a significant part in editing its publications. Nadia Verdile, "Contributi alla biografia di Margherita Sarrocchi," in *Rendiconti della Accademia di archeologia, lettere e belle arti*, vol. 61 (Naples, 1989), 166n12. For more on Sirleto see Simon

Cecilia in Trastevere where she was exposed to subjects such as philosophy, theology, rhetoric, Greek, and Latin. There, she also studied math and science, undertaking study in materials like arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy—subjects that were usually reserved for male students. Because Sarrocchi excelled in these areas of study, Sirleto arranged for her to receive private tutoring with some of the most well-known intellectuals of the time like Rinaldo Corso (1525–1582), a poet and bishop, who tutored her in Latin and Italian poetry, and Luca Valerio (1552–1618), a renowned mathematician who helped cultivate her interests in the sciences and became one of her closest lifelong friends.[147] By 1588, Sarrocchi was married to Carlo Birago and she remained married to him for roughly fifteen years before he died sometime around 1613.[148] Sarrocchi died four years after him in 1617 and was buried in Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, her body crowned in laurel.

Given Sarrocchi's extensive and well-rounded education, it is not surprising to learn that many of her contemporaries admired her intelligence. She was highly competent in Greek, Latin,

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Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity, and History in Tridentine Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 61–64.

[147] Rinaldo Corso was the adopted son of Vittoria Colonna and was known for his written works on literature, dance, theology, law, and Italian grammar (he wrote a book on Italian grammar entitled *Fondamenti del parlar toscano* (1549). He had been a high judge in the civil court of law at Correggio before switching careers to become an inquisitor. For more on Corso, see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 904–5; Amedeo Quondam, *La parola nel labirinto: società e scrittura del manierismo a Napoli* (Rome: Laterza, 1975), 111–15. Luca Valerio taught not only mathematics, but also other subjects including rhetoric and Greek. He first taught at the Collegio Romano and then from 1600 and on, he taught at La Sapienza in Rome. He is known for two books on the history of physics: *De centro gravitates solidorum* (1604) and *Quadratura parabola per simplex falsum* (1606). For a detailing of Valerio's contribution to physics and biography see Giulio Giorello, "Gli 'oscuri labirinti': calcolo e geometria nel Cinque e Seicento," in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 3: Scienza e tecnica nella cultura e nella società dal Rinascimento a oggi*, ed. Gianni Micheli (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), 261–380; Ugo Baldini and Pier Daniele Napolitani, "Per una biografia Di Luca Valerio: Fonti edite e inedite per una riscontruzione della sua carriera scientifica," *Bollettino di storia delle scienze matematiche/Unione matematica* 11, no. 2 (1991): 3–157.

[148] All that is known about Birago is that he was from the region of Piedmont and perhaps related to Francesco Birago. The record of their marriage has been lost, Angelo Borzelli, one of the first to write a comprehensive biography on Sarrocchi in the early twentieth century, believed Birago to have been a scholarly man who may have been associated with the Accademia dei Raffrontati. For more, see Meredith K. Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo: Astronomy, Astrology, and Poetics in Seventeenth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 43n3.

astronomy, natural philosophy, and mathematics. She even often appears described as an exceptional woman in *querelle des femmes* literature, with biographies comparing her to learned women from Antiquity and accounts describing her firm grasp of difficult subjects in the sciences and languages.[149] Sarrocchi excelled in all subjects and her erudition granted her membership in at least three formal literary and scientific societies in Naples and Rome where she was known to lead discussions and give lectures on a variety of topics. Most notably, Sarrocchi was a regular member of the Accademia dei Lincei, a science academy started by Francesco Cesi (1585–1630), and the Accademia degli Umoristi, a group of intellectuals focused on the burlesque and mock-heroic poetry. Along with other members, however, Sarrocchi broke from the Umoristi to form the Accademia degli Ordinati, a society that instead wanted to concentrate on a more refined poetics, using, for example, Torquato Tasso as one of their models. In addition to these memberships, Sarrocchi also held informal gatherings at her own home, making her house a sort of *salotto* where the great minds of the day discussed the latest literary works and scientific undertakings were regularly discussed. Important figures such as Tasso, Aldo Manuzio il Giovane (1547–1597), Giambattista Marino (1569–1625), and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) all attended these meetings at her house.[150] Many who frequented were impressed with Sarrocchi's salon and held her in high esteem. One observer commented in a letter to Sarrocchi that her salon was a "ricorso et accademia dei

[149] For example, Sarrocchi was featured in Cristofano Bronzini's 1623 *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne,* a catalog of famous and virtuous women. Another early biography on her was written by Bartolomeo Chioccarelli who routinely singles out her intelligence in both literature and philosophy. Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*, I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 133.

[150] Aldo Manuzio il Giovane was the son of Paolo Manuzio and grandson of the famous Aldo Manuzio, the Venetian scholar, humanist, and publisher, who helped found the Aldine Press in Venice. Il Giovane helped manage the family printing press and later the Vatican Press. Additionally, Sarrocchi and Marino reportedly had an amorous affair, however, their relationship ended after Sarrocchi criticized Marino's work in a manner he did not appreciate. Marino snapped back, criticizing both Sarrocchi's poem and Sarrocchi herself, by referring to her as a "chattering magpie who has the impudence to challenge poets by shrieking and croaking uncouth lines about wars and love." Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 14.

primi virtuosi di Roma."[151]

Interacting and exchanging ideas with other intellectuals was an integral and regular part of Sarrocchi's life. The connections Sarrocchi forged with her erudite contemporaries were very valuable to her; from them, she would often form important friendships that became useful to her own literary and scientific career.[152] Sarrocchi herself was also a prized ally to have since she was not only well-connected to literary and scientific circles, but also had close ties with the Roman Curia (like Sirleto), an affiliation that was especially beneficial during the Post-Tridentine era.[153] Some of the noteworthy figures with whom Sarrocchi routinely exchanged letters and sonnets include Muzio Manfredi (1535–1609), Marino, Manuzio, Tasso, and Galileo, all of whom attended her salon as noted above.[154] The relationships she had with her peers were reciprocal: she looked to them for their support and guidance in her scholarly endeavors while offering in return her own aid and protection.[155] Her correspondence with Galileo concretely shows how Sarrocchi managed these academic networks. The letters between Sarrocchi and Galileo also more importantly reveal Sarrocchi's anxiety about producing her heroic poem, the *Scanderbeide*.

Sarrocchi and Galileo met through their mutual friend, Luca Valerio. Before they were formally introduced in her salon in 1611, Valerio often mentioned Sarrocchi in his written correspondence with Galileo, speaking highly of her and her intelligence. In his 1609 letter to Galileo, Valerio notes Sarrocchi's interest in Galileo's work, passes along her best wishes, and asks

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[151] Antonio Favaro and Paolo Galluzzi, *Amici e corrispondenti di Galileo* (Firenze: Salimbeni, 1983), I:86.

[152] Unfortunately, all her scientific work has been lost.

[153] Because of the way in which Sarrocchi moved through these two realms, Ray deems her a "cultural intermediary" between the scientific academies and the Roman Curia. Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 2.

[154] For a discussion on the two sonnets Tasso composed in which he praises Sarrocchi see Verdile, "Contributi alla biografia di Margherita Sarrocchi," 170–71.

[155] Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 32.

whether he would be able to read and comment upon an incomplete draft of Sarrocchi's heroic poem, *La Scanderbeide*, which at the time only consisted of eleven cantos:

> Il teorema di V.S. mi è piaciuto assai, al pari de' più meravigliosi d'Archimede. L'ha letto ancora la signora Margarita Sarrocchi, che fu già mia discepola, donna dottissima in tutte le scienze, d'ingegno acutissimo; e giudica del facitore l'istesso che io, e a V.S. si raccomanda, pregandola a farle grazie, s'ella ha letti quei canti della Scanderbeide, suo poema eroico, che le furono tolti prima ch'ella li rivedesse, di scrivermene il suo parere e quel che altri ne sentono costi, siccome anch'io la prega.[156]

It is not clear whether Valerio was seeking Galileo's help specifically on Sarrocchi's behalf or whether he was expressing his own self-interest in promoting one of his most prodigious students.[157] Nonetheless, Valerio's letter reveals how Sarrocchi's inter-connected networks worked to promote her intellectual development. Through Valerio, Sarrocchi successfully entered into Galileo's social circle. Sarrocchi and Galileo's correspondence began shortly after Galileo's first visit to Rome in 1611 when he came to the Eternal City to promote his celestial findings detailed in his *Sidereus nuncius* (1610), a controversial text written in Latin that recounts observations made with the help of his spyglass of Jupiter's four stars, which he would later name the Medicean stars. The two wrote letters to each other between 1611 and 1612. In the letters, we find a reciprocal exchange of support and advice-giving, underscoring the collaborative intellectual culture of sixteenth-century Italy.

As Ray notes, "literary concerns are at the forefront of Sarrocchi's correspondence with Galileo […] In all seven of her letters to Galileo, Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*, and her plans for revising it, figure prominently."[158] Sarrocchi wanted useful feedback on her poem, which, at the time of her correspondence with Galileo, she was revising as it had been first partially published in 1606. Her

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[156] Valerio to Galileo, Padua, 30 May 1609, quoted from Favaro and Galluzzi, *Amici e corrispondenti di Galileo*, 1:7. In many other letters written from Valerio to Galileo, Valerio passes on Sarrocchi's best wishes and gratitude.

[157] One of his other pupils was Ippolito Aldobrandini who later became pope in 1592. His tenure as pope lasted until 1609. See Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 5.

[158] Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 28.

request was that he be harsh, making sure he noted every single one of her mistakes: "il favore che io principalmente desidero da lei è che rivegga il mio poema, con quella diligenza, che sia maggiore, e con occhio inimico, acciò ch'Ella vi noti ogni picciolo errore."[159] On the one hand, the idea of having Galileo critique her poem with an "occhio inimico" could reveal Sarrocchi's anxieties about producing an heroic poem. Though Sarrocchi makes no reference to her status as a woman writer attempting to write a work in a genre dominated by male authors, she does routinely express her worries about any kind of error to be found in the *Scanderbeide*.[160] On the other hand, Sarrocchi's request for Galileo's "occhio inimico" could be interpreted as a sign of confidence, showing that Sarrocchi was ready to take on even Galileo's harshest critiques. She indeed sent Galileo several drafts, asking questions about language, composition, and style, including whether her Italian was Tuscan enough, how she should split up the cantos, and if her narrative throughout the poem remained sufficiently linear. Whether we interpret "occhio inimico" as a signifier of Sarrocchi's anxiety or confidence, her carefulness and diligence to produce a clean poem underscores the seriousness with which she took publishing a work of heroic poetry.

Even though Sarrocchi's poem followed Tasso's model and Galileo was a known critic of the *Liberata* (he preferred the *Furioso*), Sarrocchi valued his opinions and the two shared views on poetic language and style.[161] Therefore, if Galileo could read her work through the lens of a harsh critic, she could correctly predict and avoid any mistake that other commentators might focus on or condemn her for. In addition to asking for editing advice, Sarrocchi also requested that Galileo pass

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[159] Sarrocchi to Galileo, Rome, 29 July 1611, quoted from Ray, 55n82.

[160] Ray, 29.

[161] In his *Considerazioni al poema di Tasso*, which was published posthumously in 1783, Galileo expressed a profound preference for Ariosto's *Furioso* and critiqued Tasso's poetic language and style. Ray, 23, 30. For more on the ways in which Galileo compared Ariosto's and Tasso's poems while expressing a particular fondness for the former see Peter DeSa Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry: Character Design in the "Orlando Furioso"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1–16.

her poem around to his friends, so that she could gauge how her work would be judged if disseminated among a larger audience. To thank Galileo for his editorial assistance, Sarrocchi asked whether he would like to be written into her poem in the scene where her fictional hero, Scanderbeg, learns of his worthy ancestors.[162] In return for his advice, Galileo asked instead for Sarrocchi's support and promotion of his discovery of Jupiter's satellites as described in his *Sidereus nuncius*, which controversially defied orthodoxy by proving that the cosmos was not comprised of heavenly bodies that orbit around the earth at their center.[163] Sarrocchi did just that; she endorsed Galileo's findings as made evident in the letter she wrote to Guido Bettoli at the University of Perugia.[164] However, as Galileo's scientific theories came under even more scrutiny by the Roman Inquisition, Sarrocchi's support of Galileo considerably decreased: "the years just before his troubles with the Church would make a continued friendship untenable for the orthodox Sarrocchi."[165] Despite the fact that their correspondence ended somewhat abruptly, their letters provide us with a view into the ways in which Sarrocchi opportunely navigated her networks and the apprehension she faced in producing a heroic poem.

B. Sarrocchi's Other Writings and *La Scanderbeide*

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[162] In this same letter, Sarrocchi writes that she intends to include her friends among the list of Scanderbeg's descendants, illuminating how important it was to her to make those close to her feel valued. However, as Pezzini notes, Sarrocchi never includes Galileo in the poem, most likely because of his already controversial status in Rome: "Allorché Sarrocchi manifestava questo intento era il gennaio del 1612, anno in cui iniziavano le opposizioni alle teorie di Galileo; quattro anni dopo lo scienziato riceverà un'ammonizione dal Cardinal Bellarmino, e verrà diffidato dal professare ed insegnare l'astronomia copernicana. Celebrarlo in un poema eroico edito a Roma e scritto da una donna senza i saldi vincoli di un *patronage* potente sarà impossibile." Serena Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," *MLN* 120, no. 1 (2005): 214–215.

[163] Galileo was not the first to place the sun at the center of the universe. This was a discovery made by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and his predecessors. For more see Rivka Feldhay and F. Jamil Ragep, eds., *Before Copernicus: The Cultures and Contexts of Scientific Learning in the Fifteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

[164] Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 8.

[165] Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 136.

Before the publication of her *Scanderbeide*, which will be the focus of this section, Sarrocchi was the author of other texts that exemplify her considerable knowledge on a wide range of subjects. Several of these texts have not been recovered; evidence suggests that some of her earlier writings included:: commentaries on Giovanni della Casa's and Petrarch's poetry, essays explaining Euclid's theorems and Valerio's geometry lessons, a translation from Greek into Italian of Musaeus' *Hero and Leander,* a theological treatise in Latin entitled *De praedestinatione* that focuses on the relationship between grace and free will*,* and a number of lyric poems that were published in anthologies like that of Muzio Manfredi, entitled *Per donne romane, Rime di diversi raccolte e dedicate al Signor Giacomo Buoncompagni* (1575).[166] Sarrocchi received praise for her writings from many of her contemporaries. For example, regarding her interpretation of a verse from Petrarch's canzone, *Standomi un giorno solo alla fenestra*, Alessandro Tassoni wrote that he agreed with her analysis: "La difende la signora Margherita Sarrocchi, lume del sesso femminile dicendo qui il Poeta non parla del composto di Laura; ma dell'anima sua, la quale vedendo morire il corpo, volandosene al cielo, sparì."[167] Not only were her literary analytical skills praised by her peers, but so was her creativity in composing poetry. In 1591 Manfredi wrote Sarrocchi a letter lauding her poetic skills while also claiming to be one of her first admirers: "Ma ne rallegro con V.S. che n'ha l'onore, e con la nostra età, che n'havrà la gloria, e meco stesso ancora, che fui dei primi suoi ammiratori; e la confortò à non abbandonar l'impresa, e la prego a farmi degno, che io vegga qualche cosa di suo nuova; e le bacio le mani."[168]

Undoubtedly, Sarrocchi's biggest literary feat was her heroic poem, *La Scanderbeide,* to which she dedicated most of her life. An incomplete version of the poem was first published in 1606 by the

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[166] Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 8.

[167] Alessandro Tassoni, *Considerazioni sopra le Rime del Petrarca* (Modena: Cassiani, 1609), 24.

[168] Manfredi to Sarrocchi, Nancy, 22 June 1591, Muzio Manfredi, *Lettere Brevissime* (Venice: Maglietti, 1606), 142.

Roman publisher, Lepido Facii, and it included two sonnets and a dedication by Sarrocchi to Costanza Colonna, Caravaggio's marchioness, along with an introduction to the poem written by an academic from the Accademia dei Raffrontati.[169] This 1606 edition consisted of 956 octaves in eleven cantos along with three very short summaries. In this version, the poem abruptly concluded at the end of canto 11, demonstrating that its narrative was still a work-in-progress.[170] Seventeen years later in 1623, a complete twenty-three canto version of the poem was published by Andrea Fei, five years after Sarrocchi's death. The dedicatee of the 1623 edition had been changed to Giulia d'Este (1588–1645), the daughter of Don Cesare d'Este, duke of Modena and Reggio, and Virginia de'Medici.[171] It was this version that was reissued by Andrea Fei in 1623 and again in 1633 and 1723. The poem was received well by its contemporaries, but by the end of the seventeenth century it was essentially forgotten.[172]

The *Scanderbeide* is a historical heroic poem set during the mid-fifteenth century (from about 1443 to 1468) that tells the story of Gjergj Kastrioti or Scanderbeg (Iskender Bery) (1405–1468), an Albanian hero, and the successful rebellion he led against the Ottomans in what is today Albania and Macedonia.[173] It begins with a four-stanza proem and utilizes a self-effacing narrator, a familiar

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[169] Sarrocchi had a longstanding relation to the Colonna family. For more on her relationship with members of this power family see Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 8; Verdile, "Contributi alla biografia di Margherita Sarrocchi," 180–81.

[170] Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 16.

[171] The relationship between Sarrocchi and Giulia d'Este is still unclear. The change in dedication was most likely made by Giovanni Latini who was the editor of this 1623 version without Sarrocchi's previous authorization.

[172] Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 1.

[173] Scanderbeg's story is one of conversion, making it perfectly suitable for the Christian narrative of Sarrocchi's poem. During his childhood, Scanderbeg was first taken by Murad II, the Ottoman sultan, and was raised at his court for the first twenty years of his life until he fled with his nephew, Hamza Castrioti, to take repossession of Kruja (Croia), leading to his abjuration of Islam and conversion to Christianity. Cox also points out that Sarrocchi may have selected his endeavors as the subject of her poem because his story was

device used in the *Iliad* and *Liberata*. By the fifth *ottava* of canto 1, the text jumps directly into the plot with a flashback narrative told by Svarte, one of Scanderbeg's trusted envoys, at the Neapolitan court of Alfonso of Aragon. Svarte tells the court of Scanderbeg's defection from the Ottoman army and his repossession of his native land in an effort to persuade Alfonso to send aid in the form of Italian troops to Croia. Alfonso agrees and Amuratte, upon hearing about Croia's rebellion, sends troops to lay siege to the city. The first twelve cantos (with the exception of canto 10 that centers on the Ottoman siege of Amantia) focus precisely on Scanderbeg's attempts to fend off the Ottoman troops in Croia, and include episodes of night sorties, retaliations made by the enemy camp, and other incidents occurring within the fortress or directing relating to it. The second half of the poem (cantos 13–23) instead centers on Presa, the home base of the Turks, and the subsequent battles on land and sea between the Christian and Ottoman armies. The poem ends with a final epic battle (cantos 22–23) which the Albanians win. After the defeat of the Ottomans, the sultan dies, leaving the Ottomans to retreat. While most of the poem's narrative is centered on military conflict, it is laced by romantic plots. However, they do not distract from the poem's unitary plot and are fully integrated into the main narrative.

Sarrocchi's poem stands as the first historically-based heroic poem to be authored by a woman and predominately follows the Counter-Reformation spirit of Tasso's directives about what makes a strong heroic poem, including the use of verisimilitude, an explicit Christian narrative, a unitary plot, and a minimalization of the element of romance. For instance, Sarrocchi selected as her protagonist Scanderbeg, a figure who converted to Christianity and pursued a strong resistance against the Ottomans.[174] Sarrocchi's choice in setting her poem within the context of a Christian-

particularly famous in the Kingdom of Naples, her original birthplace, and the place in which Scanderbeg's family eventually settled in the fifteenth century. Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 168.

[174] Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 190–91.

Ottoman conflict reveals historical anxieties about the imminent threat of Turkish expansion into Europe, evident in the ongoing Hungarian war between 1593 and 1606 of Turks against Christians. Therefore, the strong Christian narrative of Sarrocchi's poem, unveils the ideologically and morally charged nature of her project.[175]

While its Christian historical backdrop and formal style are more or less Tassian, the *Scanderbeide* does not entirely follow Tasso's example, namely with issues related to gender, and specifically in its representation of women Arguing this point, Serena Pezzini focuses on the Tassian absences in the *Scanderbeide*. She notes, like Cox and Ray, that predominantly missing from the *Scanderbeide* is an Alcina or Armida-like *incantatrice* who seduces and imprisons Christian knights, causing them to err from their heroic and pious missions.[176] The elimination of the evil *maga* or *incantatrice* correlates with an erasure of an evil female character prototype that was regularly inserted in heroic poetry from Boiardo to Ariosto to contemporaries of Sarrocchi, thus projecting negative associations onto female characters. Because of the eradication of the *incantatrice*, there is then also no need for a "riconquista del ruolo virile," as seen with Tasso's Rinaldo who, with the help of Ubaldo and Carlo, needs to overcome his deviant, feminine behavior and leave Armida behind.[177] In Sarrocchi, women work as active contributors to the Christian mission rather than as distractions

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[175] That being said, some critics like Cox find that Sarrocchi's portrayal of religious conflict in the *Scanderbeide* is less morally structured than it is in *Liberata*. She argues that in comparison with the "clear-cut invasion scenario envisaged by crusading epics such as the *Liberata*, the Balkan-war situation portrayed by Sarrocchi is intrinsically more complex and internecine." Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 171.

[176] A *maga*-like figure named Calidora does appear in Sarrocchi's 1606 edition of the poem, but she is eliminated in the final 1623 version. For more on Calidora and her absence from the later edition of the poem see Cox, 192–93; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 26–28. Meanwhile Tasso's followers kept the role of the *incantatrice* in their poems: "Gli epigoni secenteschi fanno proprio il dettato tassiano, talvolta con una solerzia così zelante da disseminare le loro ottave di libidinose eroine pagane brutalmente trucidate dagli eroi cristiani per aver incautamente cercato di distoglierli dalla loro pia missione." Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 200.

[177] Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 207.

from it.[178] Moreover, whereas amorous plots do not have room to develop and blossom in Tasso, Sarrocchi positively integrates them with the primary epic action of the poem; they neither detract from the main plot, nor do they appear secondary to it, meaning they do not need to be eradicated.

With respect to the outcomes of female characters, namely those that are pagan, Sarrocchi does not subjugate them as much as Ariosto and Tasso do. For Maggie Günsberg, the feminine, whose primary defining characteristic is sexuality, does not coincide with the masculine or the epic telos of either Ariosto or Tasso's poems, leading to a violent subordination of the feminine in these texts via rape, death, and conversion, or a combination of any of the above.[179] In Sarrocchi these repressive tactics are not used nearly as much. The idea of female subjugation in Tasso parallels the poem's ideology of the "conquista," which Sergio Zatti defines as being "istituzionalmente legata alla mascolinità," one that is apparently absent in Sarrocchi's poem. [180] In eliminating the feminine as a threatening entity that needs to be fully conquered or subdued, Sarrocchi opens the possibility for a new kind of feminine that has agency, which as we will see, includes the *topos* of female heroic friendship.[181]

C. The Case of Silveria and Rosmonda

While there are passing references to examples of male friendship in the *Scanderbeide*, it is the relationship between Rosmonda and Silveria, the two main heroines of the poem, that garners all the attention. Like Ariosto's and Tasso's pairs of female friends—Bradamante and Marfisa, and Erminia

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[178] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 191.

[179] Moreover, Günsberg understands the term feminine more as a construct that is not analogous to female character, as components of the feminine can be found in male characters as well. See Günsberg, "*Donna Liberata?* The Portrayal of Women in the Italian Renaissance Epic," 177–80.

[180] Sergio Zatti, "Dalla parte di Satana: Sull'imperialsimo cristiano nella *Gerusalemme liberata*," in *La rappresentazione dell'altro nei testi del Rinascimento* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1998), 163.

[181] Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 219.

and Clorinda, respectively—Rosmonda and Silveria represent counterposed types of femininity. Rosmonda's character is based on previous heroic warrior women archetypes: like Bradamante, Rosmonda is both an aristocrat and a woman warrior who participates in a cross-faith love story; like Camilla from the *Aeneid* and Clorinda, she fights against the army of the poem's principal heroes; and like Marfisa and Clorinda she converts to Christianity. Moreover, Rosmonda is the daughter of Amuratte, the enemy and Ottoman sultan, who appoints her to oversee the troops of the Ottoman empire. While readers first meet Silveria in canto 13, Rosmonda is introduced much earlier in canto 3:

> L'armigera del Trace inclita figlia
> Guida lor tutti in un Duce, e guerriera:
> A lui nacque d'Almena, e ben somiglia
> Di forze, e cor sua genitrice fera:
> La bella guancia candida, e vermiglia
> Rende degli anni à lei la primavera,
> Gli occhi lucenti son qual chiare stelle,
> le membra oltra ogni fè robuste, e snelle.
>
> Qual neve intatta, ò per qual Armellino
> Candide hà l'arme, e candida la vesta,
> Sparsa di perle sì, ch'in Apennino
> Men densa cade Aquilonar tempesta:
> D'un gran diamante Orientale, e fino
> Rosa intagliata hà sul cimiero in testa,
> Insetta a pietra del color del Cielo,
> Quando di giorno appar senz'alcun velo.
>
> Vuol dinotar, che il verginal candore
> Serba con castità candida, e pura,
> Con la saldezza del diamante il core,
> Ch'a' lascivi d'Amor colpi s'indura;
> E con la pietra c'ha del ciel colore,
> Che sol del Ciel qua giù non d'altro hà cura
> E con la rosa dimostrar vuol, come
> Qual pura Rosa, hà di Rosmonda il nome.
>
> Serba nel guerreggiar sol la sicrezza
> De' genitor, ch'altro da lor non prese,
> Di magnanimità, di gentilezza,
> Ha d'honor, di virtù le voglie accese:
> Di leggiadre maniere, e di bellezza

Né benigna natura, ò Ciel cortese
Ad altra parl à quella dore diede,
Che nel bel viso, e ne l'oprar si vede.

Sovra il sesso, e l'età senno, e valore,
Casto pensier sotto amoroso aspetto
Può nel barbaro Re destar maggiore
Benevolenza oltra al paterno affetto;
Ma più l'alta pietà, l'ardente amore,
Onde ella oppose à certo imprese il petto,
E grata figlia, e in un guerriera ardita
A lui, che à lei la diè, rendeo la vita.[182]

In these *ottave*, Sarrocchi characterizes Rosmonda as both the ideal Renaissance woman and an exceptional *guerriera*. She frequently highlights her beauty, chastity, virtue, and excellence in arms. Her aristocratic roots are evident in dress adorned with pearls and her diamond-encrusted helmet, with the whiteness of both to further accentuate her purity. Even though in these passages (and later on in the poem) the narrator draws parallels between Rosmonda and her father (the sultan), it is Rosmonda's mother who passes on strength and courage ("forze" and "cor") to her, demonstrating that these traits are matrilineal. More than that, Sarrocchi underscores Rosmonda's intelligence, noting that her "senno" and "valore" are unmatched for her sex and age. The nod to her erudition is interesting for various reasons. In their descriptions, neither Bradamante, Marfisa, nor Clorinda's intellect is highlighted. However, in the proem to canto 4 of *I tredici canti del Floridoro*, Fonte's narrator makes a point, commenting that if women were given the same access to education as men, they would be equal to them in any subject or field of study.[183] In fact, Fonte's narrator uses the exact same language to state that women, like men, have these qualities: "Le donne in ogni età fur da natura / Di gran giudizio e d'animo dotate, / Né men alte a mostrar con studio e cura/ Senno e

[182] Margherita Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide, poema eroico* (Rome: Andrea Fei, 1623), 3.75–78.

[183] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 179. Fonte is loosely citing canto 20 and canto 37 from the *Furioso* in which the narrator makes notable commentaries about women. For more on Fonte's and other women's feminist appropriation of Ariosto see Shemek, "Ariostan Armory: Feminist Responses to the *Orlando Furioso*."

valor degli buomini son nate, / E perché, se comune è la figura, / Se non son le sostanze variate, / S'hanno simile un cibo e un parlar, denno / Differente aver poi l'ardire e 'l senno?"[184] Sarrocchi, writing in the years after the publication of the *Floridoro*, affirms Fonte's claim and revises the traits associated with women warriors in her description of Rosmonda. In doing so, Sarrocchi also includes a compliment that was often paid to her by her male contemporaries, perhaps showing how Sarrocchi identified with her fictional character.

Silveria, on the other hand, did not start as a *guerriera.* Unlike Rosmonda who was raised at the court, Silveria's origins, like those of Camilla and Marfisa, are rooted in nature. Her status as an archer and devotee of Diana likens her to Camilla, while her upbringing in the wild, and her swearing off of men likens her to both Camilla and Marfisa. In contrast to Rosmonda whom we meet firsthand, readers, along with Rosmonda, are introduced to Silveria's character through hearsay. In the beginning of canto 13, an older widow approaches Rosmonda pleading with her to take revenge on a "donna fiera, e selvaggia ivi s'inselva / che di fierezza avanza ogn'altra belva" (13.4.7–8) who "pur dianzi m'uccise empia due figli" (13.8.8). The woman the widow describes is Silveria. The widow also narrates Silveria's upbringing, just as Diana recounts to Opis Camilla's childhood, noting that her father abandoned her in the woods and left her in the company of animals, specifically with a female bear from which she breastfed (13.4–8). Unlike Diana's narration of Camilla, the widow's words work to paint Silveria as a monstrous woman.[185] From the widow's description of Silveria, and Rosmonda's subsequent promise to help her, readers also expect to meet a vicious, heartless, and uncontrollable savage. However, when Rosmonda meets Silveria on the

[184] Moderata Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Bologna: Mucchi, 1995), 4.1.

[185] As Cox notes: "The introduction [of Silveria] leads us to expect a grotesque female other, serving to define Rosmonda's culturally acceptable virility by contrast." *The Prodigious Muse*, 194.

slopes of Mount Olympus, the mythical meeting place of the gods, she encounters a completely different person:

> Che sentendo il rumor sen' corse al varco
> Drizzando fiera a chi venia lo sguardo;
> Di corno ha mal tagliato e ruvid'arco,
> Al tender duro, all'allentar gagliardo;
> Ha di rozza faretra il tergo carco,
> Cui dentro più d'un suona acuto dardo;
> Nudo ha il petto e 'l ginocchio, e sol coturno
> Veste di lincea pelle il piede eburno.
>
> E di Leopardo maculata pelle
> Copre le membra ancor grandi e formate;
> Sopra ogn'uso viril disciolte, e snelle;
> Le chiome inculte son crespe, et aurate,
> Le luci grandi, rilucenti e belle,
> Di maschio ardir ripiene e venustate;
> Bruno hà 'l color, ma par dal solar raggio
> In un candido volto un dolce oltraggio.
>
> Giusta e vaga natura in lei comparte,
> Ma robusta, e virile ogni fattezza,
> Nè sai ben dir qual abbia in lor più parte
> Mista insieme la forza o la bellezza.
> Dirai ben ch'avventar gli strali Marte
> O col brando a ferir Amor s'avvezza
> Nè vista accende unqua impudico affetto,
> Ma desta à tema, à riverenza il petto. (13.14–16)

The description provided of Silveria's appearance over these three *ottave* parallels Rosmonda's experience of seeing her for the first time. In *ottava* 14, we first see a bow and arrow, immediately connecting Silveria to the hunt. Only after that image does a partial picture of Silveria begin to come into focus. The narrator first describes her naked knees, her bare breasts, and her feet which are covered in the skin of a lynx, providing snippets of only her bottom half. The inclusion of the lynx is interesting for it does not appear in the descriptions of Silveria's predecessors. Instead, by including it, Sarrocchi may be again personally identifying with one of her female characters, in this case with Silveria, as the word in Italian, *lincea*, recalls the name of the Accademia dei Lincei, the scientific academy named after the figure of the lynx to which Sarrocchi belonged. The narrator then depicts

the rest of Silveria's body in a vertical movement, noting first her leopard dress and the definition of her limbs, before ending with a description of her eyes. Silveria's appearance is a clear rejection of the blazon conventions of description of women. The final *ottava* highlight Silveria's aesthetic harmony; while she is "robusta" and "virile" like Mars, the god of war, there is *gentilezza* and beauty about her that likens her to love.

Overall, Silveria is portrayed as an atypical standard of Renaissance beauty: she is suntanned ("bruno ha il color"), has an athletic build ("le membra ancor grandi e formate"), and has bushy crazed hair ("le chiome inculte son crespe, et aurate"), which differs from Rosmonda's delicate white skin and blonde locks (13.11–12). In contrast to Rosmonda, whose portrayal is well-balanced—it equally underscores her beauty, intelligence, and vigor—Silveria's description focuses primarily on her appearance, physicality, and athleticism. The highlighting of Silveria's strength and virility even appear in a later episode in which Silveria defeats her male opponents in a series of athletic games and subsequently receives hostility from them via physical attack (15.18–59). The latter scene is self-referential as is the description of Rosmonda's innate intelligence: the vicious response Silveria receives from her male competitors parallels the antagonism targeted at Sarrocchi regarding her scholarly ambition from her male peers.[186] Rosmonda and Silveria are both exceptional for diverse reasons, Rosmonda for her intelligence and Silveria for her fortitude, and when put together they complete what the other is missing.

From their outward appearance and upbringing, the two women could not be any more different: one is a born into royalty, adorned in jewels, and equipped with an artisan-crafted shield and helmet, while the other is a wild huntress dressed in leopard skin and armed with a bow and arrow, living in the hills of nature. Sarrocchi makes sure to direct our attention to their

[186] Cox, 179.

dissimilarities, apparent when another portraiture of Rosmonda is given right before Rosmonda spots Silveria on Mount Olympus.[187] Despite the women's outward differences, the two find common ground with each other, which is evident when they first meet. Rosmonda intrigues Silveria and vice versa: "Né come suol ritrosa e fuggitiva / per celarsi da lei rivolge il piede, / ché donna

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[187] Sarrocchi again highlights Rosmonda's beauty, chastity, and noble upbringing immediately before introducing Silveria:

> Con l'emo ella il bel viso hor non asconde,
> scintillan gli occhi un piu ch'human splen
> parte annodate son le chiome biondore;
> e parte in preda ad un lascivo errore:
> malagevole è 'l calle à poggiar, onde
> l'irriga l'ostro un christallin sudore,
> cui ondeggiando intorno i vaghi crini
> paion legati in or perle, e rubini.
>
> Vibra lampi, e fulgor lo scudo intorno
> Al sol, che ripercosso il ripercote,
> ch'in azzuro color bianco unicorno
> serba, che 'l ferro aguzza ad aspra cote.
> Con l'elsa e 'l pomo d'or di gemme adorno,
> cui mal stimar l'opra e 'l valor si puote,
> di catena al destro omero ligato
> sen' va 'l brando a cader nel manco lato.
>
> Ne l'usbergo, onde s'arma, in mezzo al petto
> l'orribil teschio di Medusa appare;
> sembran gonfie le serpi, il collo eretto,
> per gli occhi fuore atro venen spirare,
> tale in vista d'orrore e di diletto
> qual Pallante novella altrui compare. (13.11–13)

esser la scorge; or quella arriva, /e l'una e l'altra con stupor si vede (13.19.1–4)." By having the two women see each other at the same time ("e l'una e l'altra con stupor si vede"), Sarrocchi represents their interaction as a reciprocal action. This reciprocal act of seeing foreshadows the friendship the two women warriors form by the end of the canto. Interestingly, Virginia Cox argues that this initial encounter between Rosmonda and Silveria perhaps exhibits traits of same-sex attraction: "Much less explicit, but perhaps manifesting a similar openness on Sarrocchi's part to the possibility of same-sex attraction, this time between women, is the striking episode of Rosmonda's first encounter with Silveria, found in both the 1606 and 1623 versions of the poem."[188] While her view is intriguing, I instead find that their first meeting foretells the strength of the mutual bond they cast while simultaneously rewriting the negative representations of female-female encounters found in Ariosto and Tasso. Furthermore, because Sarrocchi continuously highlights Rosmonda and Silveria's purity and chastity when they first meet, she is consciously depicting their interest in one another as platonic. For example, while Rosmonda is climbing Mount Olympus to find Silveria to initially avenge the death of the widow's two sons, a description of her shield which bears a design of a unicorn on it is given, the unicorn being a Renaissance symbol for feminine purity. Additionally, the narrator comments that the sight of Silveria, "né […] accende unque impudico affetto," thereby affirming that Rosmonda's initial glimpse of her is not one that evokes desire or impure feelings. If Sarrocchi's intention was to represent women's friendship as exemplary for both her male and female readers, then the portrayal of Silveria and Rosmonda as pure and thus not as transgressive figures who are defined by sexual impurities via same-sex attraction—an idea that pertained to Sarrocchi's world—is cogent.

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[188] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 194. Russell takes a similar stance on their first encounter, noting however that "[t]heir meeting becomes a symbolic confrontation between the author and her alter ego, and their mutual attraction can be read as a call for blissful isolation on one side and a life of challenges and struggle for self-assertion on the other." Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 36.

Whereas in Ariosto, Bradamante acts impetuously by attacking Marfisa without warning, which begins the first of their duels, Rosmonda employs self-restraint and reason by using her words to confront Silveria about the widow's two sons she murdered. In this case, Rosmonda not only corrects Bradamante's rash behavior, but she demonstrates the power of language to open a dialogue with the purported "other" to allow her to share her side of the story. Rosmonda begins the conversation by introducing herself as the daughter of Amuratte (the "Imperator") and then gets straight to the matter at hand: "Di quei german per la tua man già morti, / Qual cagion degna hor per tua scusa apporti?" (21.7–8). What ensues from Rosmonda's question is an interaction between two women who, through conversation, find mutual respect and understanding for one another—something that does not occur in either Ariosto or Tasso. Silveria acknowledges Rosmonda's noble status by bowing and praising her beauty, valor, and majesty through praise to show her respect, foreshadowing the slight power differential that develops in their bond. Silveria then continues to explain that she killed the two brothers because they were attempting to rape her.[189] To protect her virginity and her pledge to Diana, she had to act out of self-defense:

> "Hor dà me rozza, et à mentir non usa,
> E d'ogni frode popolar lontana,
> Saprai vera cagion, non falsa scuda
> De gli uccisi ver me la voglia insana:
> Io d'Himeneo, d'Amor la face esclusa,
> Rivolsi i passi à seguitar Diana:
> Ch'altro piacer non provo, altro diletto,
> Ch'armarmi sol di gel pudico il petto
>
> A dishonesto fin questi empi intenti,
> Il mio candido honor macchiar tentaro,
> Onde à ragion poi quanto sian pungenti,
> Gli strali miei per questa man provaro;
> Non ch'odio contra à giusti, et innocenti
> M'imgombri il cor d'ingiusta morte avaro,
> Non che di sangue human nudrir mi piaccia,

[189] There is a later instance in the poem in which Silveria again has to ward off unwanted sexual advances. This time though, the sexual aggression comes from the sultan, Rosmonda's father (17.56–74).

Bastan le fere à me, ch'uccido in caccia." (13.23–24)

Silveria's action of killing the two men who attempted to inflict sexual violence on her mirrors Marfisa's killing of the Arab king who also tried to rape her at the age of eighteen. Just as Marfisa is unlike some women in the *Furioso* who are passive agents when threatened with rape or violence as they rely on a passing knight to rescue them, Silveria, too, defends herself.[190] What is different in Silveria's case is that Sarrocchi gives her the agency to tell the story from her perspective and to share it with another woman. In contrast, we learn of Marfisa's actions through Atlante, which shows how Ariosto still privileges the male voice to narrate a story that defines one of his most valiant *guerriere*. Moreover, through Silveria's telling of her personal story to Rosmonda, Silveria opens a space of trust between the two women, one that was previously missing in Tasso because of Erminia's secrecy.

In response to her justification, Rosmonda finds Silveria's self-defense inspiring and praiseworthy, claiming that "morte unqua altra non fu con più ragione, dice, non pena nò merti, ma lode" (13.25.3–4). Rosmonda could have easily trusted the old woman's villainous portrait of Silveria and not believed the archeress' plea. However, Rosmonda relates to Silveria's tale, finding reason in it ("con più ragione"), allowing her to give Silveria the benefit of the doubt. In doing so, Rosmonda validates Silveria's voice and existence, which were previously in danger during the attempted assault. In lauding her actions, Rosmonda reveals her pro-woman belief that acts of sexual violence warrant punishment. More importantly, in siding with Silveria, Rosmonda exhibits empathy and understanding, which enables the women to share their sentiments with each other and connect on a

[190] Ariosto's Isabella is an exception. When faced with the threat of rape by Rodomonte, Isabella kills herself to evade sexual violence and instead preserve her chastity, leading to Ariosto's praise of her martyrdom. For more on Isabella see Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 108–9; Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes*, 169–98.

deeper level, in a display of emotional intimacy that was missing from Erminia and Clorinda's bond.[191] Indeed, it is from this conversation that Rosmonda wants to know more specifics about Silveria, asking her to show her how she lives, where she sleeps, and what she eats, to all of which Silveria agrees. What follows is a revisionary instance of the *locus amoenus* topos (13.26–38). Whereas in Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso, an idyllic world that mimics natural beauty is attributed to being the fraudulent creation and home of the *incantatrici*, Sarrocchi presents Mount Olympus, Silveria's home, as devoid of magic and *inganni*. Therefore, this space that is bereft of deception and fraud becomes the perfect place for the two women to become friends.

By the end of the episode Rosmonda is fully convinced that Silveria embodies the same qualities that resonate deeply within herself: "ti fè natura la persona, e 'l petto / ben del mio forte, e coraggioso al paro" (13.43.1–2). It is from this place of similarity that Rosmonda asks Silveria to join her on the battlefield against Scanderbeg and his army, arguing that Silveria would not live up to her full potential if she remained alone in the wild.[192] In her plea to Silveria, Rosmonda uses language of likeness, love, and friendship to persuade the wild huntress to accompany her. Rosmonda begs Silveria to join her, stating that "meco amata sarai più che sorella," (13.41.6) recalling the language Camilla used with Acca as she was dying. Silveria accepts this invitation and the scene ends with the

[191] To this episode, Russell adds that she believes Sarrocchi to denounce the leniency with which cases of rape were adjudicated. She also wonders, as others have, whether the inspiration for this scene came from the notorious 1599 Cenci case in which Beatrice Cenci, a young woman from an aristocratic Roman family, was tried and sentenced to death for the murder of her abusive father. Sarrocchi had a personal connection to Cenci through their mutual contact Caterina de Sanctis, to whom Cenci had entrusted her baby and who lived at the same address as Sarrocchi's home. Cenci did leave a small fortune to Sarrocchi, probably to thank her for her hospitality. Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 34, 246n12. Additionally, Russell's question is ever the more interesting when we note that Sarrocchi was alive and in Rome during the years of 1602 to 1606, when at least a dozen cases of the rape of virgins were recorded in the criminal court of the Governor of Rome. Elizabeth S. Cohen, "No Longer Virgins: Self-Presentation by Young Women in Late Renaissance Rome," in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 169.

[192] This seems to be a reversal of traditional male night-raid epic scenes in which one friend desires to join the other on the mission for the sake of eternal fame and glory.

two descending Mount Olympus together, symbolizing the connection the two have just made: "scendon dal monte immantinente al piano / le valorose donne ambedue liete" (13.45.1–2). As has been shown, Rosmonda and Silveria's first experience completely rewrites the jealousy turned to physical violence found in Bradamante and Marfisa's initial encounter, and the mistrust and envy that breeds in Erminia and Clorinda's relationship. She instead turns their first meeting into a positive moment, one in which women can look beyond their perceptions of each other and outward differences to form the solid foundations of a friendship.

Unlike the love-friendship triangles in Ariosto and Tasso, Sarrocchi allows friendship and romance to peacefully coexist, creating a reciprocal triangular friendship between Silveria, Rosmonda, and Rosmonda's eventual spouse, Vaconte. Vaconte is the heroic Christian knight, whose character is loosely based on Tasso's Rinaldo, and will be the one to convert Rosmonda and Silveria later in the poem. Whereas in both the *Furioso* and the *Liberata*, the female friends are respectively defined in relation to the male love interest, Ruggiero and Tancredi, in Sarrocchi's poem, Silveria and Rosmonda first relate to each other outside of their connection to Vaconte. In fact, the two women freely establish their friendship before either of them meets the Christian knight.

Rosmonda first encounters Vaconte as he lies bleeding on the ground in her camp after having tried to carry out a night raid with his friend Oronte. Though he is the enemy and should be killed in accordance with her father's law of taking no prisoners, Rosmonda offers to let him live if he agrees to remain as her captive. Upon seeing her, Vaconte immediately falls in love with the fierce *guerriera* and agrees to be her prisoner. Rosmonda and Vaconte's romance begins as a tale of unrequited love; it is not until the end of canto 15 that Rosmonda becomes enamored with Vaconte as well (15.67–70). Their cross-faith love story resembles Bradamante and Ruggiero's tale; evidently missing however is the dynastic component of Bradamante and Ruggiero's marriage and Ruggiero's

wavering fidelity. As Cox aptly argues, unlike Ruggiero, "Vaconte is entirely devoted in his passion. He is the subordinate figure of the pair for a substantial segment of the poem, captured by Rosmonda on the battlefield and spending an extended period of time as her prisoner, in an interesting cross-gendered adaptation of Tasso's motif of Erminia as 'prisoner of love.'"[193] Pezzini also demonstrates that Rosmonda's imprisonment of Vaconte pertains to the "*topos* dell'allontanamento dell'eroe dalla sua missione ad opera di una donna pagana."[194] However, it at the same time diverges from the typical imprisonment narratives found in heroic poetry for three reasons: 1) in being captured, Vaconte is not taken away from the main action of the poem; 2) the locale of Vaconte's imprisonment is not a *locus amoenus*, and; 3) Vaconte is not placed under any spells or enchantments by a witchlike figure.[195] In addition to these reasons, Vaconte's imprisonment is a far cry from either Ruggiero or Rinaldo's in another way because his escape is made possible by Silveria and Rosmonda's joint efforts.

In canto 17, knowing that Vaconte and Rosmonda have grown fond of each other, the sultan specifically sends his daughter to repress the Christian forces that are blocking the incoming of goods into Presa in order to realize his plan to kill Vaconte. Not trusting her father to be alone with Vaconte, Rosmonda has Silveria keep watch over her beloved while she is away: "Ma per che prende al cor alto sospetto, / Vuol che Silveria col prigion [Vaconte] rimanga" (17.63). Rosmonda knows Silveria has her best interest at heart, which Silveria's subsequent actions prove. After she learns of the sultan's plan to kill Vaconte, Silveria places herself in danger by succumbing to the sultan's sexual advances to better understand his scheme. Rosmonda's concern for Vaconte's safety

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[193] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 182–83.

[194] Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 205.

[195] Pezzini, 205–6.

evidently also extends to Silveria: "ben rode il core à lei mordace cura / di sua Reina il sovrastante affanno" (17.65). The idea that a friend's worry is one's own and the decision to place oneself in danger at the sake of helping a friend recalls many of the classical and Renaissance heroic friendships previously examined as it echoes the Virgilian description of Acca as the "sole sharer of her [Camilla's] cares," and also calls to mind Nisus and Cloridano who both decide to turn back to save Euryalus and Medoro. Unlike Nisus and Cloridano who are killed in their attempted rescue missions, Silveria manages to escape her dangerous predicament through wit and diligence.[196] Even better, Silveria's flight from the sultan coincides with Rosmonda's return, leaving the two to join forces with Benci, one of Vaconte's companions, and successfully free Vaconte from his imprisonment (17.80–101).

In the *Furioso,* Bradamante and Marfisa become friendlier towards one another because of their respective connections to Ruggiero. As a result, Marfisa does not help Ruggiero along his trajectory because that is Bradamante's wish. Marfisa chooses to help guide Ruggiero towards his conversion and marriage to Bradamante because he is her brother. Silveria, by contrast, actively works to help those who are close to Rosmonda: those who are dear to Rosmonda are dear to her. The three confirm their closeness through Silveria and Rosmonda's dual conversion guided by Vaconte. Rosmonda's conversion occurs as her love for Vaconte transforms into divine love or *caritas* while Silveria's comes at the request of Rosmonda:

> La donzella real poiche tant'ama
> Silveria, che à da lei amata ella anco
> Com'hà candida suor la spoglia, brama
> Che dentro renda ancor l'animo bianco,

[196] The scene in which Silveria initially placates the sultan's advances to then successfully ward them off is an example of the Silveria's innate ingenuity. She uses reason, logic, and Muslim law to condemn the sultan for his lascivious desire for her: "Tu come giusto Imperator rammenta / che sotto al gran Macon nacqui non serva, Ch'à donna, ch'impudica ad huom consenta / Come à gran fallo, il Ciel gran pena serva, / Ond'io sarò di compiacer contenta / Solo à chi, come dee la legge osserva, / Che prohibisce l'amorose voglie, / Con libera sfogar, che non sia moglie" (17.69).

Ch'l rozo pastorello il Ciel pur chiama
A so del grande Imperator non manco,
Piace à Silveria, e bella al sacro fonte
L'alta à far Rosmonda, e'l suo Vaconte. (18.104.1–2)

The narrative depicts Silveria's conversion as a moment of reciprocal female love ("a donzella real poiche tant'ama/ Silveria, che à da lei amata ella anco"). Moreover, Sarrocchi evokes Christian notions of friendship by showing that the Silveria and Rosmonda's bond is important for their respective religious journeys. Through their union and conversion, they help bring one another closer to God. By aligning her representation of the women's dual conversion with Christian doctrine, Sarrocchi demonstrates how friendship achieves a somewhat transcendent quality by simultaneously bringing humans together and bringing humans to God. Thus, the sentiments evident in women's friendships align with Christian values.

The last scene in which readers find Silveria and Rosmonda together occurs moments before Silveria's tragic death in canto 22. In this penultimate canto, Silveria volunteers to fight an armed elephant sent by the sultan to attack the Christian army and wreak havoc on her comrades. Once again, Silveria places herself in danger to protect others. Though Silveria manages to kill the elephant, she is trampled by the large beast. In response to Silveria's death, Rosmonda displays symptoms of grief, similar to those of Achilles when he hears the fateful news that his friend, Patroclus has perished. Rosmonda first cries out, "Silveria mia, Silveria a dir riprende, / qual destin empio hor ne divide, e parte / qual mio grave fallir hor mi contendo / su nel cielo, ove poggi accompagnarte?" (22.98.1–4). Just as Achilles and Patroclus' friendship is portrayed as being eternal through the mixing of their ashes in the same urn, Rosmonda and Silveria's friendship also promises to be everlasting. Although Rosmonda laments not being able to accompany Silveria to heaven, she expresses her heartfelt belief that the two of them will be united in the afterlife, making their bond

both everlasting and celestial.[197] Their conversion thus has a positive impact on their friendship as it permits their eventual union in heaven.

As James Winn notes, "many narrative poems of comradeship follow this tragic pattern with the bereaved partner channeling his grief into suicidal violence."[198] However, this literary pattern usually regards the loss of a male friend. Out of the female friendships previously examined, not one of them includes a scene depicting a woman's grief after losing her friend. Yes, Acca is present at Camilla's death, but her anguish is never heard. Sarrocchi instead gives her female characters both a forum to express their sorrow and an opportunity to find closure. By depicting Rosmonda's grief, Sarrocchi follows the Iliadic model: "Molle de l'onde de begli occhi sparte, / E sì fatto dolor l'opprime in tanto, /che piu parlar non può, le non col piantò" (22.98.7–8). And in response to her friend's sorrow, Silveria responds "O imperatrice mia, / Te non per la morte la tua serva oblia" (22.99.7–8) to assure her friend that she will not forget her even in death. The scene and canto end with a depiction of Silveria, who even in death, finds peace and evokes Christian beauty.[199]

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While Sarrocchi indeed includes "epic" *clichés* of female conversion, marriage, and tragic death with respect to Rosmonda and Silveria's characters, she revises them to minimize the regressive impact they would have on the portrayals of her female pagan characters. Rosmonda's

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[197] Remarking on Silveria's death, Russell writes: "Silveria's death may symbolize the renunciations that a woman must be ready to make in order to succeed in the real world, and Rosmonda and Silveria together could be read as embodying Sarrocchi's complex discourse on life and gender." Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 36.

[198] Winn, *The Poetry of War*, 157.

[199] Her passing is similar in description to the moments after Clorinda's death: "Nube atra involse de' begl'occhi il sole, / E' un candido pallor tinge il bel volto, / Qual recisi talhor gigli, e viole, / E da vegine man giacinto colto, / Quando languir in su'l principio svole, / Nè à fatto il vago, ò l' bel color gli è tolto, / Par, che qual de gli Dei fatta homicida / Morte trionfi, e nel vel colto rida" (22.100). Compare with the depiction of Clorinda as she dies: "[d]'un bel pallore ha il biacno volto asperso, / come a' gigli sarian miste viole." Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.69.1–2.

and Silveria's conversions do not culminate in a dramatic moment that leads to one of their deaths (as is the case for Tasso's Clorinda for example). Additionally, even though Rosmonda marries, she does not "undergo the 'normalization' to which Bradamante is subject in the final cantos of the *Furioso*, where we see her relinquish her armor for female dress."[200] In fact, after her marriage to Vaconte, Rosmonda, alongside her companion, continues to answer the call to arms, the only difference being that she now fights for the Christians. Lastly, while some scholars have questioned the necessity of Silveria's death, unlike Camilla or Clorinda, she does not die by the hand of a man.[201] Thus, their conversion story, Rosmonda's marriage, and Silveria's tragic death, are not particularly salient moments that define them. Instead, it is through their friendship that their most honorable traits and values are brought to light, making a strong case for women's friendship as a model bond that perfectly fits within the tradition of heroic poetry. Moreover, their friendship gives them agency, but at the same time it does not tarnish their good names in any way—both convert to Christianity, Rosmonda marries, and Silveria heroically dies a virgin—showing that women's friendship can also coincide with Counter Reformation Christian values.

[200] Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 182.

[201] Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi," 205n34.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has shown how women in early modern Italy portrayed and interpreted female bonds in the genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry, addressing the dearth in scholarship on women's friendship from this period. In focusing on women's friendship, I hope to have offered some insight into the ways same-sex affective ties were practiced and understood in Renaissance Italy, complementing previous studies on homosocial ties from the same period. As my analyses have illustrated, early modern friendship, as both a practice and an ideal, was more nuanced than previously imagined. Even though androcentric writings on friendship dominated the cultural discourse on the topic, early modern women also participated in these discussions, specifically through writing, in order to attest to their philosophies about and experiences in these important relationships.

In chapter 1, we saw how for Elisabetta Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este letter writing functioned as a crucial communicative tool in the beginning years of their relationship that helped deepen their bond beyond that of sisters-in-law. Through their skillful implementation and manipulation of the letter's various modes of expressing and reciprocating intimacy—such as letters as a medium to alleviate geographical distance, letters to advance in-person contact, and letters to console and give gifts—the princesses show an acute awareness of the genre's capability for articulating friendly affection. They borrow Ciceronian and humanist language to convey warm sentiment, but also draw from the female experience to do so, giving a new gendered dimension to early modern friendship.

Chapter 2 illustrated how the women of the *Rime diverse di alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* use lyric to both build literary ties with each other and celebrate friendship through various classical, religious, and erotic modes. Through sonnet exchanges, lyric addresses, and *in morte* verse, they initiate and develop profound literary friendships with each other, mourn the deaths of their close

female friends, and experiment with conventions of Petrarchan verse, like the heterosexual love dynamic, to express mutual female admiration. In multiple instances, the female poets even imagine the coming together of a female community (very much like the one the lyric anthology creates) that privileges the all-female space where women can freely engage with one another as friends. Collected together, these lyrics paint a portrait of how widespread expressions of friendship and intimacy among female intellectuals were, once again countering the common notion that the experience of, and gratitude for friendship solely pertained to the male sphere.

In chapter 3, we traced the way Margherita Sarrocchi in the *Scanderbeide* revises the tradition of heroic friendship from Homer to Tasso to portray a close bond between two *guerriere*, rather than between two male knights. We also noted how Sarrocchi rewrites previous male-authored portrayals of female heroic bonds like that between Bradamante and Marfisa in the *Orlando furioso* or Clorinda and Erminia in the *Gerusalemme liberata*. Whereas authors like Ariosto and Tasso depict women's friendship as full of conflict and peripheral to the heterosexual amorous plot, Sarrocchi demonstrates how Rosmonda and Silveria's close tie forms on its own in a supportive manner, and indeed, can coexist with a traditional love narrative.

In the introduction to this study, I posed three critical questions to help shape my analysis of Elisabetta and Isabella's epistolary correspondence, the friendship lyric in the *Rime diverse*, and Margherita Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*, to which I would like to return in order to trace the common research threads that weave throughout the three chapters. The questions raised included: How do depictions of female friendship fit into the wider discussion of friendship in early modern Italy? How do these texts reflect historical examples of female friendship? How do the three genres of epistolary writing, lyric poetry, and heroic poetry each lend themselves to discourses of female friendship?

All the women I discuss in this study play with the friendship *topos* within their respective literary genres, entering their voices into larger, cultural discussions surrounding early modern *amicizia*. In each of the case studies, the women evoke recognizable classical tropes of friendship like sameness, reciprocity, and the friend as an *alter idem*, or other self. Some of them also write about friendship following in the Christian tradition, in which the friend aids one's journey towards God. Elisabetta and Isabella, especially in letters exchanged during the early years of their bond, implement Ciceronian epistolary tactics and rhetoric to generate intimacy and communicate their longing for one another. The poets of the sonnet exchanges in the *Rime diverse* yearn to forge ties with each other by reciprocating praise, depicting similar *topoi*, and even repeating same rhyme schemes, eradicating any hierarchy that exists among them to instead see each other on the same plain. Additionally, in the single-authored lyric, Livia Pii's elegiac poetry alludes to friendship as a spiritual bond, one in which she looks to her deceased friend as a celestial guide. Though Sarrocchi's Rosmonda and Silveria appear outwardly different, they complement each other and share the same ideals of virtue, courage, and faith; their similarities, rather than their differences, unite them. When Silveria's character dies in the penultimate canto, their friendship becomes transcendental; it is clear that she and Rosmonda will meet once again in heaven.

While in their writings early modern Italian women indeed appropriate classical and Christian understandings of friendship, they also highlight aspects of *amcizia* that are uniquely feminine. In Elisabetta and Isabella's letters, we saw how the experience of childbearing was grounded in a female setting; women in labor and postpartum women alike relied on a female support system—including servants, family members, and most importantly, friends—to aid and console them during these emotionally and physically exhausting periods. In the *Rime diverse*, the image of a female community occurs repeatedly throughout various women's lyric; for instance, it appears in Veronica Gambara's opening sonnet to Vittoria Colonna, Olimpia Malipiero's funerary

verse, and Selvaggia de Bracciolini's address to Maria Martelli de' Panciatichi. This repeated and gendered image evokes the notion of a sisterhood in which its participants relate to each other and share feelings of kinship as women. Similarly, in the *Scanderbeide*, when trying to recruit Silveria to join her in arms, Rosmonda employs female-specific language—she says to the wild huntress, "meco amata sarai più che sorella"—to denote that their relationship will even exceed the intimacy shared between sisters.[1]

I have also argued that women not only experimented with the *topos* of friendship within their respective genres but that they also played with the conventions of those literary forms, illustrating the ways these three genres lend themselves to discourses of female friendship. Elisabetta and Isabella for instance, blend various letter-writing styles like the epistolary language of ancient authors like Cicero and the *ars dictamini* to best articulate themselves in letters to friends. Rather than highlight heterosexual enamorment in their mini-*canzioneri*, which was often the case for many Petrarchists, Olivia Malipiero and Pii dedicate numerous lyrics within their small collections to grieve the loss of their friends. In doing so, they substitute women's friendship for love as the chief theme of their oeuvres. Sarrocchi in the *Scanderbeide* predominantly follows Tasso rather than Ariosto in her poetics. Yet, she also makes changes that are noticeably different, especially in terms of issues related to gender. Unlike the *Orlando furioso* and the *Gerusalemme liberata*, in the *Scanderbeide* there are no witch-like figures like Alcina or Armida, who imprison the Christian heroes of the poem. The pagan female characters in the *Scanderbeide* are also not punished as severely in comparison to Ariosto's or Tasso's texts. Though as I mentioned, Sarrocchi implements "epic" *clichés* of female conversion, marriage, and tragic death with respect to the characters of Rosmonda and Silveria, she minimizes

[1] Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide, poema eroico*, 13.41.6.

their impact so that her heroines are not marked by these moments; instead she underscores the close bond Rosmonda and Silveria share to signal the importance of this relationship.

Historically speaking, Elisabetta and Isabella's letters in addition to the lyric found in the *Rime diverse* depict different kinds of real, and in some cases, lived friendships. Elisabetta and Isabella's correspondence reveal the ways they used letter writing to maintain and upkeep their friendship, whether to affirm and reciprocate intimate sentiments, to plan future encounters, or to exchange gifts and consolation. Malipiero and Pii who mourn their deceased friends presumably, are, too, writing about their own close female companions, even enough not enough biographical information is known about them to concretely affirm their existence. Additionally, though it remains unclear whether the women of the *Rime diverse* who engaged in sonnet exchange ever met—like Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, Cornelia Brunozzi Villani, and Maria Martelli de' Panciatichi—their poetic correspondence illustrates the literary friendships that formed among them.

I have also previously argued that literary texts can be analyzed within a cultural framework to unearth cultural discourses, historical practices, and shared thoughts. One of the cultural frameworks apparent in all the case studies presented is the framing of conversation as a crucial aspect of women's friendship. These writings on friendship illustrate that the act of conversation and its representation and recreation through writing, lie at the heart of early modern women's friendship, real or imaginary. In the early years of Elisabetta and Isabella's relationship, the two women relied on letter writing to either reproduce the intimacy shared in live discourse when meeting in person proved impossible or to facilitate upcoming meetings by alluding to the pleasure experienced in the activity of conversation itself. For the women in the *Rime diverse*, lyric opened a non-competitive and dialogic space in which well-known and lesser-known female poets could communicate mutual admiration that ultimately promoted equality among them, a gateway to their

forging of closer ties with each other. Finally, in the *Scanderbeide*, conversation permits Sarrocchi's two heroines, Rosmonda and Silveria, to overcome their perceived differences as two women from opposing backgrounds and instead to help them find similarities, setting the foundation for their close friendship that then ensues. My argument aligns with that of Katherine Larson, who in her study on the importance of conversation as a social interaction in early modern England, contends that "conversation is not limited to oral interaction...[instead] written conversation regularly served as an extension of, model for, and alternative to oral exchange in early modern Europe."[2] Similarly, Sarrocchi's depiction of Rosmonda and Silveria's initial dialogue underscores the social act of conversation as an important tool that encourages intimacy among women and thus helps them to form the basis of their bond.

A last research thread that runs through the three chapters of this study is the political implications of female friendship in early modern Italy. The idea that women could not engage in perfect friendships because their duties were relegated to the domestic sphere was simply untrue, as can be seen in all of the women's writings examined in this dissertation. As princely consorts, Elisabetta and Isabella were among an exclusive class of women who held important civic duties, ones that allowed them to engage more freely with the public sphere than others. Their friendship was deeply embedded in their public roles. Through their connection to each other, they secured dynastic ties by negotiating marital contracts—most notably that between Elisabetta's adopted son, Francesco Maria della Rovere, and Isabella's daughter, Eleonora Gonzaga—and used each other's networks to aid their husbands in times of difficulty (i.e. when they were prisoners of war). The dialogic nature of *Rime diverse* created a forum, that though curated by Domenichi, brought women from various socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds together as writers in a male-dominated

[2] Katherine R. Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

literary scene. Moreover, the publication of this female lyric anthology revealed to a widened audience the number of women who participated in Petrarchism, one of the most celebrated literary phenomena of the time, and validated each other in this tradition. Lastly, as *guerriere*, Rosmonda and Silveria exercise civic duty. Alongside each other on the battlefield, they fight for the betterment of society, which in the poem signifies eradicating the Muslim threat to maintain Christian hegemony, a narrative whose message would have struck a chord with contemporary readers of Sarrocchi's poem as their world was consistently under Ottoman threat. Their friendship therefore is deeply political and as Gerry Milligan argues, "enters them [Rosmonda and Silveria] into the world of military glory."[3]

Around the world, the topic of female friendship has recently come to the fore thanks to the international success of the Neapolitan novels, a four-volume series by Italian writer Elena Ferrante that recounts the lifelong friendship, with all of its highs and lows, between the tetralogy's two heroines, Elena and Lila. The raw, passionate, and complex way Ferrante details the women's bonds has captivated many, including myself, and has compelled us to reevaluate the nature of these same-sex relations, which in my case has meant returning to the early modern period. I hope to have shown how early modern women in Italy wittingly took advantage of their respective genres to portray, interpret, and practice female friendship in a world that privileged male homosocial ties. By focusing on women's friendships in Renaissance Italy, an area in Italian studies scholarship that has never been systematically treated, "Ties that Bind" contributes to the larger transhistorical study of women's friendship in Italy. It is hoped that the corpus of texts by early modern women writers on friendship presented here may inspire others to join in tracing the evolution of female bonds from the Renaissance to the modern period.

[3] Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature*, 76.

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