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**LAURA'S LAURELS:
RE-VISIONING PLATONISM AND PETRARCHISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY
OF TULLIA D'ARAGONA**

by

Elizabeth A. Pallitto

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
The City University of New York**

2002

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ABSTRACT

**LAURA'S LAURELS:
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BY
ELIZABETH A. PALLITTO**

ADVISOR: CLARE CARROLL

This dissertation is a comparative study of the *oeuvre* of the Italian poet-philosopher Tullia d'Aragona (1510-1556), divided into the three genres in which she works—philosophical dialogue, lyric poetry, and chivalric epic. I read her works in terms the influence of Platonism (and Renaissance Neoplatonism) and Petrarchism. Using the theoretical paradigms of dialogism, intertextuality, and intersubjectivity, I demonstrate how in all of her work, Aragona engages with others: poets, canonical or contemporary; other philosophers and interpreters of Plato; and even her imagined diverse audience of men—and women—readers. This awareness of readers' subjectivities corresponds to a contemporary concept called *Rezeptionaesthetik*, or reader-response theory.

Aragona can be considered a Petrarchist, a paradoxical condition for a woman poet. Rather than considering the female "Petrarchist" an oxymoron, I propose reading Renaissance women poets in relation to traditions with which they consciously engaged. Although Tullia d'Aragona's literary "ancestors" have largely been male, she nevertheless utilizes their discourses in modes of negotiation, appropriation, and *creative* imitation. In addition to situating Aragona in relation to tradition, I examine what makes her work unique: her contribution to theoretical feminism the *querelle des femmes* (the *questione della donna* in Italian). I look both to Aragona's own writings to find the public "self" she constructed, and also to period sources for provide literary and historical context.

In sum, I attempt to demonstrate how Aragona makes her mark upon literary and philosophical traditions not created specifically for women, traditions that viewed them as either inferior or as a passive object of worship, and how, in her own work, she plays with gender, rhetoric, and formal features of the discourses she appropriates. In her dialogue, Aragona even suggests, humorously, the possibility of Petrarch's mute but adored Laura speaking: hence the title "Laura's Laurels." Currently, no book in English focuses upon Tullia d'Aragona as a central author, and Aragona's poems are mostly untranslated. In my dissertation and my translations of her poetry, I attempt to rectify both of those conditions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	ix
Preface.....	1
Laura Speaks: An Introduction to the “Other Voice” of Tullia d’Aragona	5
The Question of Theory and Chapter Summary.....	14
PART ONE In Dialogue: Form as Epistemology	
Chapter One: Thinking in Dialogue: Rhetoric as Philosophy in the Cinquecento.....	21
Chapter Two: Love Sacred and Profane: In Dialogue with Florentine Neoplatonism.....	33
PART TWO In Dialogue with Tradition: Tullia d’Aragona’s <i>Rime</i>	
Chapter Three: Metamorphosing the <i>Metamorphoses</i> : Ovidian Revisions by Tullia d’Aragona and Pernette du Guillet.....	68
Chapter Four: Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis: Petrarch’s Sestina XXII and Tullia d’Aragona’s Sestina LV.....	121
Chapter Five: Eternal Lines to Time: Embodied Souls, Immortal Poems. Tullia d’Aragona and William Shakespeare.....	137
PART THREE In Dialogue with Readers	
Chapter Six: A Fine Romance: The Chivalric Epic <i>Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino</i> and Cinquecento Poetic Theory.....	173
Conclusion: A Dialogue Between Center and Margin.....	192
Appendix I: <i>Le Rime della Signora Tullia d’Aragona</i> and English Translations.....	197
Appendix II: “A i lettori:” <i>Il Meschino</i> ’s Preface “To the Readers” and Translation...	222
Bibliography.....	233

PREFACE

This dissertation is a comparative study of the works of the Italian poet-philosopher Tullia d'Aragona (1510-1556). I have divided my analysis of her *œuvre* by genre: into philosophical dialogue, lyric poetry, and chivalric epic, the three genres in which she works. Respectively, Aragona's published works are: the 1547 *Dialogo della Signora Tullia d'Aragona della infinità di amore* (in English, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*);¹ *Le Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* (*Poems by Tullia d'Aragona and to Her by Others*), also 1547; and *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino* (*The Little Unfortunate One, Also Known as The Little Warrior*), published posthumously in 1560.² Aragona produced an *oeuvre* wide-ranging in scope and genre. An analogous female author with whom she might be compared is Veronica Franco, whose published writings were also prolific and diverse.³ Instead of using only women writers in my study, however, I have decided to respect what I perceive to be Aragona's desire: to be considered as an artist on an equal basis with canonical male authors. I have found it necessary, therefore, to proceed by genre and by discursive category: that is to say, my method has been to compare her work with that of various writers who are influenced by the traditions of Petrarchism, Platonism (including Renaissance Neoplatonism), or both.

¹ At present, only the *Dialogo* has been published in an English translation. The titles of other two works are translated in parentheses—for clarity—and do not refer to published works. Unless otherwise attributed, the translations in this thesis are my own. Quotes from Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo* are cited in Italian and then in English from the translation by Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry, entitled *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997). *Il Meschino* has yet to be translated.

² The epic is the most problematic in terms of authorial attribution, as it was published after Aragona's death. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have treated the work as authentic in a hypothetical manner.

³ Veronica Franco's works, some of which were printed posthumously, include: *Terze rime di Veronica Franca al Serenissimo Signor Duca di Mantova et di Monferrato* (Venice: 1575); *Lettere dall'unica edizione del MDLXXX*, ed. Benedetto Croce (Naples: Ricciardi, 1949); and *Lettere familiar a diversi* (Venice, n.p., 1580), published as *Veronica Franco: Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret Rosenthal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

The figures “compared” include authors of Neoplatonic dialogues (Leone Ebreo and Baldassare Castiglione); canonical lyric poets (Ovid, Petrarch, and Shakespeare) and sixteenth-century women writers (poets Louise Labé and Pernette du Guillet). In the chapter on epic, I analyze Aragona’s preface to the reader as a formulation of her literary theory and examine how that theory is borne out within the work. The final chapter also situates the epic in relation to the literary theory of the era: therefore I include references to the theory of the *romanzo* as well as its practice by writers and/or critics (including Ludovico Ariosto and Giambattista Giraldis Cinthio).

Using the theoretical paradigms of dialogism, intertextuality, and intersubjectivity, I demonstrate how in all of her work, Aragona engages with others: poets, canonical or contemporary; Renaissance philosophers and interpreters of Plato; and even the diverse audience of readers she envisions— men *and* women. Her literary works are marked, to an unusual degree, not only by an engagement with the literary past but also by authorial attention to readers’ perceived subjectivities. The presence of such concepts, now called “reader-response theory,” lends contemporaneity to my argument.

Rather than join in the chorus of readers who respond to Joan Kelly’s question, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in the negative, I prefer a qualified affirmative.⁴ Without denying the social realities faced by women in the Renaissance, I wish to affirm their textual achievements. Kelly’s idea that women fared worse in the Renaissance than

⁴ In her essay “Renaissance Women Defending Women,” in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 56; and Joan Kelly, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1984, Constance Jordan claims that feminist scholars agree with Joan Kelly that “women did not have a Renaissance, at least not in the ways that men did.” Perhaps, then, a new term (“flowering”?) is necessary to describe the phenomenon of works written—and published—by women in the sixteenth century.

in the Middle Ages is difficult to prove; for my purposes it is more useful to focus upon how women wrote when given the opportunity, how their work is marked by the literary conventions of the time, and how they managed to speak within those conventions.

The best scholarly criticism of Renaissance literature finds a balance between *imitatio* and *inventio*: adherence to tradition and creative variations within it. This balanced approach, initially applied in literary criticism to male authors, has been unfairly applied to women, especially to those who write in the Petrarchan genre. The limited perspective of some earlier Italian criticism does not allow for the possibility that variations within—and revisions of—Neoplatonism and Petrarchism by female authors constitute a category in themselves. Not only do Italian scholars of a previous generation like Benedetto Croce write disparagingly of Aragona, but also late twentieth-century critics like Francesco Bausi question the integrity of Aragona's oeuvre. Giulio Ferroni questions the intellectual authenticity of women's writing in discourses developed and defined by men (like Petrarchism), as serious literary works on par with canonical texts. Although this trend has been changing, even some contemporary critical writing is clouded by an ideological blindness, an inability to see Renaissance women as authentic intellectuals. Misreadings, ideological and philosophical, have led to errors in cataloguing, categorizing, and criticizing the work of Tullia d'Aragona and others.⁵

⁵ One aim of this dissertation is to identify errors of classification by earlier critics, with a view toward rethinking the categories themselves. To cite just a few examples of critics with whom I engage in polemics: contemporary critic Giulio Ferroni considers female versions of Petrarchism to be "subordinate" and "debased" (cf. *Poesia italiana del Cinquecento*, Milano: Garzanti, 1978); similarly, Fiora Bassanese sees women Petrarchists as oppressed by the need to "conform...to models they did not create;" their poetry a "self-betrayal" in "Private Lives and Public Lies: Texts by Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance," in *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 30 (1988), 295, 300; and Giuseppe Toffanin's dismissive inclusion of women writing on love "without having read Plato") *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, 130.

Fortunately, in recent years—the last two-and-a-half decades—we have seen much-needed scholarly work on Renaissance women writers by contemporary American and Italian scholars and new translations of texts by Renaissance women:⁶ Rinaldina Russell's translation of the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, introducing Tullia d'Aragona to readers in English; Margaret Rosenthal's literary biography *The Honest Courtesan*, which brought this talented writer into the limelight; the translation of Franco's *Poems and Selected Letters* by Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret Rosenthal; Ann Jones's much-needed study of Renaissance women poets, *The Currency of Eros*; Virginia Cox's translation of Moderata Fonte's *The Worth of Women*; Anne Dunhill's translation of Lucretia Marinelli's *Nobility and Excellence of Women* (Marinelli's answer to Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*); and Diana Robin's translations of Laura Cereta's *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*. I, too, aspire to make a contribution to the literary archaeology of works by women: in both my analysis and my translations of Tullia d'Aragona's work.

⁶ Contemporary secondary sources on Tullia d'Aragona include: Gloria Allaire, "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work" *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 16.1 (1995), 33-50. On the *Meschino*'s prose source text, see Allaire's book *Andrea da Barberino and the Language of Chivalry* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), and her article "Un ignoto manoscritto di *Guerrino il Meschino* di Andrea da Barberino nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana," in *La Bibliofilia* 96 (1994) 233-41. Scholarly work on Aragona's rhetoric and the cultural *milieu* in which she wrote includes Fiora Bassanese, "Selling the Self, or the Epistolary Production of Renaissance Courtesans," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 69-82; Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Rinaldina Russell, *The Encyclopedia of Italian Women Writers*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 26-34; Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Janet Levarie Smarr, "A Dialogue of Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Speroni Sperone," *Modern Language Notes* 113.1 (1998) 204-12; Katharina Wilson, *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* (New York: Garland, 1991).

LAURA SPEAKS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE “OTHER VOICE” OF TULLIA D’ARAGONA⁷

Ma bisognava che Madonna Laura avesse avuto a scrivere ella altrettanto di lui quanto egli scrisse di lei, ed avreste veduto come fosse ita la bisogna. (Just think what would have happened if Madonna Laura had gotten around to writing as much about Petrarch as he did about her: you’d have seen things turn out quite differently then!)⁸ —“Tullia” in the *Dialogo della Signora Tullia d’Aragona della infinità di amore*

What if a woman were to write in the Petrarchan mode, a subgenre predicated upon the carefully crafted poetic lament of a male poet’s unrequited love for a chaste, inaccessible female beloved? Not only does Tullia d’Aragona propose such an outrageous scenario, but she also takes pen in hand—her own—and proceeds to do just that in her *Rime*. Although such great strides have been made toward women’s emancipation and gender equity, it is essential to maintain a historicist consciousness: this was not always the case. The sexual double standard that required strict chastity of women also decreed their silence: the prohibitions against women’s education, speech, and published writing were very real in sixteenth-century Europe.⁹ Perhaps it was necessary that a courtesan tackle certain subjects: less restricted in her speech than a married noblewoman, Aragona could

⁷“The other voice” is the also title of a series on early modern women by the University of Chicago Press.

⁸ *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, ed. Mario Pozzi (Bari: Laterza, 1978), 201; trans. by Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry as *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 69.

⁹ The very real strictures on women’s speech (even within the dialogue genre) are historically contextualized in an informative and scholarly essay by Virginia Cox, “Seen but not heard: the role of women speakers in the Cinquecento literary dialogue” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 385–400.

express desire as well as speak frankly to the social and literary conditions of women.¹⁰

Summing up the issue in the phrase “Write or be written,”¹¹ Aragona chose to do both.

Previously the objects of love in courtly and Petrarchan poetry, women such as Aragona became the subjects of their own representations in literature and art.¹² Instead of emphasizing the political over the aesthetic, or one at the expense of the other, I have chosen to view the aesthetic *as* political. Renaissance women poets, like their male counterparts, wrote within existing discursive systems—Neoplatonism and Petrarchism. Although these modes often provoked dissension, satire, and revision by men of letters, women writing at this particular cultural moment were further constrained by the necessity of employing rhetorical and philosophical modes not created for their use. Even male writers became impatient with Petrarchan conventions. (See chapter 5, “Embodied Souls, Immortal Poems,” in which I read Shakespeare as a dissenting voice within the canons of Petrarchism and Platonism.) At any rate, the results of female appropriation of male-oriented forms are polymorphic and heterogenous variations on traditional themes, some of which will be examined here.

My analysis will focus upon Aragona’s deployment of the vocabulary, imagery, *topoi*, and forms of the poetic canon. Aragona’s work is Petrarchan in its formal

¹⁰ Aragona’s treatise anticipates works published on the subject fifty years later by Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, ed. Adriana Chemello (Venice: Eidos, 1988); ed. and trans. *The Worth of Women*, Virginia Cox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Lucretia Marinella, *La nobiltà, et l’eccellenza delle donne, co’ difetti, et mancamenti de gli huomini* (Venice: G. B. Ciotti, 1601), *The nobility and excellence of women, and the defects and vices of men*, edited and translated by Anne Dunhill. Although these *trattati* are not within the scope of this thesis, their authors can be considered the literary heir(esses) of Tullia d’Aragona.

¹¹ Women are not the only (silent) objects of representation. “Write or be written” is the motto of the Italian American Writers Association, founded in 1991 by Peter Carravetta, Robert Viscusi, and other colleagues.

¹² A later example of a woman artist who self-consciously stressed her gender while vying for recognition as an artist is Artemisia Gentileschi. See Mary D. Garrard’s article “Artemisia Gentileschi: The Artist’s Autography in Letters and Paintings” in *The Female Autograph*, ed. Domna Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 81-95.

properties, such as the use of the sonnet and the sestina, and in some of its subject matter. The additional influences of Ovid, Augustine, and Dante make her poetry easily distinguishable from clichéd, inauthentic Petrarchan poetry. As a reader of poetry, Aragona has immersed herself in the poetic canon, and her poetry reflects this wide reading—not only of Petrarchism and Platonism, but also of the protean voice of Ovid (I am thinking of his many *personae* in his *Metamorphoses*, *Heroides*, *Amores*, and *Ars Amatoria*) as well as Dante, who is quoted by Aragona in her dialogue. Most critics who have written on Aragona have not factored in the complexities of literary influence upon her *Rime* in close textual analyses.¹³

Using the methodology of close reading, I hope to convey to my readers the high aesthetic quality of Aragona's *Rime*—and how really reading her poems creates quite a different picture than one gets from the official literary histories of the last two centuries. The *persona* of the *Rime* is clearly female, but the point of view expressed is one in which the woman is the lover as well as the beloved, maker of poems as well as Muse. Perhaps her Michelangesque reference to God as the “gran fattore” (great creator) is no accident. At any rate, the perspective of Tullia d'Aragona's poetry is consistent with the proposal of her character “Tullia”: women poets have a very different story to tell.

To tell a story, of course, requires an audience. In her explicit envisioning of an audience of female readers, Tullia d'Aragona is quite ahead of her time. We can cite Christine de Pisan a century earlier and Tullia's contemporary Louise Labé; however, Aragona has some very specific things to say about women and reading. Aragona claims, in the preface to her epic, that she writes for the solace of women as well as for their

¹³ One notable exception to this rule is *The Currency of Eros* by Ann Rosalind Jones, *op. cit.*

pleasure.¹⁴ Aragona's preface is among other things, a response to another literary text: the "Proemio" of Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. Like Boccaccio, Aragona recognizes that women have fewer diversions than men to distract them from unhappy love affairs:

E chi negherà questo, quantunque egli si sia, non molto più alle vaghe donne che agli uomini convenirsi donare? Esse dentro a' dilicati petti, temendo e vergognando, tengono l'amorose fiamme nascose, le quali quanto più di forza abbian che le palesi coloro il sanno che l'hanno provate: e oltre a ciò, ristrette da' voleri, da' piaceri, da' comandamenti de' padri, delle madri, de' fratelli e de' mariti, il più del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere racchiuse dimorano e quasi oziose sedendosi, volendo e non volendo in una medesima ora, seco rivolgendo diversi pensieri, li quali non è possibile che sempre sieno allegri. (And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbor secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it. Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers, they live, so to say, a life of vacant ease, and, yearning and renouncing in the same moment, meditate divers matters which cannot all be cheerful.)¹⁵

Clearly, Aragona is alluding to Boccaccio's preface in her own. However, she goes beyond the negative construction of his preface to include the idea that reading can be *dolce* (delightful) as well as *utile* (useful). Apart from the obvious allusion to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Aragona asserts her knowledge of sixteenth-century poetic theory. Nevertheless, she includes Boccaccio among the authors of "lascivissime cose" ("filthy things"). Perhaps we can infer that Aragona is not really objecting to Boccaccio's *novelle*

¹⁴ Excerpted here, the entire text of Tullia d'Aragona's preface to the *Meschino* is translated in Appendix II.

¹⁵ Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, "Proemio," 9-10. Of course, this does not apply to women in the merchant and peasant classes, who had neither the leisure nor the training to be able to read. Aragona was one of the fortunate few whose father or guardian saw to it that she educated by tutors in her youth. In his *Cronica*, G. Villani, estimates that in 1338, 8,000 to 10,000 children were reading in six schools, and that 550 to 600 went on to study "grammatica e loica" (grammar and logic) in four great schools. According to E. Fiumi, this equals ten percent of Florence. Quoted in Christine Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 108. For Venetian women, Paul F. Grendler puts the figure at 5-6% percent, in his *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning 1300-1600* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 46. Francesca Medioli, *Le inferno monachale: Arcangela Tarabotti*, 136-7.

but to what we would call “misogynistic satirical works.” “Tullia” appears as a character, in an unflattering way, in some of the pornographic literary representations of the era.¹⁶

Unfortunately, Tullia d’Aragona’s reputation as a *poet* has suffered from what has been written about her as a *courtesan*. Italian literary criticism perpetuates this tendency by linking ideologically the life and the work of women poets. This is true of past critics such as Benedetto Croce and Francesco Bausi in the twentieth.¹⁷ The latter describes Petrarchan poetry by women as “attraversamenti subalterni e degradati del codice Petrarchistico”¹⁸ (“subordinate [inferior] and degraded versions of the Petrarchan code.”) Fortunately, not all critics view female Petrarchists as interlopers who produce degraded imitations of the Platonic Form that is Petrarchism. The other charge (which contradicts the statement by Ferroni above) is that Tullia d’Aragona’s work was written (or ghostwritten) by her friend Benedetto Varchi. It is evident that from a close reading of the poems that it was not the hand of Varchi that produced *Le rime della Signora Tullia d’Aragona*.¹⁹ I am thinking of poem XL, of the dignified pathos of the Philomela persona who speaks, after her metamorphosis, from the point of view of a woman who has

¹⁶ Giraldi, Giambattista Cinzio, *De gli Hecatommith[i] di M. Giovanbattista Gyraldi Cinthio* (Nel Monte Regale, Appresso Lionardo Torrentino, 1565); Pietro Aretino, *Sei giornate. Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia (1534), Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna a la Pippa (1536)*, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia

¹⁷ Francesco Bausi, “Le rime di e per Tullia d’Aragona,” in *Les Femmes Écrivains en Italie au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance*, Actes du colloque internationale, Aix-en-Provence, 12, 13, 14 novembre, 1992 (Publications de l’université de Provence, 1994). Bausi spends more than half of the article citing Tullia’s correspondence with Varchi and spends the rest quoting scurrilous poems in which Tullia is supposedly featured, as if unproven *ad feminam* aspersions amounted to literary criticism. His “proofs” that Tullia did not write her own poems are unconvincing, as they do not take into account the practice, as common in the period as it is today, of circulating poems among friends. This question is further explored in chapter three.

¹⁸ *Poesia del Cinquecento*, ed. Giulio Ferroni, (Milan: Garzanti, 1978), xxv.

¹⁹ A cursory reading of Varchi’s poetry, far inferior to that of Aragona, should settle this question. Cf. *Opere di Benedetto Varchi ora per la prima volta raccolte, con un discorso di A. Racheli intorno alla filologia del secolo XVI e alla vita e agli scritti dell'autore, aggiuntevi de Lettere di Gio. Battista Busini sopra l'assedio di Firenze* (Trieste: Sezione letterario-artistica del Lloyd Austriaco, 1858). Cf. n. 17 *sopra*.

survived unspeakable trauma.²⁰ Regardless of how sympathetic Varchi might have been, he most certainly did not create this persona or speak in this voice, as some have claimed.²¹

As we know, literature is produced in a social context: what *would* happen if women were the authors of their own books, not to mention their own destinies? I focus upon the aesthetic, a result of my early training in New Criticism. Nevertheless, I have found it difficult to disengage “purely” literary issues from the intersection of the literary and the political. As we know from existing biographical information on Aragona, she was not the master (or mistress) of her destiny. Fortune’s fickleness is a common *topos* in Renaissance literature and iconography,²² but even so, Aragona seems to have experienced more than her share of Fate’s cruelty. Throughout the *Rime* we find references to what she calls “empia sorte” or “rea sorte” (impious or malevolent fate), juxtaposed with her desire for recognition as a thinker and for poetic fame. She expresses this sentiment in poem XXXVIII: “if evil fate does not triumph over high desire, perhaps I will satisfy my longing.”²³ One gets a sense of her strong ambition as well as the

²⁰ Paradoxically, according to contemporary trauma theory, it is precisely the articulation of the trauma to a sympathetic audience that enables the healing process. See Susan J. Brison, “Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity” in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (Boulder, CO, and Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 1997), 13-39, 27.

²¹ Bausi is not the only critic to have made this claim. Benedetto Croce is also guilty of insulting asides disparaging Tullia’s worthiness as an object of love for Girolamo Muzio. For the latter, see Croce’s *Poeti e Scrittori del pieno e del tardo rinascimento* Vol. 1 (Bari: Laterza, 1958), 198-99. Francesco Bausi cites Varchi’s correspondence with Tullia as “proof” that her fame was unmerited “forse non del tutto meritamente” and that she did not write her own poems. In *Femmes écrivains en Italie au moyen âge et à la Renaissance* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l’Université de Provence, 1994), 273-92; “Con agra zampogna: Tullia d’Aragona a Firenze” in *Schede Umanistiche: rivista semestrale dell’Archivio umanistico rinascimentale bolognese*, No. 2, 1993, 61-91: essentially the same article as discussed in note 17.

²² See *Fortune: “All is But Fortune”* ed. Leslie Thomson (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000), a book of Renaissance iconographies of Fortune exhibited at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

²³ “Fatico ognhor per appressarmi al Cielo,/E lasciar del mio nome in terra fama./Non contenda rea sorte il bel disio./Che pria che l’alma dal corporeo velo/Si scioglia, satierò forse mia brama.” (“[Like you], I labor, aspire to reach the firmament, / and to leave my name renowned on earth. / If evil fate does not triumph

substantial obstacles faced by a female artist. Similarly, the narratorial *persona* of the *Meschino* (presumably conflated with Aragona) pleads with the Virgin Mary to restrain the hand of the Parcae (Fates) so that she can live to finish the epic.

The above language reveals affinities with a certain *Weltanschauung* that is more classical than Christian in its pessimism with regard to fate. On the other hand, a desire for wisdom and right thinking are also found in the poetry, expressed in the language of Christian penitence. It is impossible to know to what extent the penitential *topos* is “sincere,” given the climate of the encroaching Counter-Reformation: writers often performed self-censorship in anticipation of the censors of the Inquisition. In the *Meschino*’s preface, the author expresses regret not so much for what she has done (under financial and other constraints) but for the “necessary or misfortune which caused her early loss of innocence. To me, this suggests an *ante litteram* awareness of social problems as well as a protofeminist consciousness.

While the word “feminism” did not exist as such in the sixteenth century, the woman question did: as the *querelle des femmes* in France and the *questione della donna* in Italy. The use of the discourses of natural philosophy and law to rethink the ontological and legal categories to which women had been relegated is also known as the “discourse of the subject.” The terms *femminismo teoretico* and *femminismo moderno* are used by Italian feminist scholar Ginevra Conti Odorisio to distinguish between early theorizing of tenets later known as feminist and later efforts toward the political practice of those tenets. While much contemporary feminist scholarship focuses upon the latter, early modern cultural historians have made contributions to the study of women in the

over high desire. / Perhaps before my soul is rent/from its corporeal veil, I will satisfy this thirst.”) My translation. Numbered as XXXVII in the 1891 *Rime* (ed. Celani), this poem is 28th in the 1547 edition.

Renaissance. I wish to add a different kind of scholarly depth to my enterprise: intertextual criticism, i.e. reading Aragona in the light of literary and philosophical source texts as well as the work of her contemporaries. Looking forward chronologically in terms of indirect influence, I will compare her work to that of Shakespeare, who is working, in a revisionary mode, with Petrarchism as well as Neoplatonism.

Reading Renaissance women writers in relation to traditions with which they consciously chose to engage seems a more valid critical practice than dismissing as a “bad fit” the entire literary phenomenon of *Petrarchismo femminile*. Proceeding from the assumption that Aragona’s published writing was a source of pleasure and pride, as she claims, I begin by translating her poetry and the literary “theory” contained in the preface to her epic. I then use intertextual and historicist approaches to ground my findings in the theory and practice of the day. Recent work by scholars such as Ann Rosalind Jones and Fiora Bassanese has made me acutely aware of the public “self” that Aragona constructed in her writing, and has led me to search for context in the social settings in which the “performance” of these works occurs. My awareness of period sources was heightened in a Folger seminar with Daniel Javitch on poetic genre theory. The seminar thus provided me with a literary-historical context for the artistic choices Aragona made, especially in her epic. Thus I situate Aragona’s work, not only in relation to the traditions of Platonism and Petrarchism, but also with respect to period quarrels such as the sixteenth-century debates over the interpretation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

What is the *status quaestionis* of Tullia d’Aragona in literary criticism to date? Not completely unknown in the world of letters, she is not properly evaluated either. Venerable tomes of the history of Italian literature make brief note of her, according her

work such varying degrees of merit that one wonders whether these critics read her work closely, and with what criteria in mind. On the other hand lies the danger of an anachronistic feminist reading. I have striven to avoid imposing contemporary standards on sixteenth century poets, especially since Petrarchism was the reigning discourse for lyric poets. The fact that Renaissance women writers had to appropriate language(s) not their own seems to have challenged rather than oppressed them: In the chapter on the *Metamorphoses*, I focus upon a nontraditional “imitation” of traditional discourse.

How do we read gender into texts? To some degree, all critics (including myself) read their own preoccupations into literary works, particularly concerning women and sexuality.²⁴ In Italian criticism, Tullia d’Aragona has been assigned to the ideologically charged category of “courtesan poets.” In the words of one critic, for example, “La poetessa aveva insomma salvata la cortigiana” (“the poet has saved the courtesan”).²⁵ What if the profession of courtesan was not exactly a choice, as implied in the preface to her readers? Literary historians cannot seem to separate the words “courtesan” and “poet” when discussing Tullia d’Aragona. By contrast, I find that male literary figures are not judged according to their biographies to the extent that women writers are. In an era when women were to be “chaste, silent and obedient” (now a commonplace in scholarship of the period) a loquacious courtesan tends to attract a sensationalistic response. Past criticism has focused too much upon the courtesan; I aim to offer a portrait of the artist.

²⁴ I have been influenced by Vincent Crapanzano’s theory that the anthropologist, like the literary critic, cannot but read himself (or herself) into the fieldwork study or the text. See the introduction to his book *Tuhami, portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1980). I too admit a certain subjective point of view.

²⁵ Salvatore Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari* (Rome: Presso i Principali librai, 1890), 187.

In sum, I attempt to demonstrate how Aragona makes her mark upon literary and philosophical traditions not created specifically for women, traditions that viewed them as either inferior or as a passive object of worship, and how, in her own work, she plays with gender, rhetoric, imagery, and the formal properties of Petrarchan lyric. In her dialogue, Aragona even suggests, humorously, the possibility of Petrarch's adored, mute Laura speaking. This is why I have chosen to title my work "Laura's Laurels." Currently, there is no book in English that focuses upon Tullia d'Aragona as a central author, and many of Aragona's poems remain untranslated. In this dissertation and in my translations of her poetry, I attempt to rectify both of those conditions.

THE QUESTION OF THEORY AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

This dissertation will present arguments for the literary merit, originality (within the parameters of Renaissance *imitatio*), and potential canonicity of the philosophical and literary work of the sixteenth-century Italian writer Tullia d'Aragona. In framing my own discursive strategies, I found that the work of Aragona and other Renaissance women poets is not fully addressed by existing theoretical paradigms, and even opens a space for the formulation of a new kind of feminist theory. Feminists who would have Renaissance women writers fit their own conception of feminism display an ahistorical consciousness in judging the ideologies of an earlier period by contemporary standards.²⁶ Furthermore, the concept of "originality" did not exist for Renaissance women poets as it did for the Romantic poets, for example. "Imitari is nothing," mocks Shakespeare's Holofernes precisely because his creator knew that in Renaissance poetry, imitation is everything.²⁷

Not all theories of literary influence apply to the complex relationship of women writers to the androcentric discursive categories of Platonism and Petrarchism. While Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" is interesting, it would need to be adjusted to accommodate women poets—and Romance-language intertextuality.²⁸ The most useful theory of imitation is that of Thomas Greene, who divides Renaissance

²⁶ In the French edition of *The Defiant Muse* (NY: Feminist Press, 1986), xxv, Domna Stanton excludes Louise Labé from an anthology of feminist poetry because the Petrarchan code Labé employs does not fit her definition of feminism. I admire greatly Stanton's scholarship and her perceptive analysis of academic feminism in the early 1990's; nevertheless, this position partakes of the Petrarchan dilemma analyzed in this thesis. I cannot help but note that the editor's definition of a "feminist poem" is in reaction to a reactionary anthology of poetry, *La poésie féminine*, 2 vols., ed. Jeanine Mounin (Paris: Seghers, 1963-66).

²⁷ "Imitari is nothing. So doth the hound his master, the ape his keeper, the tired horse his rider." William Shakespeare, *Love's Labor Lost*, 4.2. Quoted in Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 44.

²⁸ In her essay "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981) 137, Ann Jones notes that Bloom's psychoanalytic model excludes women poets.

imitatio into sacramental, eclectic, heuristic,²⁹ and dialectical. The texts that I will analyze occupy various points on the imitative spectrum. The dynamic of female Petrarchism tends to produce texts that employ heuristic or dialectical imitation. In this mode, the struggle between two texts assumes a dynamic or agonistic relation—or to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, a “dialogic” function.³⁰ I have also found useful the psychoanalytic theory of Jessica Benjamin (*The Bonds of Love, In the Shadow of the Other*). Benjamin’s work has contributed to my reading of intersubjectivity in Aragona’s relationship to her real and anticipated readers. Benjamin’s rereading of Freud, emphasizing a mutual recognition of subjectivity rather than the asymmetrical Oedipal model, provides a rational and much-needed alternative to essentializing interpretive discourses, both Freudian and French. This statement needs to be qualified in light of feminist versions of Freudian theory by Nancy Chodorow and others in recent decades. Nor do I wish to present French theory as essentializing, but I have found less useful to my project the Lacanian strain which persists in duality, associating the male with reason and the female with the irrational (a question Aragona addresses).³¹

Tullia d’Aragona predates “feminism” per se, but anticipates feminist thought.³²

She questions philosophical ideas of female inferiority and remarks upon the silence of the woman in Petrarchan poetry, commenting with acerbic irony, “If Madonna Laura had

²⁹ “Heuristic” imitation is “the rite of passage from an earlier semiotic matrix to a modern one;” in dialectical imitation, the later writer engages in a dialogue with the text. Greene, *The Light in Troy*: 41–45.

³⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited and translated Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Other writers on the dialogue whose work I found helpful include: Virginia Cox, Raffaele Girardi, David Marsh, Walter J. Ong, and Jon Snyder (see bibliography).

³¹ For the specific way in which Aragona addresses this association, see my chapter two, page 32, note 71.

³² Constance Jordan, “Women Defending Women: Arguments Against Patriarchy” in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 55.

gotten around to writing as much about Petrarch as he wrote about her, you'd have seen things turn out quite differently then!"³³ Thus, the stage is set for a new type of writing: through Aragona's female persona in the poems and her character in the *Dialogue*, a silent Laura is replaced by a dialogue of women with men.

There is always a dialogic dynamic in the rhetorical structures of Aragona's work: from the *Dialogue* itself, to the exchange-sonnets, to "A i Lettori," the preface addressing her readers in the chivalric epic *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino*, Tullia d'Aragona works in a dynamic of exchange, where communication is expected, implied; the reader's response anticipated. She is concerned with intersubjectivity—in relations between lover and beloved, between poets in relation to one another, and between author and audience. Her work is enhanced by her awareness of the subjectivity of others.

Chapters one and two will deal with the dialogue in general and Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue in particular. Body and soul—and the synthesis of these usually antithetical entities—comprises a main theme in Aragona's work. The relationship of body and soul is certainly central to the *Dialogo della Signora Tullia d'Aragona della infinità di amore* (*Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, henceforth called the *Dialogo*). Aragona situates her dialogue in relation to Plato's *Symposium*, as did many other writers of love dialogues, or *trattati d'amore*, in the Cinquecento. In Neoplatonic philosophy, love is viewed in the terms of Pythagorean dualities, or binary oppositions: vulgar/honest; corporeal/spiritual; Venus Pandemia (earthly)/Venus Urania (celestial).³⁴ While these

³³ *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry. 69.

³⁴ As much of the first chapter is devoted to defining—in fact, to Aragona's redefining—Platonism and Neoplatonism. I will not attempt an oversimplified definition here. Let it suffice to say that Neoplatonism is a term coined in the nineteenth century to describe interpretations of Plato from the third century (such as that of Plotinus, who incorporated some ideas from Aristotle as well: namely, the equation of Being with intelligence) to the sixteenth, when Marsilio Ficino published his famous commentary on the *Symposium*.

categories are standard in the period, Aragona's redefinition of the "vulgar" and "honest" categories is quite new, as is her affirmative view of the ontological equality of male and female. Depending upon one's reading of Plato's *Symposium*, Aragona either revises the theory of love set forth therein or recuperates something of its original spirit.

Just as Aragona offers a rereading of Plato counter to the prevailing currents of Neoplatonism, she creates a unique version of belated or post-Petrarchism.³⁵ Two centuries after Petrarch, Aragona engages intertextually with this most influential poet of the Italian Renaissance, breathing new life into what had become a clichéd formula.³⁶

Chapters three, four and five will deal with Aragona's *Rime* and its intertextual relationship to the work of three canonical poets: Ovid, Petrarch, and Shakespeare. In chapter three, "Metamorphosing the *Metamorphoses*" I examine the use of Ovidian myth by Aragona and Pernette du Guillet. In her Rymes, Pernette speaks of the "mots doretz" ("golden words") she will produce, just as Tullia declares her desire to transcend earthly limitations. As this is a single-author study, I expend more critical attention upon Aragona's poem than du Guillet's. However, the work of these two poets form a suitable pair for the theme of this chapter: woman as maker of poems as well as the muse of others, both subject and object of representation and desire.

In chapter four, a reading of Aragona's sestina, 'Oscuro il Sole,' I uncover a Petrarchan intertext and compare Petrarch's XXII (also a sestina) with Aragona's LV. I examine this unique poem to see whether it falls into the category of "sacramental" imitation. Sestina LV, unusually faithful to its Petrarchan intertexts, stands in opposition

³⁵ This term comes from Roland Greene's book, *Post-Petrarchisms*. Greene argues for the centrality of the lyric sequence: not only to Italian literature, but to poetry in general.

³⁶ For over two centuries, lyric poets in Italy, England, Spain, and France engaged in various forms of Petrarchan *imitatio*.

to critical assertions that Petrarchism constitutes an act of bad faith on the part of women poets. On the contrary, Aragona seems to find her own voice within the conventions and imagery of the Petrarchan sestina.

Finally, in “Eternal Lines to Time” (chapter five), I read Shakespeare in the light of his approaches to the Petrarchism and (Neo-)Platonism of his time and place. Examining Aragona’s *Rime* alongside Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, I demonstrate how both of these poets depart from—and adhere to—Neoplatonic themes of idealization, procreation, and immortality.

The original edition of the *Rime* had 39 sonnets and a closing sestina; the 1891 version edited by Enrico Celani comprises 55 poems, including variants of poems and concluding with a one-stanza poem of eight lines. Comparing the two versions, I have found the original order and arrangement to be more effective, as sestina LV ends on a note of affective sublimity and apocalyptic finality. In Aragona’s *Rime*, a new voice in the love lyric becomes manifest: an openly expressed female voice of desire for the other—and for recognition, patronage, and tribute. The *Rime* range from flattering sonnets to her patrons Eleonora di Toledo and Cosimo de’Medici, to poems addressed to fellow poets, lovers, and teachers in the art of poetry, like Pietro Bembo. LV, a sestina, functions as a closing poem, giving a sense of completion to Aragona’s lyric *raccolta*.

Chapter six will deal with the chivalric epic attributed to Aragona: *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino* and the epic’s preface, addressed “to the readers” (“A i lettori”). Because this text was published posthumously, there is some scholarly debate about the authorship of the *Meschino*. My arguments about Aragona’s work in general do not depend on the epic’s authenticity. However, once readers become familiar with this

little-read *romanzo*, perhaps they will recognize Tullia's "signature" in its pages. Of all three works attributed to Aragona, this latter one shows the most poetic dexterity: it demonstrates the author's ability to work on a large scale and to sustain a narrative over great distances in time and place. This fanciful *romanzo* features a cross-dressing female narrator, possibly another of Tullia's *personae*.

In sum, Tullia d'Aragona, the major author in this dissertation, is an important writer—one whose work has long awaited a book-length study in English. Her work has potential application in many disciplines: philosophy, poetry, Italian studies, literary theory, rhetoric, humanism, women's studies, and of course, history. While a huge body of work exists on Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, we have not yet begun to harvest (*sfruttare*) the potential of this woman writer of the Italian Renaissance—not to mention exploring her indirect influence—in the concept of embodied love—on later poets, including William Shakespeare and John Donne.

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING IN DIALOGUE: RHETORIC AS PHILOSOPHY IN THE CINQUECENTO

[Humanist works] often seem to lack not only originality, but also coherence, method, and substance, and if we try to sum up these arguments and conclusions, leaving aside citations, examples, and commonplaces, literary ornaments and digressions, we are frequently left with nearly empty hands. Thus I have not been convinced by the attempts to interpret these humanistic treatises as contributions to speculative thought.³⁷

Fate il contrario di quello che faceva egli, perciocché egli apparava e voi insegnate. (You do the opposite of Socrates: he adopted a learning stance, whereas you are imparting lessons.)³⁸

In this chapter I ask questions about the dialogue form in general before I touch upon the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*—and its relevance to the teaching of rhetoric and philosophy. Why is this particular genre neglected in the curriculum? Can this exaggeratedly rhetorical mode accommodate serious philosophical content? What is the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, i.e., how does the nature of thought embodied in the dialogue manifest itself in the rhetorical mode of the *trattato*? How is the Renaissance dialogue a literary descendant of Plato's *Symposium*, and in what ways does it differ? Is Aragona's dialogue truly philosophy, or is it a "frivolous" attempt at literary sophistication by an immoral dilettante?³⁹ I maintain that under the veil of sophistic humor, Aragona's *Dialogue* predates and foreshadows later concepts in the history of ideas—concepts usually associated with the Enlightenment—in its emphasis upon nature, reason, and experience.⁴⁰

³⁷ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Humanist Movement" in *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanistic Strains* (New York, 1961), 17-18.

³⁸ "Tullia" to Varchi, in *Trattatisti*, 198; *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 67. Translation modified.

³⁹ This is the position taken by Nesca Robb in her critique of Aragona's *Dialogue* in *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1935), 205. While Robb sees the *Dialogue* as artificial and frivolous, she concedes (equally without evidence) that Tullia's *Rime* are characterized by "the warmth of experienced emotions." While I agree with the latter point, Robb gives no evidence for either.

⁴⁰ See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951).

In my high school English composition class (which followed a curriculum established, admittedly, before postmodernism and its objection to binary oppositions), I was taught to anticipate the arguments of my opponent and to argue in a dialectical mode. One could argue with the philosophy behind this model; however, many educators consider dialogism still useful in teaching rhetoric at the undergraduate level.⁴¹ Yet how many instructors ground the teaching of writing and rhetoric in a historicized framework of the classical dialogue? Furthermore, existing curricula are marked by a conspicuous “absence” of philosophy of the Italian Renaissance—with the exception of Machiavelli. Survey courses and textbooks often skip the period entirely.⁴²

This is somewhat understandable: the Renaissance dialogue seems to be going nowhere, or takes so long to get somewhere that it taxes one’s attention span. Analytical thought has taught us that our philosophical texts should be linear, not meandering; logical, not dialogical. An analytical philosopher with whom I team-taught the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* found its non-linear quality, (what Italians call dialogue’s “girevole strada, or “winding path”) obfuscating.⁴³ As such, Aragona’s dialogue is not a useful paradigm for student writing or academic discourse. Yet the meandering quality of the dialogue—and the *Dialogo*—is partly a function of a pre-Cartesian *mentalité* and of the transition from orality in “literature” to the printed word. Just as the Internet is having a revolutionary impact upon the contemporary world of letters, so the printing press

⁴¹ Kay Halasek, *A Pedagogy of Possibility* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).

⁴² Please note the distinction between undergraduate curricula and serious philosophers, such as Eugenio Garin: *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano: ricerche e documenti* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1979).

⁴³ Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*, trans. John Michael Krois and Azizeh Azodi (Carbondale, IL: South Illinois University Press, 2001).

effected (and reflected) a similar paradigm shift in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁴ Though ostensibly a firsthand account of a spoken conversation, the Renaissance dialogue was produced in printed form. A product of this dual medium, the *trattato* can be seen as a transitional genre evolving into multiple forms, much as Bakhtin envisions the evolution of the novel.⁴⁵

With the evolution in generic form came a change in content: Renaissance dialogue became a vehicle for reconceptualizing ancient philosophy.⁴⁶ The effect of the intellectual and technological changes upon the dialogue's evolution is an opening up of thought at the hermeneutic level. To quote one scholar who specializes in the form: "what kind of thought thinks itself in dialogue form?"⁴⁷ A possible short answer would be "anti-dogmatic thought"—a movement away from catechistic Scholasticism and toward a spirit of inquiry exemplified by thinkers such as Galileo. In American philosophy departments, in which analytical philosophy is the reigning mode, this spirit is associated more with the Enlightenment than with the Renaissance.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Martin Elsky, *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing, and Print in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: the Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: NLB: Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976).

⁴⁵ Much of what Bakhtin says is true of the novel alone applies to the dialogue, thus giving an unintentional ironic cast to his insistence upon the novel's uniqueness: "The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. The novel...best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it." *The Dialogic Imagination*, 7.

⁴⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin; Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy*; Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982, 1988).

⁴⁷ Mark Jordan, "A Preface to the Study of Philosophical Genres," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 14:4 (1981) 199-211.

⁴⁸ The Enlightenment's origins are generally considered English, French and German, disregarding the intellectual contribution of the Italian Renaissance in the dialogue form.

Philosophy and Rhetoric: Happy Marriage or Diaphoristic Divorce?

The relationship between poetry and philosophy, vexed since Plato's *Republic*, has been described as agonistic. The term "diaphora" also is used to describe this ancient quarrel.⁴⁹ Such distinctions, however, did not hold in the Renaissance, and this point is crucial to my argument. The Renaissance dialogue, or *trattato d'amore* is a direct descendant of the *Symposium* of Plato. Renaissance imitations of the *Symposium* were ambitious attempts at metaphysical speculation, previously considered the province of theology, whereas other *trattati* dealt with less weighty questions of social comportment. Rhetoric and poetry function in these dialogues as a form of play, of intertextual reference, or as content.

Some consider philosophy almost as a Platonic Form, independent of language rather than conveyed through language—indeed, some philosophers write as if this were so. For contemporary readers, Renaissance language may be obscured by rhetorical artifice. The potential frustration of those readers for whom linguistic clarity equals clarity of thought is understandable. In my experience, the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* has met this fate. To a present-day analytical philosopher, Neoplatonism may seem obscure and unsystematic, abstruse mysticism intertwined with interpretations of Plato.

Is the Renaissance dialogue to be read as philosophy, as rhetoric, or to be read at all? One reason for the devaluation of Renaissance philosophy is the Ramist paradigm shift in the way knowledge is constructed and taught. For some, the move from dialogic treatises to Cartesian thought marks the end of humanism, and the beginning of the *diaphora* between poetry and philosophy.

Ramus's concern with method is in one sense the culmination of humanist pedagogy....But Ramus also marks the death of humanism, for while the Ramist reform of the arts curriculum seems to derive in part from the humanist interest in method, it actually results in the

⁴⁹ Peter Carravetta, *Prefaces to the Diaphora*. I discuss Carravetta's work later in this chapter.

subordination of invention and disposition to logic, and the reduction of rhetoric to elocution—now conceived of, in the best of all possible worlds, as inessential.⁵⁰

This is not to over-idealize pre-Ramist rhetorical dialogues as equally worthy of speculative thought. I do wish to emphasize, however, the relative epistemological openness of the form, with the aim of discovering its particular applications.

Humanist thought valorized evidence revealed by the senses, by experience, that which is verifiable by others. It is characterized by less of a medieval vertical emphasis upon the relationship between self and God, and more emphasis upon the horizontal—the individual subjectivity, or the presence of another (an Other). The Renaissance *trattato d'amore*, or treatise on love, is suited to an intersubjective epistemology, which is perhaps one reason why *eros* is a pervasive theme in the *trattati*:

L'esperienza platonica più consistente nella letteratura del Cinquecento è quella della discussione sull'amore...anzi lo sviluppo della forma dialogica, che affronta la tematica morale e culturale più varia oltre quella amorosa, si spiega proprio con la fortuna diretta dei dialoghi platonici. (...[T]he Platonic experience occurring most frequently in the literature of the Cinquecento is a discussion of love...thus, the development of the dialogic form, which confronts a moral and cultural thematic beyond that of love, makes itself clear with the direct line of development [literally, fortune(s)] of the platonic dialogue.)⁵¹

The dialogue came to be the genre of choice for interrogating questions previously considered the province of theology, such as the spirit-matter debate. In the Renaissance, this debate is disguised as an endless, seemingly frivolous conversation about love, *eros*. Its subject is really *eros* in a larger sense: friendship, love, and community, the *eros* of the state.⁵² Thus by its very form dialogue moves away from solipsism and catechism and toward a wider interpretive community, the public sphere (or the reading public, at least).

Jon Snyder and Victoria Kahn also comment upon the intrinsic intersubjectivity

⁵⁰ Victoria Kahn, "Humanism and the Resistance to Theory" in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 375.

⁵¹ *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. 4, ed. Enrico Malato (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1995) 498.

⁵² Thanks to M. B. Mineo for her insights on the political dimension as one of the many meanings of *eros*.

of the genre.⁵³ The dialogue form constructs knowledge itself in a specific way: as soon as there is a second subjectivity present within the dramatic frame, the locus of authority is dissipated or less easily located—as is the point of view of the author. For a public intellectual like Galileo, this could be useful in distancing oneself from one's position. The tension oscillating between contrary positions lends interest to the subject matter and distributes the responsibility, if individual responsibility was too heavy a burden to bear. Humor also functioned as an essential component of the genre, protesting (too much, sometimes) about the relative unimportance of what was being said.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, what was being asked, or investigated. To quote Mark Jordan: "The question is not, 'Why should a dialogue be chosen?' The question is, 'What kind of thought thinks itself as a dialogue?'"⁵⁴ He is commenting on another philosopher, Albert William Levi, who asks the first question. Renaissance dialogues tend toward epistemological skepticism, presenting two (at least) sides of a question, with the possibility of having an open-ended conclusion—or no conclusion. More than in the Socratic dialogues, the Renaissance dialogue dramatizes the possibility of testing reality, of vying with the Other.

In the dialogue, furthermore, some of the same possibilities for tension exist as in classical drama. Although the dialogue constitutes a genre or a set of genres of its own,

⁵³ Jon Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking: Theories of Dialogue in the Late Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989); Kahn, Victoria, "Humanism and the Resistance to Theory," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint, 388. In critiquing Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kahn comments, "Clearly, this monological constraint of nature is incompatible with the early humanists' resistance to theory, their insistence on intersubjective dialogue or rhetoric *in utramque partem* as the model of human cognition and action." Though one does not find such a "resistance to theory" in the thought of Tullia d'Aragona (and the refutation of such a claim is the first part of my argument), I agree that the dialogue—and works which take a dialogic shape—are absolutely and intrinsically intersubjective, i.e., they partake of the dynamic between the point of view, or if you will, the consciousness, of two parties.

⁵⁴ Mark Jordan, "A Preface to the Study of Philosophical Genres" in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 14, no. 4 (1981), 199-211.

the dramatic form of the classical dialogue cannot but have an impact upon its content. As Virginia Cox points out in *The Renaissance Dialogue*, “the act of persuasion is being played out before us, and we cannot simply absorb the message without reflecting on the way in which it is being sent and received.”⁵⁵ Cox has written about the dialogue’s impact on the reader who is by definition outside the “scene” as a third interpretant.⁵⁶ Her book raises the question of how we react to its mimetic aspects, keeping in mind the anticipated reader’s responses and the artifice of the genre.

Thus, the dialogue form is more than a literary genre: it is a modality of thought whose very epistemological openness is essential to the development of Renaissance humanist philosophy. More than any other genre, the dialogue by its very essence dramatizes or reenacts the coming together of “two or more subjectivities which cannot fail to take account of one another,” even if one should triumph in a particular dialogue. here one should distinguish between the dialogues in which Socrates questions someone until he realizes the “lesson” he is being taught, and the more aporetic dialogues, which end with the possibility of formulating new question(s). Because of their subject matter, however, Plato’s dialogues are the primary model to be considered in any discussion of the Renaissance love treatise, or *trattato d’amore*, the type of dialogue discussed below.

As soon as there is a second subjectivity present within the dramatic frame, the locus of truth is no longer co-opted by one authoritative party. As opposed to the *sic et non* catechistic form of the Scholastics, Renaissance humanists chose dialogic forms of thought, variously called quarrels, debates, *quaestiones*, *disserere in utramque partem*

⁵⁵ John Charles Nelson, *The Renaissance Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

⁵⁶ Umberto Eco, *Trattato della semiotica generale* (Milano: Bompiani, 1975); *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

(“arguing on both sides of the question”), and *dialoghi* (“dialogues”). In these forms, “truth” is less easily located—as is the point of view of the speaker. The author may or may not be represented by the point of view of any one of the speakers, or by all of them. This epistemological dislocation makes the form most open to intellectual inquiry, prefiguring elements of the modern—and even the postmodern.

In the Renaissance dialogue is an *ante litteram* suspicion about the duplicity of language. Literary postmodernists begin with an assumption of this doubleness—or should. To quote from the work of a contemporary in postmodern philosophy and hermeneutics, the duplicity—or multiplicity which characterizes language should be a given in our literary—and social—interpretations:

Criticism should be a risky, duplicitous, and uncanny experience. *Risky*, because it should take to task dominant, authoritative, practices of discourse, implicitly, but even more, explicitly, subverting—or attacking—selected existing institutionalized, coercive, and leveling orders....*Duplicitous*, because it is in the nature of language, history, and being, to be double...this duplicity is not necessarily something to be censored *a priori*—an attitude which has led to hysterical moralizing in the past. Rather it is the necessary condition that governs the very act of interpretation....⁵⁷

What interests me in this particular critique of literary-critical hermeneutics is the way in which the instability of meaning is seen as already present in the dialogue, which must

re-propose the prophetizing attitude, particularly when confronted with the *problema*, the original enigma of the *logos* itself. The movement of cognition and understanding can be fully incarnate in the language appearing in-between speeches (or between question and answer, as it were), foregoing the false ideal of being able to attain, reach, conquer, or see the other's whole being.⁵⁸

It is the very questioning of the position of the Other that is the essence of the dialogue, a recognition of the ultimate unknowability of his/her subjectivity. Mikhail Bahktin has recognized in the dialogue a space for subversion for the hearing of hitherto-unheard

⁵⁷ Peter Carravetta, *Prefaces to the Diaphora: Rhetorics, Allegory, and the Interpretation of Postmodernity*. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991), 170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

voices. Given the political climate of the Counter-Reformation, a certain indeterminacy regarding the position of the author becomes increasingly expedient. Virginia Cox analyzes Galileo's use of the form in a book devoted to the practices of the literary dialogue and the wider social context in which these practices were necessary.⁵⁹

I would like to briefly touch upon one of the points made by Cox that has relevance to my project: that is, the dialogue's dramatic component. Following Aristotle's *Poetics*, the concept of verisimilitude is a key issue in sixteenth-century genre debates. Renaissance dialogues in general (and Tullia d'Aragona's in particular) utilized this illusion of presence to call to mind historical persons doubling as *personnages*: for example, "Tullia" is a character in her own dialogue as well as in the *Dialoghi d'Amore* of Sperone Speroni. Paradoxically, this verisimilitude underscores the artifice of the genre. It also calls up a Platonic distrust of dissimulation as expressed in the *Republic* (3.392.c-395a). Though metafictional representations fit easily into our expanded notion of what constitutes a text, they were a source of anxiety in a period whose literary theory was marked by confusion over the adaptation of models and the representation of reality.

A growing tension between fiction and veracity becomes apparent in the quarrels and debates of Renaissance poetics. This tension stems from a particular cultural moment—the Counter-Reformation—as well as from the literary sources just mentioned. Renaissance *litterati* quarreled as to whether characters in drama should be drawn as they are or as they should be. It is a short step from the drama to the dialogue, especially in the latter's representation of real persons—but then does the dialogue still constitute philosophy?

⁵⁹ Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance dialogue: literary dialogue in its social and political contexts: Castiglione to Galileo* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

If the dialogue is literature, can literature be considered philosophy? The dialogue poses problems as interesting for the study of genres as it did for early modern literary theory. In the period, however, the dialogue's literary form did not preclude philosophical legitimacy. On the contrary:

Dialogue, with its seemingly unsystematic conversational style, so different from the scholastic *altercatio*, colloquy, *sophismata*, or *quaestiones*, was seen in the Renaissance as one of the most legitimate of all ancient textual forms because of its proximity to the origin of classical Greek philosophy.⁶⁰

Though the separation of rhetoric and philosophy into different camps was beginning to occur in Scholastic-humanist debates of the Renaissance, the camps were not as sharply distinguished as they were to become later. As Ernesto Grassi writes, referring to one of Plato's dialogues, the *Phaedrus*,

...[Thus] philosophy is not a posterior synthesis of *pathos* and *logos* but *the original unity* [(italics mine)] of the two under the power of the original *archai*. Plato sees true rhetoric as psychology, which can fulfill its truly "moving" function only if it masters original images (*eide*). Thus the true philosophy is rhetoric, and the true rhetoric is philosophy, a philosophy which does not need an "external" rhetoric to convince, and a rhetoric that does not need an external content of verity.⁶¹

To this quote I would add a certain epistemological skepticism as to whether an "external content of verity" is ever possible. Furthermore, some of this skepticism was present in the latter half of the fifteenth century. In a world in which the truth claims⁶² of textual and institutional authority were increasingly suspect, human experience provided an alternative epistemological window, the interior, subjective reality of poetry another, and language itself, still another.

Given these *foci* upon epistemology, empiricism, and semiotics, there are ample categories in which the Renaissance dialogue may have philosophical relevance today.

⁶⁰ Snyder, 22. Italics in original text.

⁶¹ Grassi, 32. Italics in original text.

⁶² I borrow this phrase from the argument of Maria Rosa Menocal's book *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: from Borges to Boccaccio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

Establishing a common ground shared by philosophy and rhetoric is essential to the next chapter's discussion of the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*: a literary work engaged in philosophical debate, and a work of philosophy unusually grounded in literature. The *Dialogue* uses all of these actual discursive formations as "proof": quotations from the canonical poetry, experience drawn from the interlocutors' lives; abstract geometry; the protean, polyvalent character of language itself; a radical skepticism separating the human and divine realms.

Before deconstruction, before the Port-Royal Grammar, and before theories of Roman Jakobson and Umberto Eco on linguistics and semiotics, Tullia d'Aragona was dealing with the ontological aspects of grammar, using experience as a basis for her conclusions, and questioning binary oppositions previously unexamined by her philosophical contemporaries. In the following chapter, I identify and explicate nascent "Enlightenment" concepts⁶³ in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogue*. In positing a case for one Renaissance dialogue, I hope to encourage a new look at the genre altogether.

In many ways, the Italian canon is still exclusive in gender and genre. Dialogue is underrepresented in the curriculum, as were women writers until very recently. Otherwise, it would be surprising that so little scholarly and/or philosophical writings exist on Aragona's *Dialogo*. It is less surprising that the neglect of this prolific literary figure has been remedied only recently, in the last few years. Scholars from the Italian literary establishment have written a few scant lines on women writers like Aragona; the best recent overviews of Italian literature devote only a few pages. The American world of letters is beginning to discover the women writers who lived five centuries ago, and

⁶³ The persistent epistemological prejudices I have encountered in response to my work on Aragona's dialogue led me, in part, to write this chapter. For example, in a dissertation seminar, when I had presented the draft of the next chapter, a colleague commented, "But those are eighteenth-century concepts!"

finally the Continental women writers.⁶⁴ After a brief burst of philological-encyclopedic fervor in the late nineteenth century, and the feminist movement in the late twentieth, these early modern women are only now being published and translated in this country.

Tullia d'Aragona might not have called herself a feminist, even though some of the issues she raises become considered as such in the history of feminism. Tullia longed for poetic immortality *despite* her gender: I think she saw herself as a writer's writer. She took pains to construct an identity as a poet, a philosopher, a humanist and a woman of letters. I suggest that her *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* leads us to reconsider the status of the dialogue, of early modern women, and of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. We don't have to kick the poets out of the Republic or the philosophers out of the republic of letters. However, we ought to harvest (*sfruttare*) the potential of Italian Renaissance women such as Tullia d'Aragona.

⁶⁴ New additions to this category, women writers and writers on the woman question, from the Other Voice series published by University of Chicago Press, include: Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. and trans. Diana Robin, 2000; Veronica Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal, 1998; Lucretia Marinelli, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. and trans. Ann Dunhill, 1999; Bartolomea Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent*, ed. and trans. Daniel Bornstein, 2000; Anna Maria von Schurman, *Whether a Christian Woman Should be Educated*, ed. and trans. Joyce L. Irwin, 1998; and Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, ed. and trans. Charles Fantazzi, 2000.

CHAPTER TWO
LOVE SACRED AND PROFANE:
TULLIA D'ARAGONA'S *DIALOGUE ON THE INFINITY OF LOVE*
IN DIALOGUE WITH FLORENTINE NEOPLATONISM

The focus of this chapter is the *Dialogo della Signora Tullia d'Aragona della infinità di amore*, its contribution to Renaissance philosophy and to the discourse of the subject. Informed by scholarship on the dialogue from Bakhtin to the present, this chapter will analyze the philosophical-rhetorical and satirical aspects of Tullia d'Aragona's 1547 *Dialogo della infinità di amore*. The *Dialogo* belongs to the genre of the dialogue or treatise on love, the *trattato d'amore*, after Marsilio Ficino's translation and commentary on Plato's *Symposium* called *De Amore*.⁶⁵ The subject matter of the love treatise is neither limited to "love" nor as specialized as its label might seem to imply. The *trattati* incorporate a range of content, from philosophical discussions on the spirit-matter question to prescriptive treatises on the proper roles for men and women, especially at court. A well-known example of the latter, more socially-oriented category is Baldassare Castiglione's 1518 *Il Libro del Cortigiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*).⁶⁶ Among the works in the genre, the *trattato* considered to be the most serious philosophical work is the *Dialoghi d'Amore*, written in 1501-2 by Leone Ebreo and published in 1535.⁶⁷ Others include Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505) and Francesco Diacceto's *De amore* (1508).⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium Convivium Platonis de Amore* (1484); later simply called the *De Amore*.

⁶⁶ Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin* (Paris, Société d'édition Les belles lettres, 1958) lists thirty-three important *trattati d'amore*, Aragona's among them. The *trattati* also include prescriptive conduct manuals such as Vives' 1523 *De institutione feminae Christianae* (*The Education of a Christian Woman*), trans. Charles Fantazzi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ John Charles Nelson, in *Renaissance Theory of Love* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958), 73.

⁶⁸ Not to be confused with Ficino's commentary, Diacceto's *trattato* follows Ficino's in title and subject. Indicative of Bembo's concern with language, *Gli Asolani* was the first *trattato d'amore* in the vernacular.

Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue questions received ideas about the social and ontological status of women; reassigns the roles of body and soul, revising the position held by most Florentine Neoplatonists on the spirit-matter question; and reexamines period interpretations of Plato's *Symposium*. Aragona's dialogue constitutes an important but overlooked contribution to period debates on Neoplatonism and the "questione della donna" (woman question). Its contemporary relevance consists in its contribution to "femminismo teoretico" (theoretical feminism) and to the history of ideas, specifically the "discourse of the subject."⁶⁹

The *Dialogo* engages with opposing positions in a dialogic mode, combining the subject matter of the Platonic dialogue with the spirit of Lucianic satire.⁷⁰ While satire is more accessible and less threatening than outright critique, the work's humorous quality may have led to a critical underestimation of its importance.⁷¹ As I will demonstrate in chapter six, Aragona wrote for a diverse audience, not only the *literati*. Aragona's status as courtesan poet may have impeded the dialogue's reception as a serious text. The author's gender, as well as her occupation, may have also factored into the fortunes of the *Dialogo* as a text.

⁶⁹ Both terms are used by Constance Jordan in her article "Renaissance Women Defending Women: Arguments Against Patriarchy," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 55-67.

⁷⁰ David Marsh, "Dialogue and Discussion in the Renaissance," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. III, ed. Glyn Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267. David Marsh and Virginia Cox divide the dialogue genre into its Platonic, Lucianic, and Ciceronian forms. See also David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue: classical tradition and humanist innovation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Jon R. Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking: Theories of Dialogue in the Late Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary dialogue in its social and political contexts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Raffelle Girardi, *La società del dialogo: retorica e ideologia nella letteratura conviviale del Cinquecento* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1989).

⁷¹ Cf. Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), 205.

How have earlier critics read the *Dialogo*, and what do contemporary critics say? Most recently, Constance Jordan evaluates Aragona's dialogue positively, classifying it as "an anti-neo-Platonic dialogue on love," a position with which I agree.⁷² On the other hand, an Italian literary historian refers contemptuously to the rise of women authors "who discuss love without having read Plato"—a generalized attack with a possible application to Aragona.⁷³

The *Dialogo* also has been misclassified as "Neoplatonic" by various scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁴ John Charles Nelson writes: "The Platonism of [Aragona's] dialogue on love is orthodox in terms of Renaissance interpretations of Plato," without specifying which interpretations he means. As I will argue, Aragona's dialogue is quite unorthodox in comparison with almost all of the other works except Ebreo's, which Nelson praises: "[Ebreo's philosophy stands] almost alone as having any philosophical importance out of that vast body of philosophical literature."⁷⁵ Nelson's argument needs to be reexamined on the first count, thereby rendering his second

⁷² Constance Jordan's classification of Aragona's dialogue is most accurate. In a review essay, "Listening to the Other Voice in Early Modern Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. LI, No. 1, Spring 1998, 188.

⁷³ To quote one critic's disparaging comments on the literary productions of women: "Come si sa, il sorgere del romanzo borghese e della frivola causerie...è messo in relazione con la rivincita della donna, che, liberata dal latino e da Greco, scopre finalmente il suo genio e lo fa prevalere. In questo giudizio si scambiano, per molta parte, cause ed effetti; anche se il sorgere del romanzo borghese coincide col trionfar nel salotto della donna, che parla d'amore senza aver letto Platone." ("As is well known, the rise of the bourgeois novel and of frivolous casuistry...is seen in relation to the vindication of women, who, liberated from Latin and Greek, finally discover their genius and prevail. This...confuses cause and effect: even the rise of the novel coincides with triumph of the woman in the sitting room, who speaks of love without having read Plato.") *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, ed. Giuseppe Toffanin (Milan: Casa Editrice, 1965), 130.

⁷⁴ John Charles Nelson, in *Renaissance Theory of Love* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958), 73; Laura Anna Stortoni and Mary Prentice Lillie claim the *Dialogo* is "fully in the spirit" of other Neo-Platonic dialogues, and that "all her writing fits perfectly the Neo-Platonic doctrines...of her times." *Courtly Ladies and Courtesans: Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Italica Press, 1997), 83. For a different view, see T. Anthony Perry's *Erotic Spirituality: the Integrated Tradition from Leone Ebreo to John Donne* (University of Alabama Press, 1980). Perry makes a convincing case for classifying Ebreo as an influential precursor of the "integrated view" of love also espoused by Aragona.

⁷⁵ Nelson, *op. cit.*

assertion suspect. Nesca Robb dismisses Aragona's treatise as "frivolous," "as remote from the artistic dignity of Bembo as it is from the earnestness of Ficino," and claims that it "recalls more than once the hollowness of the writer's profession and the gulf[...]between theory and practice in the society she frequented," implying that one in the profession of courtesan probably would not have produced literary works of substance and quality.⁷⁶ Nineteenth-century critics Enrico Celani and Benedetto Croce both insinuate that Aragona could not possibly have written such works on her own: "La Tullia d'Aragona è quella che nelle sue rime lascia maggiormente scorgere l'influenza dei letterati, sino a dubitare che alcune di esse siano opera del Varchi stesso..." ("Tullia is one in whom we can discern to a large extent the influence of the *literati* upon her poetry, insofar as to wonder if some of them were written by Varchi himself.")⁷⁷ In Croce's words, "Lo compose forse aiutata da qualche amante che tenne la penna" ("perhaps she wrote aided by some lover who held the pen"), a rather vulgar and *ad feminam* slur.⁷⁸

In short, there is a lack of critical consensus. I argue that if understood correctly, Aragona's dialogue will be seen as an important chapter in the history of ideas. Leone Ebreo, the philosopher who has most influenced Aragona, is cited as a precursor to Spinoza.⁷⁹ In fact, both Aragona's and Ebreo's dialogues constitute alternatives to Ficino's Neoplatonism. The reconciliation of body and soul in Ebreo's view of love (and

⁷⁶ Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935), 205. Perhaps Robb did not read Aragona's *apologia* for women who have no choice but to "fall into bodily error" ("cadere in errore nel corpo suo") through necessity or misfortune. Cf. chapter 6 and Appendix II.

⁷⁷ E. Celani, ed. introduction, *Rime di Tullia d'Aragona* (Bologna: Editrice Forni di Bologna, 1891), xvi.

⁷⁸ This famous insult can be found in almost any article on Aragona.

⁷⁹ Leone Ebreo, *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'Amore)*, (London: The Soncino Press, 1937), xv.

in Aragona's) in what T. Anthony Perry has called the "integrated tradition."⁸⁰ Indeed, the categories of carnal and spiritual love, normally seen as a dichotomy in the period, achieve a unique integration in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore*.

Philosophical and Philological Background

The genre of *trattato d'amore* or love dialogue flowered in fifteenth-century Florence. Marsilio Ficino's well-known translation of Plato's *Symposium* and his commentary, the *Commentarium Convivium Platonis de Amore*, made this seminal text of Platonic philosophy accessible to scholars in the Renaissance.⁸¹ Ficino's version of the *Symposium* provided the primary subject matter for a discussion of the body-soul question among the philosophers of his Florentine Academy.⁸² Other dialogues on love would follow, but Ficino's reading of the *Symposium*, espousing a radical separation of spiritual and corporeal love, dominated Florentine Neoplatonism in the Renaissance. While Ficino's work is extremely valuable from a scholarly point of view, he departs significantly from Plato. Regardless of one's reading of Plato, Ficino's idea of sensuality is quite sublimated in comparison with the more openly-embodied homoeroticism of the *Symposium*.

Some Neoplatonists view the body as a potential impediment to spirituality. Scholars have underscored the mediating influence of Plotinus on this point, but Ficino's

⁸⁰ T. Anthony Perry, *Erotic Spirituality: The Integrated Tradition from Leone Ebreo to John Donne* (University of Alabama Press, 1980).

⁸¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium Convivium Platonis de amore* (1484), Latin version, 1474 and Italian, 1475. I have used Sears Jayne's translation of the *Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, 1985).

⁸² As Paul Oskar Kristeller writes, "Ficino's pupil Francesco Diacceto carried his tradition into the first decades of the sixteenth century...at the new Florentine Academy of 1540 and at the University of Pisa." *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), 50-51.

doctrine views the body as a hindrance,⁸³ using phrases like “fall into the body,”⁸⁴ “Plunged into the body as though into the river Lethe”⁸⁵ and “corporis peste.”⁸⁶ To quote one Plotinus scholar, “Plotinus treats affective *eros*, including sexual desire, as an inferior but legitimate expression of a longing for beautiful form.”⁸⁷ By the late fifteenth century, Platonic philosophy had encountered other influences in addition to Plotinus. Some Neoplatonists, like Pico della Mirandola, argued that the truth was also to be found in other schools of esoteric thought, such as the Jewish Kabbala and the Greek and Egyptian Hermetic traditions.⁸⁸ In terms of cultural influences, Neoplatonism was complicated by poetic notions of love from *fin’amors* to Petrarchism.⁸⁹

Revisionist Neoplatonist scholars like Pico della Mirandola and Leone Ebreo attempted to syncretize the disparate elements mentioned above, but the general tendency in Christian Neoplatonist thought is to divide love into sacred and profane and to put soul and body in opposition, as in the following quote from Ficino’s *Commentarium*:

If anyone, through being more desirous of procreation, neglects contemplation or attends to procreation beyond measure with women, or against the order of nature with men, or prefers the form of the body to the beauty of the soul, he certainly abuses the dignity of love.⁹⁰

⁸³ *Commentary*, Speech II, Chapter 4 (50).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Speech IV, 73, Chapter 4, Speech 4 (76).

⁸⁵ *Commentary*, Speech IV, Chapter 5 (76).

⁸⁶ Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Epistolae*, lib. 1, in *Opera Omnia*, 182, quoted by P.O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 215.

⁸⁷ Al Wolters, “Ficino and Plotinus’ Treatise ‘On Eros’ ” in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Olga Zorzi Pugliese (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions Canada, 1986), 190.

⁸⁸ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *On the dignity of man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis. *On being and the one*, trans. Paul J.W. Miller. *Heptaplus*, trans. Douglas Carmichael (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

⁸⁹ Literary analogues to the Plotinian view of love and the body would be the idealized love represented in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* or the semi-sublimation symbolized by the chaste kiss described by the Bembo character in Castiglione’s *Cortigiano* (Book IV, LVII).

⁹⁰ *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 54.

Some versions of Neoplatonism seem to allow for the existence of the procreative drive, though this drive is presented as decidedly inferior to the ascent toward a contemplative spiritual life. Given the dualistic *mentalité* that runs throughout Greek (and Christian) thought, it is not difficult to understand why the Renaissance Neoplatonists favored the metaphorical division of love into the two “Aphrodites,” Pandemia (common) and Urania (heavenly). As we will see, these two categories are reconstrued in Aragona’s dialogue.

Tullia d’Aragona’s *Dialogo della infinità di amore* (*Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*) was written in 1546 and printed in 1547 in Venice by Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari et Fratelli, a major publisher of literary humanist works. By this time, other dialogues on love and the “woman question” were in circulation, but women are seldom portrayed as the originators of independent thought in these texts. In fact, contemporary critics such as Valeria Finucci have commented on the lack of major “speaking parts” for women in the *trattato*.⁹¹ However, Aragona’s dialogue is an exception to this rule. Not only is the author presented as a speaker, but “Tullia” is the central character as well—and her apartment is the salon in which the discussion takes place. The *Dialogo* begins with Benedetto Varchi, an authority on Neoplatonist philosophy, assuming the role of pedagogue, only to be subverted by a female character who plays Diotima to his Socrates. (Varchi was the consul and official lecturer of the Accademia Fiorentina, giving public lectures on the topics of nature and the poetry of Dante and Petrarch.)⁹²

⁹¹ For example, Valeria Finucci emphasizes that although women are present in the conversation in Castiglione’s *Cortigiano*, the roles they play are ancillary in character. In *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Ariosto and Castiglione* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 29–45.

⁹² These lectures can be read in his published *Opere*: Benedetto Varchi, *La prima (-seconda) parte delle lezioni...nella quale si tratta della Natura, Della Generazione del corpo humano, e dei mostri*, (Firenze, I Giunti, 1560/1). Cited in Axel Erdmann, *My Gracious Silence: Women in the Mirror of Sixteenth-Century Printing in Western Europe* (Luzerne, Switzerland: Gilhofer & Ranschburg GmbH, 1999), 51. See also his *Opere*, 2:289a, 655, 657b–658a. See also *Opere di Benedetto Varchi*, vol. 2 (Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco,

“Diotima,” a character mentioned in the *Symposium* as Socrates’ teacher in matters of love, is an appropriate *persona* for Tullia d’Aragona. One could call her an instructress in love—she has been called the Diotima of her time, and even refers to herself by this name in her dialogue. Her ironic use of the Socratic method to “teach” an already-erudite interlocutor lends the text a classical authority and a performative quality as well as a subversive twist. Because Tullia is a courtesan—albeit of the refined, highly educated variety—she *does* know about love.⁹³ As such, she is in a good position to distinguish vulgar from honest love, presumably having experienced both types.

Splitting Venus: Pandemic Aphrodite versus Uranian Aphrodite

How would one define these varieties of love? Renaissance interpretations of Plato tended to divide love into bodily versus spiritual, earthly versus celestial, real versus ideal. The point of view favored by the Neoplatonists is that of Pausanias in the *Symposium*, although this is not necessarily the view endorsed by Plato—or Socrates. The following quote from the speech of Pausanias illustrates a predominant view of love:⁹⁴

The Eros associated with Common Aphrodite is, in all senses of the word, common, and quite haphazard in his operation. This is the love of the man in the street. For a start, he is as likely to fall in love with women as with boys. Secondly, he falls in love with their bodies rather than their minds. Thirdly, he picks the most unintelligent people he can find, since all he’s interested in is the sexual act. This love derives its existence from the much younger Aphrodite, the one composed equally of male and female elements. The other Eros springs from Heavenly Aphrodite, and in the first place is composed solely of the male element, with none of the female (so it is the love of boys we are talking about), and in the second place is older, and hence free from lust.

1859). Respectively, “Lezioni sul Dante,” 284–438, “Sulla generazione del corpo umano,” (on *Purgatorio*. XXV), 284–310; and “Della Natura,” 648–59.

⁹³ Aragona cites her experience as evidence, contrary to critics who claim that her poetry is a pretext disguising her life as a courtesan, such as Laura Anna Stortoni and Mary Prentice Lillie, *Courtly Ladies and Courtesans: Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance*, 82–83.

⁹⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Tom Griffiths, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 181b.

Renaissance Neoplatonists aspired to the second kind of love, although their claims to Platonic love were fraught with hypocrisy. By stating the fact of her own experience in matters of love, “Tullia” exposes its hypocrisy; by bringing the discussion into the empirical realm, and using Aristotelian logic, the Tullia character avoids getting caught up in her opponent’s obfuscations, which are characterized by sophistic casuistry and a certain dogmatic adherence to the Scholastic method.⁹⁵

“Varchi” seems to be a caricature of a certain school of thought and its antiquated discursive practices. Compared to her Neoplatonist contemporaries (and Varchi is included in this portrayal), Aragona emerges as a humanist engaged in demystifying received truths and a feminist *ante litteram*. Varchi, on the other hand, seems to represent the Scholastic *mentalité*—or at least one who holds a position in a rather dogmatic, unexamined way.⁹⁶ I will support these claims in the reading that follows, in which I cite passages that contain pivotal points in the dialogue—points at which the fictional Tullia provokes the fictional Varchi. One such instance occurs at the beginning of the dialogue, when “Tullia” casually brings up her interlocutor’s belief in the inferiority of women:

Ma io, per me, dubito più tosto che non vi abbia a parer di stare anzi a disagio che no[n], e per questo vi sapesse male di essere venuto, e massimamente toccando il favellare a me. ... Laquale, oltre lo esser donna (le quali voi, per non so che vostre ragioni filosofiche, riputate men degne e men perfette degli uomini), non ho, come ben sapete, né dottrina di cose né ornamenti di parole. (Yet I rather wonder whether you may not end up feeling a little uncomfortable and perhaps regretting the fact that you came over, particularly because it was my turn to speak. ... Not only am I a woman—and you have some complex philosophical reasons for considering women less meritorious and intrinsically less perfect than men—but

⁹⁵ The term “loico” (“logico”) was synonymous with “Sophist.” Readers of Dante might recognize a reference to the pseudo-judicial logic of the demon in *Inferno*, Canto 27.122-3, who is arguing with St. Francis over the soul of Guido da Montefeltro. Just when it seems that Francis is about to win, the demon points out “forse tu non pensavi ch’ io loico fosse” (“perhaps you didn’t think I was a logician”).

⁹⁶ The difference between Scholasticism and humanism was often one of methodological approach. Scholastics tended to consult the appropriate *auctoritas*; humanists favored rhetoric and empiricism. For a thorough scholarly treatment of these two concepts, see Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Cf. also Garin, *op.cit.*

what is more, I do not possess either sufficient learning or verbal ornaments, as you are well aware.)⁹⁷

Tullia d'Aragona does indeed know the arguments for the inferiority of women, upheld by Neoplatonists and neo-Aristotelians alike. Instead of an overt rebuttal, however, her first tactic is to display hallmarks of logical and philological sophistication in the form of her argument and by the use of certain rhetorical codes respectively. "Tullia" claims to lack the appropriate learning and language ("dottrina delle cose" and "ornamenti di parole") but this claim is couched in the modesty *topos* and in a rhetorical figure: *non solum...sed etiam* ("not only...but also") thus demonstrating a mastery of said rhetoric.

The tone is lighthearted, but the accusation is serious. In other words, the "philosophical reasons" ("vostre ragioni filosofiche") to which the Tullia character refers represent the ideas the real Varchi had expressed on the subject of women's inferiority.⁹⁸

"Varchi," missing the point, pontificates on the beauty of women and their power over men, and upon Tullia's many admirers and her personal attributes:

Io non credo...poco sperto nelle cose del mondo e della natura, ch'io non conosca, non dico in tutto, ma in qualche parte quanto poterò, possono e potranno sempre le donne verso gli uomini, sì con le virtù degli animi e sì massimamente con le bellezze de' corpi loro: dico, quando non avessi bene né veduto mai né udito mai né altra donna che voi. (I am not a fellow so inexperienced in worldly matters and the facts of nature as not to know, at least in part, how great the power of women over men is, was, and always shall be, thanks to their spiritual qualities and, even more, to the beauty of their bodies. I would know as much had I not seen or heard any other woman but you!)⁹⁹

Addressed as a beautiful object, "Tullia," refuses his praise. With mock impatience, she brushes away "Varchi's" flattery as well as his overblown claims to modesty. Thus Tullia d'Aragona (the author) demonstrates subtly how apparent gestures of courtliness can

⁹⁷ *Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento*, ed. Mario Pozzi, (Bari: Laterza), 187-88; *Dialogue*, 55-56.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Opere*, 655: "[P]erchè la natura ha ordinato questa differenza tra loro a questo fine; e così è la differenza...che l'uomo le è naturalmente superiore." ("because nature has ordained this difference between them to this end; and the difference is...that man is naturally superior.") In Varchi's lecture on jealousy, he contends that women are "generally less wise, more suspicious and timid, and loving with less restraint, must therefore fall victim to this dangerous disease." Cited in Erdmann, *My Gracious Silence*, 51.

⁹⁹ *Trattati*, 188; *Dialogue*, 56.

have an undermining effect in the realm of intellectual debate—at which she is skilled. Even in her reply, the intellect of the *Dialogue*'s author manifests itself: Tullia returns the volley by portraying this backhanded compliment as a particular shortcoming of Varchi's rather than the universal fallacy it is. The opening exchange exposes to ridicule the *doxa*, the prevalent view of the biological and intellectual inferiority of women inherited by the Renaissance from classical philosophy and espoused by Varchi.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the metafictional aspect of the text serves to display in microcosm a world in which the same issues are at play for higher stakes. When "Varchi" praises "Tullia" for the wrong reasons, his intellectual shortcomings and lack of integrity become apparent. Moreover, to focus upon the seductive allure of the courtesan rather than upon her accomplishments in the spheres of art and intellect, as Varchi is made to do in this text, is more than just a personal idiosyncrasy. Such *ad feminam* rhetorical tactics also appear in the anti-courtesan writings of Pietro Aretino, and Tommaso Garzoni, and the later writings of Sperone Speroni. Like these more blatantly misogynist writers, "Varchi" avoids acknowledging Tullia's intellectual qualities. Moreover, he has ignored her self-fashioning as a writer. "Tullia" responds to his dubious *captatio benevolentiae* by saying that the way to please her is to appeal to her intellect with arguments, not to appeal to her vanity with flattery. In the *Dialogue*, Aragona underscores the intellectual side of her image, but later, in the context of the epic's preface, she will attack her attackers, the

¹⁰⁰ The history of these ideas and the terms of the Renaissance debate on gender ontology are concisely laid out in Ian MacLean's *The Renaissance notion of woman: a study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 2, 50-67.

satirists of courtesans,¹⁰¹ criticizing writers who, “ambitious for their own glory,” gained fame from slanderous writings at the expense of others.¹⁰²

Is Aragona not guilty of the same sort of slander: in other words, is the portrayal of Varchi intended as an *ad hominem* attack? Although Varchi is an historical person, in the dialogue he functions as the representative of a type rather than an individual, representing both heterosexual and homosexual hypocrisy. He stands for all flatterers who only see beauty on the outside and for all hypocritical Neoplatonists who insist on spiritual love while indulging in the carnal variety. If Varchi had a hand in the *Dialogo*’s authorship, as many critics claim, then he helped to create a less-than-flattering portrayal of himself. Varchi’s need to defend himself legally from such notoriety is well-documented.¹⁰³

As is evident so far, the theories contested by Aragona are deeply entrenched, culturally and philosophically. In the Neoplatonism of Ficino and his disciples—more,

¹⁰¹ Cf. Margaret Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24–37. Each of these authors writes differently on the subject of courtesans, though all are disparaging. As a penance of sorts for his 1542 *Dialoghi d’amore*, Sperone Speroni was obliged to write a dialogue against courtesans *Orazione contra le cortegiane* (1575) in the later years of the Counter-Reformation. The early work featured Tullia as a flirtatious courtesan and a jealous lover of Bernardo Tasso. Perhaps her own dialogue was an attempt to correct the image portrayed by Speroni. Although in his satires Aretino “speaks” in the voice of a courtesan, his female figures are still mouthpieces for his own views of sexuality. Cf. his *Ragionamenti* and also Bette Talvacchia’s *Taking Positions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). The monk Tommaso Garzoni writes in scathing moralistic terms about courtiers and courtesans in *La Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Somasco, 1585).

¹⁰² In the preface to her epic *Il Meschino*, Aragona takes a much stronger stand on the issue of literary representations of the courtesan. Pietro Aretino and Lorenzo Venier come under attack for gaining fame by appealing to the baser instincts of their readers with slanderous *ad feminam* works: “Onde non é poi stato maraviglia se ambiziosi di questa sua Gloria, si sien posti de gli altri à far le Nanne, & le Pippe, le Puttane erranti, & per fino quel libro, che per certo offesa troppo altamente la maestà della gentilissima Città di Siena, il sapersi che egli fosse fatto da persone nate & nodrite in essa.” (“Whereby it had not been a marvel if, ambitious for his [Boccaccio’s] glory, others are disposed to create Nannas and Pippas and Errant Prostitutes, and finally that book, [La Cazzaria] which certainly greatly offends the high majesty of the city of Siena, made of persons born and raised there.”) The objection here is not to the salacious content *per se*, but to the hypocritical, slanderous and incriminating character of the works.

¹⁰³ Varchi narrates the incident in “Sopra l’invidia. Lezione una.” in his *Opere*, vol. 2, 568–611; see also introduction, “Vita di Benedetto Varchi,” in *Lezioni sul Dante e prose varie* (Florence, 1841).

perhaps, than in Plato—the body, especially the female body, is removed from the realm of spiritual love. In his *Commentary*, Ficino's interpretation of the mythology of Platonic love is both hierarchical *and* gendered: the lower kind of love characterizes heterosexual relations, and the higher kind chooses men rather than women as objects of (Platonic) love. This division originates in myth: the lower, or “vulgar” Venus is born of a heterosexual union, Jupiter and Dione; while the celestial Venus is born without an earthly mother, therefore less tainted by matter.¹⁰⁴

The Heavenly Venus was born of Uranus, without any mother. The vulgar Venus was born of Jupiter and Dione....The first Venus, which is in the mind, is said to have been born of Uranus without a mother, because mother, to the physicists, is matter. But that Mind is a stranger to any association with corporeal matter.

Aragona seeks to remove this taint from the sphere of male-female relations, although in her version, that higher form of love is not embodied equally in all unions.

Thus, in Aragona's dialogue, two systems of duality are under attack: the binary view of love as the two Venuses and the classical belief in the inferiority of women. When “Tullia” pointedly asks “Varchi,” “Can women also be loved with such a love?” she is challenging a belief in female inferiority that had obtained for about twenty centuries. Both Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy privilege spiritual love over bodily love, and also relegate women to the lower category. This is especially true in Ficino's interpretation: inextricably associated with the world of matter, woman is disassociated from (and incapable of) higher love.

Though Aragona posits a version of gender equality *ante litteram*, she follows the Neoplatonic division of love into body and soul to a point—bodily love in itself is not reprehensible, because it exists for the continuation of the species. Rather than accepting

¹⁰⁴ *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, op. cit., 53.

the spirit-matter dichotomy, she presents nature and the body as morally neutral, applying Aristotelian logic to the experience of procreation. Thus, in Aragona's dialogue, an Aristotelian concept of nature is paired with the Platonic idea of the desire to generate a mimetic self—without the Neoplatonic skepticism regarding the body. In the following quote, the terminology Aragona uses is Aristotelian:

Al primo dico che io so bene che di quelle cose che ci vengono dalla natura non possiamo essere biasmati né lodati[...]e così lode merita e non biasimo un che generi cosa simigliante a sé e di conservi almeno nella specie sua[....]E tanto più negli uomini, quanto essi producono cose più perfette e più degne che le piante e gli animali non fanno: purché tale appetito non sia sfrenato e troppo strabocchevole, come si vede accader le più volte negli uomini, i quali hanno libero arbitrio. (First I say that I know very well that things which come from nature are neither to be praised nor blamed[....]and thus one merits praise and not blame who generates something resembling oneself, thus conserving his species[....] Rather, it can be and should be lauded to a greater extent in humans because they are capable of generating offspring of a more noble and worthy caliber than plants and animals can. My main proviso is that this appetite should not become unbridled and overpowering, for this often happens with human beings, who are endowed with a free will.)¹⁰⁵

Following Aristotle, she posits the body's role in love and procreation as derived from nature and "therefore neither to be praised nor blamed." Unlike Aquinas, who sought to reconcile Aristotle with Christian thought prior to the Renaissance, Aragona does not insist that procreation is the only appropriate goal of intercourse. Nor does she suggest that intercourse be confined to marriage. She is, in fact, scornful of those whose *only* aim is physical reproduction, comparing them to the beasts.

Aragona's thinking on this point resembles that of Pico della Mirandola, who stresses that humans, unlike animals, can choose their place in the great chain of being. Because humans are given free will, they can choose to be less like beasts, and to strive in their nature as lovers to be like angels: "Perché, se i brutti non diventano mai piante, come noi diventiamo brutti, essi non possono ancora per mezzo niuno diventare uomini, come noi angeli, mediante l'amore...." ("Because if the beasts can never become plants,

¹⁰⁵ *Trattati*, 226; *Dialogue*, 94. See also the poem to Bernardino Ochino in which Aragona defends free will over the imposition of prohibitions on human activities. Trans. Stortoni and Lillie, *Courtly Ladies*, 87.

as we become beasts, they [animals] cannot by any means become men, [whereas] we [become] angels, by means of love....”¹⁰⁶ Aragona is also echoing Pico della Mirandola’s *De Hominis Dignitate* (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*), where he writes that humans can choose to grovel like beasts or to ascend like angels, since human potential is only limited by the will. His claims for the destiny of the intellectual being are more hyperbolic than Aragona’s, though their language on the subject is similar:

At man’s birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God.¹⁰⁷

Such statements are found throughout the writings of Pico della Mirandola. Pico asserted, and Aragona seems to concur, that human nature was flexible and based upon free will.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Pico’s textual references, like Aragona’s synthesize Plato and Aristotle:

And...who is there who does not know that I could have spun out one of the nine hundred theses, that is, that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are to be reconciled, into six hundred headings, not to say more, beyond all suspicion of artificial multiplicity, enumerating one by one all the places wherein others think they disagree and I think they agree?¹⁰⁹

Like Pico, Aragona reconciles Aristotle and Plato methodologically and philosophically, even if the two thinkers do not reach the same conclusions. In her dialogue, Aragona subjects Platonic texts (the *Symposium* and Ficino’s commentary) to Aristotelian logic and to the humanist methodology of empiricism. The following quote is a possible locus for the doctrine of nature as posited by Aristotle and later used by Aquinas:

¹⁰⁶ *Trattati d’amore del Cinquecento*, 227; *Dialogue*, 95.

¹⁰⁷ [Oration] *On the Dignity of Man* (*De hominis dignitate*), tr. Charles Glenn Wallis, (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 5.

¹⁰⁸ In Aragona’s poem to Bernardino Ochino, she accuses him of wanting to take away the free will given by God to humans: “Non fōra santità, fōra arroganza/Torre il libero arbitrio, il maggio dono/Che Dio ne diè ne la primera stanza.” (Holiness it is not, but arrogance/ To take away free will, the highest gift /Which God bestowed on us from the beginning”), trans. Stortoni and Lillie, *Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

Inest enim primo inclinatio homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis: prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam. Et secundum hanc inclinationem, pertinent ad legem naturalem ea per quae vita hominis conservatur, et contrarium impeditur. Secundo inest homini inclinatio ad aliqua magis specialia, secundum naturam in qua communicat cum ceteris animalibus. Et secundum hoc, dicuntur ea esse de lege naturali 'quae natura omnia animalia docuit,' ut est coniunctio maris et feminae, et educatio liberorum, et similia. Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria.

(There is indeed in man, according to nature, a first inclination toward the good which he has in common with all substances: insofar as every substance seeks its own preservation according to the law of nature. Corresponding to this inclination, the natural law applies to those things by which life is conserved, and on the contrary against those things by which it is impeded. Secondly, there is to be found in man an inclination to more specific ends, according to the nature that man shares with the other animals. With respect to this inclination, all those things are said to pertain to the natural law 'that nature teaches all animals,' such as the conjunction of the male and the female, the rearing of offspring, and the like. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination toward the good according to his rational nature, that which is proper to man alone.)¹¹⁰

Procreation, then, is part of natural law, as is a rational inclination toward the good. The relationship Aragona draws between passion and reason, following Aristotle's *Ethics*, is what ultimately produces the distinction between vulgar and honest love. In the animals, she argues, no one would call natural desires lascivious or dishonest: as they exist for the continuation of the species, they are neither to be praised nor blamed. In humans, she continues, these desires or appetites, independent of free will, should be praised when they are subordinate to reason, and occur in moderation: reason should control passion.

To make her point, Aragona uses language that evokes both Dante and Aristotle. The terminology of the following passage is reminiscent of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, and Dante's *Commedia*.

Ora, come niuno merita biasimo, il quale mangi o bea, anzi lode, perché mangi o bea, perché, mediante questi, ristora il caldo naturale e l'umido radicale, per li quali due si mantiene in vita; così lode merita e non biasimo uno che generi cosa simigliante a sé e si conservi (poiché non può nello individuo, cioè in se stesso) almeno nella specie sua. Ma come uno, il quale mangia e bee o più del dovere o fuor di luogo e di tempo, tanto che quelle che gli dovria giovare gli nocchia, è degno non solo di riprensione, ma di castigo; così, anzi molto più, merita [c]astigo¹¹¹ e riprensione chiunque senza regola o misura alcuna si dà in preda agli appetiti carnali, sottoponendo la ragione, la quale dovrebbe esser la reina, al senso e,

¹¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, Q. XCVI, Article 2, excerpted in *The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), 122. Italics mine.

¹¹¹ The text is inconsistent here, using "gastigo" for "castigo, which" must be an orthographic error.

brevemente, diventando, di un omo razionale, animal brutto....(No one deserves censure for eating and drinking, but should be congratulated, because these processes restore the natural warmth and essential humors which maintain us in life; so people should be praised, and no one censured, for generating offspring that are similar to themselves, thus perpetuating themselves in the species, since they cannot reproduce themselves as individuals....Just as we can blame and also chastise someone who eats or drinks more than is reasonable, or in the wrong place and time, in a way that things that were supposed to benefit him actually harm him, so we ought to chastise and blame far more vigorously those persons who yield to the passions of the flesh without due limit and moderation. *For in doing so they subordinate reason, which ought to be the queen of the body,*¹¹² *to the senses,* and thus they quickly turn from being rational men into being brute animals.)¹¹³

An erudite sixteenth-century Italian audience might recognize a reference to Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*, even if they were unfamiliar with Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the effect of passion in the metaphor of a man carried by a whirlwind. I think that Dante had the *Ethics* in mind when inventing the punishment of the lustful sinners: they too, are carried along in a "hellish hurricane:" *la bufera infernal*.¹¹⁴ With similar abandon, Dante's *lussuriosi*, like Aragona's vulgar lovers, "somettono la ragione al talento" ("they subordinate their reason to desire").¹¹⁵

If in Aragona's definition, vulgar love occurs when reason is subordinated to passion; then in honest love, it is the other way around. Vulgar love is temporary; honest love, infinite, at least in potential. Both involve the body. Rather than persist in the binary oppositions of body and soul, Aragona places them in a different relationship than do the Neoplatonists or neo-Aristotelians. Here is her reformulation of the two kinds of love:

[L]asciando stare molte altre divisoni che si potrebbero fare, che lo amore è di due ragioni: l'uno chiameremo "volgare" overo disonesto, e l'altro "onesto" overo virtuoso. Il disonesto,

¹¹² To a contemporary reader, it is difficult to convey this classical duality, in which reason and passion coexist in a master-slave relationship. When reason is said to be the queen (*la reina*), this means that she is dominant, sovereign, and the passions are subject. Russell and Merry's translation conveys this very well.

¹¹³ *Trattati*, 226-27; *Dialogue*, 94.

¹¹⁴ V.31. Dante shows his familiarity with the *Ethics* when "Virgil" exhorts: "remember your *Ethics*" (*Inferno* XI.79-84; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, I 1145a; Aquinas, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXI). Cited in *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, commentary, C. H. Grandgent, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 175.

¹¹⁵ Dante, *Inferno* V.39.

che non è se non degli uomini volgari e plebei, cioè di quelli che hanno l'animo basso e vile e che sono senza virtù o gentilezza, qualunque essi si siano, o di picciolo legnaggio o di grande, è generato dal desiderio di goder la cosa amata; ed il suo fine non è altro che quello degli animali brutti medesimi, cioè di aver quel piacere e generare cosa simigliante a sé, senza pensare o curare più oltra. E chi si move da questo desiderio ed ama di cotale amore, tosto che egli è pervenuto dove egli desiderava ed ha adempita la volontà sua, cessa dal moto e non ama più...[e] rivolge lo amore in odio. (Leaving aside all possible subdivisions, love is of two types. We shall call the first "vulgar" or "dishonest love, the other "honest," that is to say, virtuous. Dishonest love—which is only found in vulgar and low-minded individuals, that is, in those whose souls are low and vile, who lack virtue or refinement, whether they come from noble or insignificant stock—is generated by a desire to enjoy the object that is loved, and its goal is none other than that of common animals.... They simply want to obtain pleasure and to procreate something similar to themselves, without any further thought or concern. Those who are moved by this desire, as soon as they reached their goal and have satisfied their longing, will desist from their motion and will no longer love. As a matter of fact, they may quite often recognize that they have made a mistake...and so they turn their love into hate....) ¹¹⁶

Dishonest love lacks endurance, which is associated with the intellectual or rational faculty. The emphasis upon free will is consistent throughout Aragona's work.

L'amore onesto, il quale è proprio degli uomini nobili, cioè che hanno l'animo gentile e virtuoso, qualunque essi siano, o poveri o ricchi, non è generato nel desiderio, come l'altro, ma dalla ragione; ed ha per suo fine principale il trasformarsi nella cosa amata con desiderio che ella si trasformi in lui, tal che di due diventino un solo o quattro....Bene è vero che, desiderando lo amante, oltra questa unione spiritale, ancora la union corporale per farsi più che può un medesimo con la cosa amata, e non si potendo questa fare, per lo non esser possibile che i corpi penetrin l'un l'altro, egli non si può mai conseguir questo suo desiderio, e così non arriva mai al suo fine, e perciò non può amar con termine, come io conchiusi di sopra. (Honest love, which is characteristic of noble people, people who have a refined and virtuous disposition, whether they [are] rich or poor, is not generated by desire, like the other, but by reason. It has as its main goal the transformation of oneself into the object of one's love, with the desire that the loved one be converted into oneself, so that the two may become one or four. But as it is the lover's wish to achieve a corporeal union besides the spiritual one, in order to effect a total identification with the beloved, and since this corporeal unity can never be attained, because it is not possible to be physically merged into one another, the lover can never satisfy this longing of his, and so will never satisfy his desire. Thus he cannot love with a limit, as I concluded earlier.) ¹¹⁷

Renaissance Neoplatonism had made Pausanias's division of love: vulgar/honest, Venus Pandemia/Urania into the basis of their dichotomized view of love. Instead, Aragona argues for a more integrated, or syncretic relationship between body and soul—with the proviso that it is impossible to satisfy the infinite desires of noble souls who truly experience honest love. Since their desires are infinite, so too, love, in a sense, is infinite.

¹¹⁶ *Trattati*, 222; *Dialogue*, 90.

¹¹⁷ *Trattati*, 222-3; *Dialogue*, 90.

Thus, Aragona's reformulation of categories is an innovation, new to both the courtly and the mystical varieties of Neoplatonism. Unlike previous theories of love, Aragona's model pointedly rejects social class, gender, and even marriage as criteria for honest love: noble lovers are determined by their integrity instead of by their bloodlines. As we have seen Aragona applies classical principles in a rather egalitarian way. Women are not only released from being the lower category of love object; declared capable of reason, they also can choose the reciprocity of honest love over inferiority or subjection.

A unique feature of Aragona's dialogue is that she is using an essentially Scholastic formulation to put forth a humanist version of nature that runs counter to Neoplatonic doctrine. In this humanist version, the good is defined as measured, following reason, experience, nature—*secundum naturam*, as opposed to *contra naturam*, a phrase used in medieval writing to describe homosexual love. In Aragona's time, the phrase was *amor socraticus*. Experts on sexuality in the period define the term as used among those "in the know" as a sort of underground code word for homosexual love.¹¹⁸

Platonic Love and *Amor Socraticus* (i.e., Theory vs. Practice)

Because of the highly particular use of the phrase in the period, it is necessary to examine Aragona's position on *amor socraticus*, or homosexuality in the guise of Platonic love. At first glance, homosexual love does not appear to receive Aragona's blessing. Reading more closely, there is less indication of what we would call "homophobia" on the part of

¹¹⁸ Giovanni dall'Orto, in a detailed and fascinating scholarly article, argues that what we would call a homosexual "drive" was recognized in the Renaissance, not to mention a subculture of homosexuality. Varchi, an example of "amor socraticus," is ridiculed by contemporaries in satiric poems: he is called a "new Socrates" (by Francesco Grazzini), and is accused by Scipione Ammirato of being "inclinato" ("inclined") to "amori fanciulleschi" ("boy-loves"). Quoted in dall'Orto, "'Socratic Love' as a Disguise for Same-Sex Love in the Renaissance," in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Gerard Kent and Gert Hekma, (New York: Haworth Press, 1988), 22-65.

the Tullia character than a need to critique satirically the huge gap between the Neoplatonists' theory and practice. Varchi, notorious for his practice of seducing male pupils, was a good friend. If Aragona is launching a critique, it seems more directed toward the hypocrisy surrounding homoeroticism among the Neoplatonists rather than an attack on Varchi the man. "Varchi's" refusal to acknowledge homoeroticism in Plato is one of the most clever and humorous moments in the dialogue. It is too lighthearted to be an attack on Varchi or upon *amor socraticus*.¹¹⁹ My sense is that her apparent position on sexual love between men is not so much serious as *serio ludere*: she regards professed Platonic love between men, or by anyone for anyone, with lighthearted cynicism.

In a parodic vein, Aragona's dialogue makes an allusion to *Philosophies for Sale*, a dialogue by Lucian in which Socrates is caricatured as being a lascivious opportunist. Lucian, the second-century Greek satirist, was a popular author in the Renaissance. Aragona's *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* is a literary of Lucian, who makes sport of a Socratic character as follows:

Academic: I am a lover, and wise in matters of love.

Buyer: How am I to buy you, then? What I wanted was a tutor for my son, who is handsome.

Academic: But who would be more suitable than I to associate with a handsome lad? It is not the body I love, it is the soul that I hold beautiful. As a matter of fact, even if they lie beneath the same cloak with me, they will tell you that I have done them no wrong.

Buyer: I can't believe what you say, that you, though a lover, take no interest in anything beyond the soul, even when you have the opportunity, lying beneath the same cloak.

Academic: But I swear by the dog and the plane-tree that this is so!¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ What we would call closeted homoeroticism was called "*amor socraticus*" with negative connotations. As John Charles Nelson points out, sounding somewhat like Varchi, "The love depicted by Neoplatonists is still, on its human side, essentially a heroic friendship...Unfortunately in the society that surrounded them, the most shameful depravity came sometimes to be qualified as *amor socraticus*" (69). [italics mine]

¹²⁰ *The Works of Lucian*, 7 vols., vol. 2, ed. T. E. Page and W. H. D. Rouse, trans. A. M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1915), 479-80. The reference is to Plato's *Symposium*, 216d-219d.

As one can see from the above quote, Lucian often expresses an irreverent, ironic point of view: in this case, about Socratic love. The presence of a comic or burlesque element in Renaissance literature, however, does not necessarily imply that the subject matter is frivolous. In fact, the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin cites Lucian as an example of “parodic-travesty discourse” whose function it is “to provide the corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward genres, languages, styles, voices; to force men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them.”¹²¹ Though Bakhtin is describing Lucian and not Aragona, his words have an uncanny resonance with a discussion of her *Dialogo*. By citing Lucian in the same sentence as Plato, Aragona is already engaging in generic *contaminatio*, foregrounding the use of humor in the context of philosophy.

Scholars of the Renaissance dialogue further divide the genre into subcategories: Platonic, Lucianic, and Ciceronian.¹²² By mixing these genres in a positive *contaminatio*, Aragona seems to be saying that the Lucianic model of humor can be incorporated within Platonic philosophy; in other words, making a serious point by means of a genre—and an author—usually considered comical.¹²³ In the dialogue, Varchi continues to function as the “straight man” of the comic team. Failing to see the satire in the Lucian reference, Varchi re-enacts it. He feigns shock throughout the exchange, accusing Tullia of equating Plato and Lucian:

¹²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 59.

¹²² Aragona’s dialogue incorporates aspects of the Platonic, Ciceronian, and Lucianic models for dialogue. For a discussion of these terms, see Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), and his more recent *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

¹²³ For a study of how Lucian had been read in the previous century, see David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

Tullia: Ed a pena posso credere che chi usa un così brutto, scelerato e nefando vizio, o per arte o per una usanza così fatta, sia uomo. E di ciò avrò caro mi dichiarati poi il parer vostro, ché so bene che appresso i greci era tutto il contrario, e che Luciano ne fa un dialogo dove loda questo vizio, e Platone medesimamente.

(Tullia: What is more, I can scarcely believe that there are people who practice such an ugly, wicked, and hideous vice, by design or by custom. And of this I will say I know well that among the Greeks it was completely the opposite, and that Lucian wrote a dialogue in which he praised this vice, as did Plato.)

Varchi: Io non voglio indugiare a poi, ma rispondervi ora, perché voi mescolate i ceppi con le manaie, e sète in grande errore se volete aguagliare Luciano a Platone, o pensate che Platone lodasse mai così lorda sceleratezza. Tolgavisi, per Dio, della mente così brutta credenza, anzi così grave peccato, indegno non pur del vostro animo cortesissimo, ma di qualunque più vile.

(Varchi: I did not want to indulge you then, but I will respond now, because you're mixing logs with axes, and you have fallen into grave error if you wish to equate Lucian and Plato, or if you think that Plato would ever praise such grave wickedness. For God's sake, banish any thought of such an ugly belief—and such a grave sin as well—not worthy of your most refined mind, but of someone more vile.)

Tullia: Perdonatemi. Io aveva inteso che Socrate e Platone non solo amavano i giovani pubblicamente, ma se lo recavano a gloria e ne facevano i dialoghi come si vede ancora di Alcibiade e di Fedro dove parlano di amore amorosissimamente.

(Tullia: Pardon me. I had understood that Socrates and Plato not only loved young men publicly, but they gave them eternal glory through their dialogues, telling of love most lovingly, as one sees in the *Alcibiades* and the *Phaedrus*, where love is spoken of most lovingly.)

Varchi: Io non dico che Socrate e Platone non amassero i giovani pubblicamente e non si recassero a gloria e non iscrivessero i dialoghi favellando di amore amorosissimamente; ma dico che non gli amavano a quello effetto che si pensa il vulgo, e che pare che intendiate ancora voi. E non so chi parli più amorosamente che Salomone nella sua *Cantica*.

(Varchi: I do not say that Socrates and Plato did not love young men publicly and that they didn't glorify them in their dialogues, telling of love most lovingly; but I do say that they didn't love them in that way that the common crowd thinks of it and it seems that even you understand this. And I do not know who speaks of love more lovingly than Solomon in the *Song of Solomon*).

Tullia: Io crederò come dite voi. Ma ditemi: erano eglino amanti?

(Tullia: I will believe it is as you say. But tell me: were they lovers?)¹²⁴

Citing Plato and Lucian in support of not only bodily love but of such love between men, the Tullia character prods the Varchi character into further indignation. He is also

¹²⁴ *Trattati*, 228-29; *Dialogue*, 95-96. Using the translation by Russell and Merry as a point of departure, I have rendered the Italian text more literally in the above passage.

apparently scandalized at the suggestion that one could think to *aguagliare* [equate] the serious philosopher Plato and the irreverent satirist Lucian. Varchi's character also clearly demonstrates a vested interest in denying the sexual content of these classical works, not to mention an unwillingness to attribute his own real-life sexual practices to the ancient worthies. When Varchi insists that the practitioners of Platonic or "Socratic" love (*i socratici*) did not love youths, at least not in the vulgar sense, Tullia humors him by saying "I will believe everything you say. But tell me: were they lovers?" Understanding the term in his own way, Varchi replies with an emphatic "yes" and goes on to say that Socrates and Plato were souls pregnant with goodness, desiring to generate something similar to themselves. Impossible, Tullia responds, refusing to pursue the argument any further.

There is nothing unusual, from a Neoplatonic standpoint, about what Varchi is saying, but Tullia follows his train of thought in a series of rhetorical maneuvers, Socratically cross-examining him until he contradicts himself. Reiterating an earlier point about the inferiority of women, Tullia asks whether women, supposedly lacking the intellectual faculty of the soul, can be loved with the higher love that men have for men:

[T]uttavia vorrei sapere perché non si può amare anche una donna di cotesto medesimo amore; ché non penso già che vogliate dire che le donne non abbiano l'anima intellettuale come gli uomini e non siano di una medesima specie, come ho sentito a certi.... (I would like to know why a woman cannot be loved with this same love. For I am certain that you don't wish to imply that women lack the intellectual soul that men have and that consequently they do not belong to the same species as males, as I have heard a number of men say....)¹²⁵

After establishing the equality (or similarity) of essence between the sexes, the next major step in Aragona's *Dialogo* is to establish women as potential objects of "Platonic" love, *contra* Ficino and *contra* at least some of the speakers in Plato's *Symposium*. Hypocritically, "Varchi" speaks as if he has always believed as much, though the actual

¹²⁵ *Trattati*, 229; *Dialogue*, 97.

Varchi had aired views to the contrary. Not only is it possible for one to love women with spiritual love, Varchi replies, but it is also a common occurrence. “I know people who have done it and who do it all the time,” is his answer.¹²⁶

In addition to evading the issue of *amor socraticus*, the fictional Varchi has also avoided addressing the question of whether women have an intellectual soul—or even have a soul. As absurd as it may seem to the contemporary reader, the question “Is woman a human being?” was the subject of much written debate in the Renaissance. Phrasing the question with more subtlety, Aragona echoes the debates of her contemporaries on the discourse of the subject.¹²⁷ This discourse questioned not only the intellectual, rational, and appetitive aptitudes of the souls of women, but of slaves and native Americans as well.¹²⁸

More relevant to a discussion of Aragona’s dialogue, Varchi himself had expressed such beliefs in lectures on Dante and on nature.¹²⁹ In the *Dialogue*, Varchi claims to believe that the difference between men and women is not one of essence. Aragona is challenging a scholar with impressive credentials on his views. Reading Varchi’s lectures, however, these views appear outdated, even for the sixteenth century.

[E] però sempre si genererebbe maschio, se non fosse impedito, essendo maschio l’agente; e perchè ogni effetto debbe somigliare quanto può la cagione sua quando si genera femmina, è contra l’intenzione dell’agente almeno particolare, se non universale. E senza dubbio se la

¹²⁶ *Dialogue*, 97.

¹²⁷ See Ian MacLean’s *The Renaissance notion of woman: A study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life*, (Cambridge UP, 1980), 2, 50-67. A locus classicus for the inferiority of women, children, and slaves is Aristotle’s *Politics* I.13.

¹²⁸ A period source, Bartolomé de las Casas’s 1552 *Brevissima relacion d[e] la destruycion de las Yndias*, reprinted as *The Devastation of the Indies*, trans. Herma Briffault, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), recounts the debate in the court of Charles V as to whether the natives lacked the rational and intellectual faculties of the soul or whether they had souls at all. Contemporary sources include Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Historical Relativism* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹²⁹ Lectures by Varchi on *Purgatorio* XXV and nature can be found in his *Opere*, 2:284-310, 648-59.

materia fosse sempre disposta e ubbidiente, sempre il parto sarebbe maschio e non mai femmina: onde la femmina non è altro che un maschio diminuito e imperfetto.... (Thus, if unimpeded, a male would always be generated, the agent being masculine; and because every effect should assimilate as much as it can its cause when a female is generated, it is against the intention of the agent at least particularly, if not universally. And without a doubt if the matter was always disposed and obedient, always one would give birth to a boy and never a girl: *the female being nothing other than a diminished and imperfect male....*)¹³⁰

In the above quote, “Varchi” contradicts what he “says” in the *Dialogo*: the difference between male and female is one of essence, a fundamental difference in *materia*.¹³¹

“Varchi” never elaborates on the point of female inferiority. Aragona does, however, in a poem to her friend Piero Manelli. Although I will deal with the poetry over the course of the next three chapters, the poem is worth citing here.

XXXVIII¹³²

A Piero Manelli

Poi che mi diè natura a voi simile
Forma, e materia; o fosse il gran Fattore;
Non pensate ch'ancor disio d'honore
Mi desse, & bei pensier. MANEL gentile?

Dunque credete me cotanto vile,
Ch'io non osi mostrar cantando fore,
Quel che dentro n'ancide altro ardore,
Se bene a voi non ho pari lo stile?

Non lo crediate, no PIERO, ch'anch'io
Fatico ogn'hor per appressarmi al Cielo,
E lasciar del mio nome in terra fama.

Non contenda rea sorte il bel desio,
Che pria che l'alma dal corporeo velo
Si scioglia, satierò forse mia brama.

XXXVIII

For Piero Manelli

Since (like you) by Nature I was wrought
or by the great Creator, in form and matter,
my dear Manelli, do you think the desire for honor

¹³⁰ Varchi, “Sulla generazione del corpo,” *Opere*, 2:284-310, 301b. Italics mine.

¹³¹ It is interesting to note that Varchi corresponded with the Italian physican Gabriello Falloppia, the anatomist-surgeon for whom the Falloppian tubes are named. Falloppia is called “chirurgo, anatomico ed ostetricante di quell merito che tutto sanno.” In one line of his poem to Falloppia, Varchi exclaims, “Il corpo è fango: vedi che non pera l'alma,” (“The body is mud: as you see, the soul does not perish” (Sonetto CXX.12, *Opere*, 849).

¹³² The above poem, XXXVIII in the 1891 *Rime* edited by Celani, is actually the 28th poem in the 1547 *Rime*. In Appendix I, I use the numbering of the original edition.

was not given me as well—and capacity for lofty thought?

Do you think me so spiritually poor
that I dare not show forth, singing,
what in me would kill all other longing
though my style is not on par with yours?

I do not think you can conceive, Peter,
that like you I labor, aspire to the firmament,
and to leave my name renowned on earth.

If evil fate does not triumph over high desire,
then perhaps before my soul is rent
from its corporeal veil, I will satisfy this thirst.

Of course, the very existence of Aragona's *Dialogo* and her *Rime*—as well as the content of these works—is a challenge to received notions of the spiritual and intellectual inferiority of women.

The Beauty Myth: The Neoplatonic Conflation of Beauty and Goodness

Proceeding from women in general to specific cases, Tullia asks if those whose physical beauty has faded can be valid objects of Platonic love as well. If it is really spiritual love being described, then why do the objects of love always seem to be beautiful young men? Why do the *socratici* never love those people “who are not beautiful, or whose beauty has faded”? (“che questi socratici non amano quelli che non son belli o che sono attempati”)¹³³ In other words, what is the relationship between love and physical beauty? Is beauty an indication of goodness? Is love possible after physical beauty has faded?¹³⁴

¹³³ *Trattati*, 229; *Dialogue*, 97.

¹³⁴ Part of the fiction, evident from reading the preface by Muzio, is that the Tullia character was originally and modestly called Sabina but that the name Tullia is restored by her editor, lover, and friend, Muzio Iustinapolitano. Tullia modestly does not praise herself, but allows Muzio to do it for her. *Dialogue*, 51-53. In Book IV of the *Cortigiano* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1929) LVII, Castiglione's ‘Bembo’ conflates beauty and goodness in the following quote: “onde rare volte mala anima abita bel corpo e perciò la bellezza estrinseca è vero segno della bontà intrinseca” (“a wicked soul rarely inhabits a beautiful body, and for that reason outward beauty is a true sign of inner goodness.”) Aragona is refuting this view. Tullia d'Aragona knew Bembo, and exchanged sonnets with him in her *Rime* (Venice, 1547).

The implications of this apparent jest between Tullia and Varchi involve a serious reappraisal of what beauty and love really mean in the *Symposium*.¹³⁵

“Tullia’s” reiteration of the casual comment about beauty and goodness forces “Varchi” to examine his position, and the philosophical stakes get higher. Suspecting a trap—“Io credetti essere io che recercasse ogni cosa minutamente. Ma chi ve l’ha detto?”¹³⁶ (“I thought I was the one who looked into everything minutely. But who has told you this?”)—Varchi walks into it anyway. Quoting the philosophical clichés of the period, he claims, we know nothing without the evidence of the senses, and beauty is visible: the more noble and perfect a thing looks, the more it is so, “because the good and the beautiful are the same thing.” (“Poiché il bello e il buono sono un medesimo”). Tullia stops him here. “I didn’t know that...and don’t concede it, because in this way all those who are beautiful must be good” (“Questo non sapeva io, né lo concedo, perché a questo modo tutti belli sarebbero buoni”) is her response.¹³⁷ The claim that all beautiful people are good—and she appeals to experience to deny this—partakes of the fallacy of the universal: such a statement is only true if there were no exceptions. In other words, Varchi is trying to create a universal without considering particular cases. Aragona takes up this problematic question, one that has plagued many interpreters of the *Symposium*.

¹³⁵ The character Alcibiades in Plato’s *Symposium* may be said to represent one who has grasped the idea of soul love, but persists in locating it in the body. Attracted to the inner beauty of Socrates, he still attempts bodily seduction—with comically unsuccessful results. Alcibiades compares Socrates with a Silenus-box, ugly on the outside, nevertheless containing a god—and to Marsyas, who renders his hearers ecstatic (literally, out of the body) without the aid of any instrument (216c). Ironically, out of envy, Apollo flayed Marsyas from his own skin. Those who emphasize the roles of Diotima and Alcibiades include: Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press) 165-99; and Paul Friedlander, *Plato: The Dialogues*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964-9), 28. Friedlander states: “The concluding part...in which the ascent to the heights would be depicted in the reality of actual life. The *Symposium* reaches its climax in the episode involving Alcibiades.”

¹³⁶ *Trattati*, 229; *Dialogue*, 97.

¹³⁷ *Trattati*, 230; *Dialogue*, 98.

Neoplatonist interpretations of the *Symposium* tended to answer this question in the affirmative. For example, in the *Cortigiano* (*Courtier*), Castiglione attributes such a claim to the Bembo character: “onde rare volte mala anima abita bel corpo e perciò la bellezza estrinseca è vero segno delle bontà intrinseca.” (whereby rarely does an evil soul inhabit a beautiful body because extrinsic beauty is a true sign of intrinsic beauty.)¹³⁸ Though the other two speakers, Federico and Morello, disagree with Bembo, such a reading of Plato became somewhat of a common Neoplatonic misreading. For Ficino, the beauty of the beloved existed in the physical realm, but pleasure was best confined to visual pleasure (as the sense of touch was seen as lower than those of sight and hearing):

But since love is nothing else except the desire of enjoying beauty, and this is perceived by the eyes alone, the lover of the body is content with sight alone. Thus the desire to touch is not a part of love, nor is it a passion of the lover, but rather a kind of lust and perturbation of a man who is servile.¹³⁹

Ficino’s Neoplatonism gave way to a superficial aesthetic hierarchy, which Aragona revisits and interrogates in her dialogue.

Originally, the conflation of the beautiful and the good is posed as a question by Socrates to Agathon: “Would you agree that what is good is also beautiful?”¹⁴⁰ More than a rhetorical question; it is one of the major points on which the *Dialogue* turns. Renaissance Neoplatonists often overlooked the distinction between beauty and goodness, virtually equating the two. For Aragona, this is another opportunity to unmask the hypocritical contradictions in Neoplatonist theory and practice.

For the origin of the question—in Plato—it is necessary to go back to key passages in the texts of the dialogues. My reading of Plato’s *Symposium* depends on the

¹³⁸ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortigiano*, Book IV, LVII.

¹³⁹ Jayne, *Commentary*, Chapter 9, Speech II, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Tom Griffith, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 201c.

use of all characters in Plato's dramatic scene: in other words, I consider the interruption of Alcibiades as essential. If we consider Alcibiades's speech as pertinent to the argument—and there is support for this position among contemporary philosophers—then Alcibiades represents the last word, the ultimate position presented.¹⁴¹ Alcibiades is indeed inebriated, but as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus*, there is such a thing as a sort of inebriation which is a divine madness, the Bacchic—not unlike the erotic—*furor*.

In his Bacchic “madness,” Alcibiades speaks the truth when he speaks of Socrates as a Silenus box: one sees a grotesque pipe-playing satyr on the outside, but there is a god inside.¹⁴² In the previous speech, Socrates' conversation with Agathon seemed to conflate beauty and goodness, yet the question remained unanswered. In the intervention by Alcibiades, this too-facile equation is subverted. Or rather, the equation of beauty with goodness is valid if and only if beauty is defined correctly—as the beauty of the soul. Appearance, beautiful or not, can mask inner reality, the soul's inner reality.

Aragona navigates these waters very carefully. Echoing a point in the preface by Muzio about a beautiful soul in an aging body,¹⁴³ the Tullia character asks what if the Platonic lovers love these youths until the flower of their youth is past, and no more, even to the point of ensuing hatred? “Varchi” denies this phenomenon, saying that these Platonic lovers (*i platonici*) are degraded or shallow if they only love external beauty. This contradicts his earlier position, when he equated the *bello* (beautiful) with the *buono*

¹⁴¹ See Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 165-99, and Paul Friedlander, *Plato: The Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton: University Press, 1964-9), vol. 3, p. 28.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 216e.

¹⁴³ Muzio's comment in his preface to the *Dialogo* is that he falls in love more each day with Tullia, whose soul burns more brightly even as the flower of her earthly beauty fades: “[V]enendo a meno col tempo il fior della spoglia nostra terrena...crescendo ogni dì luce de' nostri animi...di giorno in giorno maggiormente se ne infiammi....” (the flower of our earthly garments diminishing with time ...the light of our souls growing each day...day by day we become more enamoured...) *Trattati*, 245 (translation mine).

(good). Tullia points out that their mutual experience seems to confirm this privileging of beauty. In fact, experience is precisely what Tullia cites and Varchi disregards: “Voi negherete la verità, che la sperienza mostra il contrario” (“You negate the truth, which is demonstrated to be otherwise by experience.”) These tendencies are not just exaggerated characters traits, but epistemological differences. In the dialogue between “Tullia” and Varchi,” the humanist approach is exemplified by the Tullia character, who tends to cite lived experience, while the Scholastic approach, represented by Varchi, was to quote received opinion.¹⁴⁴

Critiquing certain points of view in the guise of sparring with Varchi, the author Tullia d’Aragona asserts her own knowledge of current philosophical arguments, or *quaestiones*. In the form and style of argumentation as well as other aspects, the *Dialogo dell’Infinita di Amore* reflects and even anticipates epistemological concerns of the period. For example, when “Varchi” is grappling with the concept of the infinite, “Tullia” posits an example from abstract geometry: straight lines which extend into infinity.¹⁴⁵ Using classical Aristotelian logical principles and demonstrating an awareness of the mathematical ideas of her time, she is revealing her intellectual contemporaneity.¹⁴⁶

Varchi introduces the idea of God when “Tullia” mentions infinity. A Scholastic in his thinking, he cannot conceive of infinity without conceiving of God. He asks whether God can be both lover and beloved. “Tullia” asks him, are you reasoning as a

¹⁴⁴ One difference between the humanist and Scholastic camps was that the humanists were more apt to quote classical sources, to argue on both sides of the question, and to value nature, experience and reason. The Scholastics, on the other hand, resorted to commonplaces or *loci* and a question and answer method known as *sic et non*. See Erika Rummel, *Humanism and Scholasticism in the Renaissance and Reformation*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁵ “Tullia” provides examples of numerical and spatial infinity (*Trattati*, 213-14; *Dialogue*, 81-82).

¹⁴⁶ “While Platonism flourished at the courts...Aristotelian philosophy and its method of “scientific” analysis were prevalent in the northern university centers, such as Padua and Bologna.” Russell (1997), 31.

theologian or as a philosopher? When he tries to do both, she introduces a separation of the human and the divine realm, acknowledging the unknowability of the divine as opposed to the more epistemologically definitive realm of mathematics.

Having failed to throw her off track with arguments about the nature of God, “Varchi” tries to trap “Tullia” into distinguishing between *amore* and *amare*. What is the difference, he asks slyly, between a noun and a verb? “I have no particular competence in grammar,” “Tullia” answers. Nevertheless, she will demonstrate an equal mastery of grammar and dialectic, although she has disclaimed such knowledge at the outset of the dialogue. Nouns, she replies, connote meaning without time, but verbs occur within a time frame. (“I verbi hanno tempo, ed i nomi significano senza tempo....”)¹⁴⁷ Verbs, then, would be finite and nouns, infinite. Conjugations of the verb “to love” take place within a finite time period but the noun “love” is potentially infinite, since it does not depend upon time. Whereas earlier, epistemology was dependent upon the ontological, now it is a function of the linguistic.

The point, in the *Dialogo*, of this grammatical exercise is to determine if the two categories are the same in essence, and therefore distinct only as substance and accident: “love” being the substance, and “to love” being the accident. If these two words, one a noun, and the other a verb, mean the same thing, and if “end” and “limit” mean the same thing, then once a lover has reached his *end* (as in the end, or objective of consummated

¹⁴⁷ Recent critics such as Giuseppe Mazzotta and Jesse Gellrich have reconsidered the status of grammar as constituting an early foray into the areas of epistemology, anticipating the thought of Enlightenment philosophers who consider the use of grammar to explore thought itself. See Jesse Gellrich, “The Language of Mythology: On Medieval Grammar and Hermeneutics,” in *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1985) and Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

love), he will cease to love the object in question, and satiety and disgust will ensue. Having attained the end, the lover will cease motion and will remain at rest.

This is basically the position of “Varchi”—when the goal of consummated love is attained, the lover will cease his motion and love will cease as well. Varchi’s line of reasoning would imply a rather goal-oriented but fickle male lover. Nevertheless, he blames women for their fickleness in love, citing Petrarch to prove his point: “Ond’io so ben ch’un amoroso stato/in cor di donna picciol tempo dura” (“Whereas I know full well that the state of love/Lasts but a short time in a woman’s heart.”)¹⁴⁸ In the attribute of constancy, “Varchi” presents women as not only ontologically but also morally inferior. At this point, “Tullia” resorts to an *ad hominem* argument: “Voi lo sapete male e giudicate forse l’amore delle donne dal vostro...” (“You’re wrong there. Perhaps you were judging women’s love from your own....”).¹⁴⁹ Obviously, the word “love” has different connotations for “Tullia” than it does for “Varchi”.

Varchi is forced to admit uncertainty where he was formerly certain. He is eventually forced into admitting that the word “love” is a polyvalent noun. As everyone knows—especially Neoplatonic philosophers—there are different varieties of love. The innovation, however, is in Aragona’s treatment of the polyvalence of the term and concept of “love.” In her next argument, one can recognize the hand of Aristotle (and the shadow of Ficino). Both Aristotle and Ficino claim that one must be directed toward some end, and that after having attained it, one will be at rest. Varchi, too, makes this claim in his lecture on Nature (“Della Natura”):

¹⁴⁸ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, 183.13-14

¹⁴⁹ *Trattati*, 201; *Dialogue*, 69.

La Natura...tende sempre a un fine, ancora che per molti mezzi, come si vede nel grano. E perché l'infinito non ha fine, però è nimico della natura e fuggito da lei, oltra che non è....(Nature tends to move toward an end, even if by many; means, as one sees with wheat. This is why the infinite does not have an end, because it is the enemy of nature and flees from her....)¹⁵⁰

Varchi sees all things as partaking of the above pattern, tending toward the end. In Aragona's version, however, when a body moves toward an end (e.g., lover towards beloved), one of two things happens. If the goal is reached and the previously ardent lover is consumed with satiety and disgust, this is vulgar love. In honest love, however, after the desired goal is attained, love increases in infinite measure. Love is defined as "un desiderare di godere con unione quello o che è bello veramente o che pare allo amante" ("a desire to enjoy with union what is truly beautiful or seems beautiful to the lover.")¹⁵¹ This phrase echoes Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*. Aragona's concept of *amore onesta* (honest love) as natural, based upon reason, and infinite in potential is Aragona's original formulation.

Tullia d'Aragona's major contribution to philosophy in the *Dialogo della infinità di amore* is a rehabilitation of the body's drives. These procreative drives are now seen as legitimate in themselves, given the proper context: i.e., that the lovers experience a spiritual as well as a corporeal union. Furthermore, they may be exercised in the service of honest love ("amore onesta"), which is potentially productive both in the body and in the soul. Of course, in the *persona* of Diotima, Plato has said as much in the *Symposium*: creative bodies bring forth children and creative souls bring forth ideas in the mind of others. (Diotima does not place a hierarchical value upon creations of the soul over creations of the body, though one might infer that Plato does, from other dialogues by

¹⁵⁰ Varchi, *Opere*, 657.

¹⁵¹ *Trattatisti*, 202; *Dialogue*, 68.

Plato such as the *Phaedrus*.) Plato creates a hierarchy where creations of the soul are privileged over those of the body, but Neoplatonism creates a bipolar dichotomy between body and soul, whereas in Plato's dialogues, the relationship is much more ambiguous. Tullia d'Aragona's reading of Plato recovers the function of the body as a means to an end, a step on the ladder of beauty. The difference is, in Aragona's treatise, that the ladder does not need to be kicked away.¹⁵²

In the structure of love and relations between the sexes in Neoplatonism, there is no satisfactory locus of being for woman, no space for her to constitute herself as subject. While Petrarchism spiritualizes woman out of existence, Neoplatonism either associates woman with matter (thereby relegating her to an inferior position), or denies her access to reason. In this chapter, I have privileged the category of reason, though it has been defined as male-oriented, logocentric. I have resisted essentializing readings that associate woman with the body or with the irrational. The category of "honest love" based upon reason corresponds to the higher love of Plato and the "amor verus" of Ficino without rejecting body with which one expresses love.

Reason, in this view, is part of that which tempers the affective as well as the intellectual part of the human being. Reason, then, is generative: it can inaugurate an affective attachment that subsequently (or even primarily, as Aragona argues) can be grounded in the body or inclusive of the body. Aragona was extremely progressive for her time. Rejecting Neoplatonism, her version of love derives from that of Leone Ebreo. Ebreo envisions the union between two people as reflecting the love of God. He sees human love as a microcosm of the macrocosmic celestial order, the cosmic hypostases.

¹⁵² I am indebted to Jay Bregman for this apt metaphor.

Aragona's view of integrated love is an enduring idea, and one that includes a positive view of woman. The author of the *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, invading alien philosophical territory and writing from a socially ambiguous position, cannot completely reverse positions entrenched for centuries, but she should be recognized for her wit and erudition; for her early efforts toward gender equality, for a unique rewriting of the spirit-matter dichotomy; and for her empirical approach to the problem of love.

CHAPTER THREE
METAMORPHOSING THE METAMORPHOSES:
OVIDIAN REVISIONS BY TULLIA D'ARAGONA AND PERNETTE DU GUILLET

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was published frequently in the Renaissance: not only "moralized," as it were, but also adorned with annotation and commentary.¹ An edition including the commentary of Raphael Regius was "the first and most frequently reprinted Renaissance commentary on the *Metamorphoses*."² The Aldine editions of Regius and of Andreas Navagero (1515 and 1533 respectively) acquired the authority of "received texts," providing ample subject matter for poets who sought inspiration in classical works. Several recent studies on Ovidian influence upon later poets (Dante, Petrarch, Marlowe, Marston, Shakespeare) have called attention to this intertextual phenomenon.³ Despite—or, perhaps, because of—the ubiquity of Ovid, these poets took liberties with the tales: removing them from their epic context, selectively refashioning new versions, and constructing a lyric persona around certain myths. For example, Petrarch chooses Apollo; Pernette du Guillet, Diana. This chapter will focus upon two women poets who identify with figures in already-gendered Ovidian tales of violence. They retell Ovid's

¹ A contemporary edition of "Ovid moralized" is *Ovide moralisé: Poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle*, ed. C. De Boer, 5 vols. (Amsterdam: Muller, 1915-38). Cited in M.L. Stapleton, *Harmful Eloquence: Ovid's Amores from Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

² Venice, 1493. Ann Moss, *Latin Commentaries on Ovid from the Renaissance* (Signal Mountain, TN: 1998), 29. "Aldine," of course, refers to works from the printing press of the famous Renaissance printer Aldus Manutius.

³ To list only a few of the studies on Ovid's influence upon subsequent poets: see Stapleton, *op.cit.*; Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the Rime Sparse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); Peter Allen, *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

narratives in a different voice, gaining the symbolic power they lacked in their lives. Like other strong poets, Tullia d'Aragona and Pernette du Guillet use Ovidian myths in a transformative, original, and gender-specific way, thus metamorphosing the *Metamorphoses*.

First, I will concentrate on Tullia d'Aragona's use of the Philomel myth in poem XXX⁴ of her *Rime*. Then I will discuss Pernette du Guillet's treatment of the Actaeon story in "Elégie 2." These two poets are by no means the first to "reread" Ovid, but their readings of him constitute examples of what Greene calls dialectical imitation: a dialogue between texts. Nevertheless, I have chosen to compare them because their poetic *personae* are identified with specific metamorphoses and because the narrative swerve that results is shockingly effective. The recasting of Ovid's stories by Aragona and du Guillet is inflected by gender and marked by a tension between imitation and originality. Utilizing Thomas Greene's categories of imitation, I propose to situate the Ovidian "revisions" that follow as examples of dialectical imitation: a mode of intertextuality in which the later text brings out the resonance of the earlier one, and vice versa. (I will combine Greene's theory with the useful terminology of Harold Bloom's theory of influence, even though the latter is not wholly adequate to my purposes: Bloom does not deal with "translations" of influence between languages). Both Tullia d'Aragona and Pernette du Guillet Latin "translate" Latin poetry into a Romance language. It is not

⁴ Enrico Celani, the editor of the most recent edition, rearranges the sequence of the 1547 edition of Aragona's poems; nevertheless, I have chosen to use his numbering. To date, Celani's is the only scholarly edition of her *Rime* (Bologna: 1891).

difficult to see why Renaissance women authors would gravitate to Ovid, whose poetry deals with sex, gender relations, and violence, but despite the Ovidian themes, the poems in question differ significantly from his version of these myths.

Women poets were not the only ones to use Ovidian myths. The tradition of Petrarchism encompasses not only imitations of Petrarch, but also of the classic poets to whom he alludes. In fact, Petrarch's lyric sequence is unified by the trope of Apollo-poet and Daphne-beloved. Petrarch's "scattered rhymes" (*Rime Sparse*) are unified into an epic whole, bearing a formal similarity to the collection of disparate tales that comprise Ovid's "epic." Following Petrarch, early modern poets in Italy, France, England, and Spain attempted to grapple with the complex legacy of his *Canzoniere*—and to weave scenes from the *Metamorphoses* into their work. This particular form of influence is a phenomenon quite accurately called "post-Petrarchism" by Roland Greene.⁵ The term usefully foregrounds the belatedness of writing in a Petrarchan mode, many instances of which occurred a full two centuries after Petrarch—and not only in Italian. Nor were only men captivated by "Laura"—seventeenth-century poet Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, for instance, uses the name "Laura" in her poetry to refer to a female patron.⁶ Another

⁵ Belatedness characterizes post-Petrarchism: "Petrarch's posteriority to a classical past, his cultural isolation, has been much observed by historians and literary critics. That condition finds its analogy, I think, in a certain post-Petrarchan belatedness in lyric discourse, where poets born at least two centuries after Petrarch look directly or refractively to his *Canzoniere* as the model of what I call lyric fiction." Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations in the Western Lyric Sequence*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

⁶ Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz addresses her poem 299 to the Marquesa of Mancera, a royal female patron, as "Laura."

example is Shakespeare's well-known Sonnet 130, which satirizes the obsession with Petrarchan conventions.⁷

Petrarch's use of the *Metamorphoses* is complex, even in the gendering of his imagery. Petrarch's revisionary use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is itself an example of Renaissance imitation, especially poem XXIII, the renowned *canzone degli metamorfosi*. The speaker of poem XXIII undergoes several metamorphoses, turning into a laurel, among other things.⁸ Oddly, this poem does not utilize the laurel to symbolize Daphne/Laura, but rather the speaker. Once a man, Petrarch's persona *becomes* the laurel tree:

Ché, sentendo il crudel di ch'io ragiono
 infin allor percossa di suo strale
 non essermi passato oltra la gonna,
 prese in sua scorta una possente Donna,
 ver' cui poco già mai mi valse o vale
 ingegno o forza o dimandar perdono:
 ei duo mi trasformaro in quel ch'ì sono,
 facendomi d'uom vivo un lauro verde
 che per fredda stagion foglia non perde.

([F]or the cruel one of whom I speak, seeing that no blow of his had gone beyond my garment, took as his patroness a powerful lady, against whom wit or force or asking pardon has helped or helps me little: those two transformed me into what I am, making me of a living man a green laurel that loses no leaf for all the cold season.)⁹

Love and "a powerful Lady" have joined forces to bring about this man-laurel metamorphosis. In this unusual poem, Petrarch identifies with Daphne, the victim, rather

⁷ This sonnet, which begins, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" revises several Petrarchan clichés: rewriting the blonde tresses of Laura as black wires; the white of her skin as "dun"; her angelic form as an imperfect earthy one.

⁸ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the laurel and the fountain were both women: Daphne and Byblis respectively.

⁹ Robert Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, XXIII (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1976).

than Apollo, the pursuer.¹⁰ Petrarch is capable of imagining himself in a subordinate position with respect to his beloved—and to Amor. I am not claiming that this metamorphosis makes Petrarch sympathetic to women, however.

Scholars have questioned whether or not Ovid's narratives in the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses* are sympathetic to women.¹¹ In my reading, he possesses a certain degree of negative capability, the Protean capacity to see from another's point of view. In the Daphne/Apollo story, for example, we first see the scene through the hungry eyes of Apollo. Later, the reader is encouraged to identify with the position of Daphne when the narrator describes Apollo breathing down her neck. When Daphne can no longer run, she prays to her river-god father in onomatopoeic syllables, "Si flumina numen habetis qui nimium placui, mutando perde figuram" ("if your waters hold anything of divinity, change and destroy this beauty whereby which I pleased o'er well.") Despite moments of empathy for the predators, the dominant picture presented in the *Metamorphoses* is that of the misuse of power of the gods (and by extension, the emperor), whose despotically violent desires often end in tragedy for the victims—usually a rape followed by a metamorphosis. Given that the representation of power is connected with the representation of the body and of violent sexuality, it is not difficult to understand the

¹⁰ While it is true that the figure of Apollo often stands for the poet himself in the "lyric fiction" of the *Canzoniere*, in this poem Petrarch demonstrates, among other things, a certain flexibility with gender and signification.

¹¹ On this subject, see "Reading Ovid's Rapes" by Amy Richlin, in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Molly Myerowitz, in *Ovid's Games of Love* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), champions illusion, artifice, and play in Ovid; see also Florence Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

literary appeal of Ovid's myths for women poets who might want to foreground such themes, especially in a period marked by debates over the uses of antiquity.¹²

If, strictly speaking, a female Petrarchist is an oxymoron, what is an Ovidian woman poet? Some critics have seen women Petrarchists as derivative or unoriginal, applying an unfair double standard.¹³ In an era of *imitatio*, how else should one write? I chose these two poems because they resist, or at least do not fit the pattern of, the courtly, stilnovist, and Petrarchan poetic traditions.¹⁴ Ovid's own attention to narration, his identification with the tellers of tales and the makers of speech acts, and his ventriloquism of female voices, make him a logical choice for female poets in search of a literary ancestor.¹⁵ Just as Arachne's tapestry is a retelling of the loves of the gods as a series of rapes, so Renaissance women poets often present versions of these myths that somehow alter or interrogate the stories, foregrounding the polyvalence of signification in the original text(s) themselves.

¹² This debate was called "the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns." Chapter six deals with such literary disputes in the context of sixteenth-century genre theory.

¹³ To cite two of these critics, Fiora Bassanese judges the literary production of courtesans in the Italian Renaissance as ultimately in bad faith (albeit due to circumstances) and their Petrarchism "a self-betrayal, for *imitatio* did not take into account the alien nature of male experience for a female imitator." ("Private Lives and Public Lies: Texts by Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance," in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, No. 30 (1998), 295-319. Giulio Ferroni claims that female lyric poetry is marked by "subordinations and degradations of the Petrarchan code" ("si piega ad attraversamenti subalterni e degradati del codice petrarchistico") *Poesia italiana del Cinquecento*, xxi.

¹⁴ I refer not only to the *Heroides*. Ovid's epistolary fictions "by" women, but to other female characters in his work.

¹⁵ A recent critical work, one that pays particular attention to Ovid's semiotics and his own metamorphosing persona, is *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* by Lynn Enterline (Cambridge UP, 2000). Enterline makes a thorough study of the relationship in Ovid's work between violence toward—and representation of—women.

Like several other poets, Tullia d'Aragona chooses Philomela as her protagonist.¹⁶ In Ovid's version Philomela is the central figure in a story of rape, dismemberment, and murder. Following is a brief summary of the narrative. Pandion, the king of Athens, weds his daughter Procne to the Thracian hero Tereus, but the marriage is cursed by Juno, Hymen, and the Graces. (One could add that it is a "mixed" marriage between Athenian and barbarian, like Medea's—and about as successful.)¹⁷ Procne implores Tereus to allow a visit from her sister, Philomela, for whom he conceives an unfortunate, violent lust. After transporting Philomela from the protection of her paternal home, Tereus takes her to a secluded forest, where he rapes her repeatedly. When she protests that she (or the very stones) will divulge his guilt and asks to die, he cuts out her tongue instead. (In a particularly Ovidian touch, the severed "lingua" attempts to speak.) Philomela, voiceless but not helpless, weaves a tapestry narrating the events, which she then sends to Procne. Procne reads Philomela's "text" and vows to revenge Philomela's violation.¹⁸ The annual Bacchic rites provide an excuse for Procne to find Philomela, and the sisters return to Procne's marital home. Philomela is fearful and pious, but Procne is bent on vengeance. Like Medea, she displaces her wrath onto Itys, the boy she has borne to the shameless Tereus. (It is not clear to what extent Philomela participates in the infanticide.) The tale

¹⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI 424-675.

¹⁷ I am indebted to Rick Griffiths for this and other insights, structuralist and linguistic, about the Ovidian myth.

¹⁸ In "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours," Patricia Kleindeinst Johnson gives a feminist reading of the Philomela myth. In *Stanford Literature Review* (1984), 25-53.

ends with three metamorphoses: Procne becomes a swallow; Philomel, a nightingale; and Tereus a hoopoe with a bloody, warlike crest.¹⁹

Some poets focus upon Procne's unsettling revenge rather than Philomela's violation. As Ann Rosalind Jones has argued, Petrarch and other male poets continuously choose such scenes from Ovid, eliding the violence against women the original stories contain.²⁰ In one poem by Petrarch, "Philomena" is merely the herald of the spring; in another, the bird changes gender entirely. In Sannazzaro's *Arcadia*, the guilt belongs to Procne and not also to Tereus; Sannazzaro's speaker even asks the female birds to be silent so that his own voice can be heard!²¹ Others, even women writers, make passing references to the birds' songs and not to their tragic and violent history.²² Gaspara Stampa, outraged for the sisters, is an exception to this rule.

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 420-681. All quotations are from the Loeb edition.

²⁰ I refer readers to Ann Rosalind Jones's essay, "New Songs for the Swallow," in *Refiguring Women: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Juliana Schiesari and Marilyn Migiel, (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 263-277. After comparing other poetic uses of Philomel, Jones argues that Tullia "[appropriates] paradigms of feminine reticence as a condition to which a counter-condition could be vividly imagined, as a limit to be defiantly transgressed." (266). Jones also notes Tullia's emphasis upon the triumphant aspect of this mythological figure: "Tullia's Philomela is represented at the moment of her escape from Tereus' prison." (272).

²¹ An observation made by Jones, in "New Songs," 270. In fact, the speaker identifies with the "rosignuol," whose lament for his "cara consorte" reminds him of his [own] harsh fate: "mi rammente di la mia dura sorte."

²² Philomela as the nightingale is, admittedly, somewhat of a Renaissance cliché, used more as "an ornamental shorthand for the coming of spring" (Jones, 272) than for her less-than-pastoral Ovidian identity. In a familiar letter to "Europa Solitaria" questioning the wisdom of the *vita contemplativa*, Quattrocento humanist Laura Cereta uses Philomela and Procne as symbols of pastoral: "Therefore this privilege of solitude of yours is not suitable at your age. ...It will be enough if you live in an urban cave and choose Antonius and Paul for your teachers about life, who never devoted their free time to idle repose or to any such pleasures either in the narrow confines of a cave or the bristling silence of a forest. Nor did they rely for their happiness on the songs of Philomena or Procne, or in servitude to untamed beasts, or in contemplating the stars in the middle of the night." Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Humanist*, ed. and trans. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 126.

Ann Rosalind Jones notes the occurrence of the images of Echo and Philomela in the work of Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona, connecting the use of Ovidian myth to the question of the "voice" of women poets—or the lack thereof. The image of Echo may well represent the treatment experienced by women poets. Stampa's poem 152, while ambivalent, does seem to be expressing something akin to this frustration. Jones notes that in 173, "Cantate meco, Procne and Philomena," ("Sing with me, Procne and Philomela") Stampa is nothing if not vocal as she identifies with the wronged creatures, referring to their just ire ("giusta ira") and asking them to join her, the poet, in singing of her more recent grief ("più fresco dolor").²³

The poet as a bird, the poem as a bird-song, a means to assuage grief, is a standard feature of Petrarchism, as in his line, "perche cantando il duol si disacerba" (*Canzoniere*, XXIII). Nevertheless, these two women poets utilize Philomela differently than their male counterparts. While we might find it surprising that such material may be ignored or repressed, sexuality was viewed in a mode more predatory than egalitarian—both by Ovid and in Renaissance law. To add a historicizing perspective, rape and violence against women generally were not always prosecuted as crimes.²⁴

²³ Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, Jones, in "New Songs," 271.

²⁴ In *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Guido Ruggiero provides documentary evidence of the lack of consistency in prosecuting this particular form of crime by the Forty, the ruling body of Venice. The higher the social status and the lower the age of the victim, the more the crime tended to be treated with gravity. Raping servants and poorer young women of marriageable age was not always punished with long prison terms and fines.

A defender of women in other contexts, Tullia d'Aragona does not overtly use the tragic content of the Philomela tale to drive poem XXX.²⁵ Does Philomela know her Ovidian history? As with other cases of Renaissance *imitatio*, the poem creates some distance from the original myth, and suggests sources of "dolor" more immediate than Philomela's past trauma. Transcendent expressions—such as "in superba vista" and "tornata in libertate e in lieta vita"—suggest some dark past behind this triumphant bird, contrasting with the present triumph, which proves to be short-lived.

In any case, the choice of the Philomela theme would not be considered unusual in a post-classical literary context. From a thematic point of view, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* depicts recurrent scenes of rape by the gods. As in the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's portrayal of sexual attraction is more predatory than consensual. "Love" is figured textually in images of hunting and warfare, neatly encapsulated in his phrase "venator sequitur fugentia" ("the fleeing prey is followed by the hunter.") If we examine carefully the language of the tale, the characters are described in avian and animal imagery even before their metamorphosis into birds. When Tereus's ship has left the shore with Philomela aboard, he is already described as a bird of prey:

...non aliter quam cum pedibus praedator obuncis
deposuit nido leporem Iovis ales in alto
nulla fuga est capto. spectat sua praemia raptor...

(...as when the ravenous bird of Jove has dropped in his high eyrie some hare caught in his hooked talons; the captive has no chance to escape, the captor gloats over his prize.)²⁶

²⁵ For Tullia's engaged position on women's equality and subjectivity, I refer readers to the chapter on her *Dialogue*.

²⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 515-17.

In this passage, Ovid's grammatical and metaphorical choices underscore what Alfred Lord Tennyson referred to as "nature red in tooth and claw." The height of the eagle's nest ("nido...in alto") is in stark contrast to the flightless captivity of Philomela ("nulla fuga est capto"). This passage, in which the eagle eyes his captive prey, is followed by more predatory images, of wolf and lamb.

Throughout the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid calls attention to representation, narration, and acts of speech (or attempts to speak resulting in non-speech, as it were). Both Philomela and Actaeon are muted or thwarted in their attempts to speak. In Ovidian tales, other recently-metamorphosed characters try to speak as humans, only to growl like a bear (Callisto) or to be mute like a deer (Actaeon). Likewise, when Philomela's severed tongue tries to speak, she resorts to weaving a "text" to narrate her story. Ovid's placement and interweaving of the tale is also a form of foreshadowing. Like his cousin Actaeon, Pentheus's fatal flaw is scopic: he wants to *see* the rites of the Bacchants and eventually becomes dismembered for his voyeuristic desire.

The Philomela tale is located in Book VI, which begins with the story of Arachne. We will recall this tale of the arrogant weaver who, when challenged by Minerva, refused to retract her claim of superior skill at the loom. In the "text" she weaves, the gods appear in a bad light (much as they do in Ovid's versions of them). In *The Gods Made Flesh*, Leonard Barkan draws a convincing parallel between Arachne and Ovid: Arachne weaves her tapestry of "mille colores," and Ovid weaves his variegated tapestry into a single

text.²⁷ Self-consciously foregrounding the creative act, Ovid comments upon the verisimilitude of Arachne's tapestry (and by implication, his own) twice in Book VI:

Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri
Europam: verum taurum, freta vera putares

(...a real bull and real waves, *you would think* them)

corpora Cecropidum pennis pendere putares:
pendebant pennis. quarum petit altera silvas,
altera tecta subit, neque adhuc de pectore caedis
excessere notae, signataque sanguine pluma est.

(...*you would think* that the bodies of the two Athenians were poised on wings: they were poised on wings! One flies to the woods, the other rises to the roof. And even now their breasts have not lost the marks of their murderous deed, their feathers are stained with blood.)²⁸

The metamorphosis itself is expressed in terms of perception: "you would think" (*putares*). The word draws a parallel between the artistry of Ovid and Arachne, implying the praiseworthy verisimilitude of the representations and the efficacy of the creative imagination. We will see a similar self-consciousness about signification in Tullia d'Aragona's Philomela, who is *compared* to—but not equivalent to—the tragic, silent figure of Ovid's Philomela.

There are other things to note about the imagery of the metamorphosis of the escaping sisters, such as the continuities they exhibit between their human and animal forms. Even as birds, the deed marks them: their wings are "signed" with blood ("signataque sanguine pluma est"). Each "bird" resorts to her natural habitat, house or

²⁷ Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 4, 7.
²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI. 103-5, 667-70.

forest: Procne chooses a domestic locale and Philomela, a pastoral one. We will see this recur in the poem “Qual vaga Filomena.”

Tullia d’Aragona’s choice of a wooded locale for Philomela draws upon the last line of Ovid’s tale. From a female point of view, the pastoral *locus amoenus* is always fraught with danger—the possibility of violation lurks in the shadows. While conscious of her own modesty, the goddess of chastity does not always protect her devotees, as in the case of Callisto. (Taken by Jove in the guise of Diana, the pregnant Callisto is expelled, eventually, from her band of virgins). As I will demonstrate, in Pernette’s poem, identification with Diana’s nakedness is a teasing protest of purity and power; Aragona’s poem is concerned with the redemption of a prior state of wholeness. Philomela protests—before losing her tongue to Tereus’s sword—that she had been a virgin. In the world of myth, virginity is associated with Diana the sylvan huntress, the goddess of chastity and solitude. In XXX, therefore, the Ovidian text functions as subtext, as an unspeakable violation of female sanctity and privacy.

In a sense, the Philomela tale *is* unspeakable. Philomela has survived a fate that Ovid describes, or rather fails to describe, as “nefas” (that which cannot be spoken). As Lynn Enterline points out, in narrating the rape, Ovid “stammers” over the word: “fassusque nefas et virginem et unam/vi superat” (“he did the unspeakable: a virgin and all alone/he overcame her”)²⁹ VI, 524-25. Nor can her sister, Procne, bring her own tongue to speak:

²⁹ Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 153.

..verbaque quarenti satis indignantia linguae
defuerunt, nec flere vacat, sed fasque nefasque
confusura ruit poenaeque in imagine tota est.

(... her questing tongue can find no words strong enough to express her outraged feelings. Here there is no room for tears, but she hurries on to confound right and wrong, her whole soul bent on the thought of vengeance.)³⁰

In the original Ovidian text, Philomela cries “omnia turbasti” upon realizing the unnaturalness of Tereus’s desires. She threatens the vengeance of the gods and Furies, imploring the very woods and stones to cry out, as if she were another Orpheus. The threat draws upon the power of place: Tereus’s Thrace has witnessed the scene of Orpheus’s dismemberment. Such a scenario is further evoked in Procne’s disguise as a Bacchant, though it is not Tereus who is dismembered.

The Philomela story is yet another instance of Ovid’s ability to move his audience through the power of his poet-persona, and to identify with one of the victims. In the light of the complexity of Ovid’s text, Aragona’s claim of likeness to Philomela is all the more moving. Furthermore, by using a simile: “qual...er’io uscita” (“Like [Philomela]...so I escaped”) instead of speaking in the voice of Philomela, a dignified aesthetic distance is established from Philomela, and from the woods that witnessed her abduction. Regarding the woods from a distance, Aragona does not worry about moving them; instead she moves her readers, through an evocation of her source text and its web of compelling stories.

In the web that Tullia d’Aragona weaves, there are other textual strands in addition to the Ovidian. In my interpretation of this poem, I have tried to trace the

mediating influences of Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch. As of this writing, no one has read this poem by Aragona in the light of these other authors, but as part of her public relations effort at image rehabilitation.³¹ This interpretation makes sense, considering the legal problems incurred by Tullia's refusal to wear the courtesan's yellow veil were a reason for the *Rime*'s publication in the first place. In fact, my reading, which sees the poem as proposing an alternative definition of love as well as a farewell to the life of a courtesan, builds upon this premise.

Keeping in mind the social realities behind the poem, I wish to go deeper into its literary aspects. From an intertextual perspective, one can see evidence of Aragona's deep engagement with—and revision of—her literary sources. Just as in publishing her *Rime* as an anthology of exchange-sonnets with prestigious living authors, so too in this poem an acute intertextual consciousness of canonical predecessors is revealed. Toward that end, she combines Ovidian psychic torture, Dantean repentance, Petrarchan masochism, and a Sappho-like dedication to the goddess of love, culminating in a dramatic reversal of fortune. Following my translation is an interpretation of Tullia's dazzling fortieth poem, with its complex permutations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.³²

³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 584–86.

³¹ This is the interpretation suggested by Jones in her essay "New Songs," *op cit.* 274.

³² This poem and my translations of I. XXXVIII, and LV of the *Rime* can be found in *Forum Italicum*, Spring 2002.

XXX

Qual vaga Filomena, che fuggita
 è da l'odiata gabbia, e in superba
 vista sen va tra gli arboscelli e l'erba,
 tornata in libertate e in lieta vita;

er' io da gli amorosi lacci uscita,
 schermendo ogni martire e pena acerba
 de l'incredibil duol, ch' in sè riserba
 qual ha per troppo amar l'alma smarrita.

Ben avev' io ritolte (ahi stella fera!)
 dal tempio di Ciprigna le mie spoglie,
 e di lor pregio me n'andava altera;

quand' a me Amor: le tue retrose voglie,
 Muterò, disse; e femmi prigionera
 di tua virtù, per rinovar mie doglie.

Like flitting Philomel—who flies so proudly free,
 having fled the prison of her hated cage,
 who goes among the wooded groves and greens
 returning to her former happy life, in liberty—

so had I escaped from love's handcuffs
 scorning all suffering and the special bitter pain
 of the sorrow beyond belief, reserved for the one
 who has lost her soul through excess, loving love.

As the Cyprian knows well (oh, merciless star!)
 I had gathered up my spoils from her temple
 and for their proud price I had gone elsewhere:

when to me, Love said: *I will alter*
 (to renew my pain) *your perverse will.*
 And made me your virtue's prisoner.

At the end of Ovid's tale, Philomela becomes the bird who flies to the woods as opposed to the one who seeks the rooftops, "*quarum petit altera silvas/ altera tecta subit.*" As mentioned above, the setting of Aragona's poem is (just above) the woods, "arboscelli," rather than the roof of a house or the temple of Venus, as in a subsequent stanza. When the poem opens, she is flying above the scene of the crime, having escaped. Aragona's speaker recalls the story subtextually even as she creates a perspective distant from it.

In Aragona's poem, it is a triumphant Philomela that emerges—or so it appears at first. By the end of the poem, an original lyric persona/self emerges out of prior, unspecified trauma. This persona is not voiceless or a victim but assertive and autonomous—except for a rather Ovidian-Petrarchan subjugation to the god of love. Like Ovid in the *Amores*, the speaker is love's prisoner—bound, or as I translate it, handcuffed—to the powerful dark forces of attachment usually associated with *Eros*.

Although these bonds are “only” psychic, they are nevertheless real.³³ The history of this dark view of love, of course, threads through Ovid and the Latin love poets, through Cavalcanti and Petrarch, and can be found in the post-Petrarchan poets and Shakespeare. Even Petrarch is ambiguous: his *Rime Sparse* chronicle struggles with the effects of love on the soul that are both Ovidian and Augustinian in nature.³⁴

There are at least two distinct movements in Aragona’s poem. In the octave, the speaker is seen as having escaped from the bonds of love (“amorosi lacci”) as well as the hated cage (“odiata gabbia”). These metaphors could possibly refer to Tereus’s past imprisonment of Philomela, to Tullia’s profession, or to a psychic bondage more imprisoning than any outward circumstances. Escape is equated with renunciation of the love in which one loses one’s soul (“per troppo amar l’alma smarrita”), usually associated in Italian poetry with Cavalcanti and Petrarch, but in this poem escape is equated with the classical figure of the Cyprian, (Venus). In the first ten lines, Aragona’s speaker balances an acknowledgement of the dark side of love (to which she has been bound) with an emphasis upon freedom from these bonds, with a triumphant register in her poetic voice. She identifies equivocally with Philomela, as an agent of her destiny, locating the tragedy in the past. However, the more powerful will of Amor will soon triumph over this quite willful speaker.

³³ The parallel, in the myth, is the physical, psychological, and linguistic imprisonment of Philomela—in a stone cottage with guards and no voice. Despite these constraints, she bribes a servant to smuggle the tapestry to Procne.

³⁴ In *Harmful Eloquence*, M.L. Stapleton traces Petrarch’s inner struggle with the Ovidian “desultor amoris” persona. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

The sonnet begins, “Qual vaga Filomela, che fuggita / è da l’odiata gabbia...” and immediately our attention is drawn to the past participle “fuggita” and the past fact of the cage. The metamorphosis, then, has already occurred; Ovid’s account is the precursor text to which Tullia’s tale of flight is the “belated” sequel.

The “Philomena” of poem XXX is not, at first glance, Ovid’s Philomela, who is a voiceless object, the passive and tragic recipient of Tereus’s lust and rage. In this very stylized and very Petrarchan poem, I find both triumph and sorrow—of a different kind than Petrarch’s. Like Petrarch, Tullia elides the violence of the Ovidian tale, although there are dark subtextual resonances that never completely disappear. Philomel is free, or thinks she is, but her psyche is enslaved. The first two *stanze* retell the narrative of escape; the third repeats the departure motif, but with a more purposeful tone: it is a choice rather than an escape. Is this a choice to leave the lifestyle of prostitution? This interpretation coheres with biographical interpretations made in the light of the charges leveled against Aragona: the lawsuit over not wearing the yellow veil forms a possible parallel with the metaphor of departure from the temple of the Cyprian. Following the logic of the poem, the spoils she had gathered were not worth the enslavement to the prison-house of the earlier stanzas. (“Spoglie” means both “garments” and “spoils of war.”) This is consistent with the imagery of the first sonnet of the collection: nymphs and shepherds offer incense to Pan because he has answered their prayer and granted them the nymphs’ love. If the speaker has been a priestess of Aphrodite and has chosen to leave the temple, relinquishing her spoils, is it because her prayers have not been

answered? Has the goddess been unreliable or too literal, bestowing spoils in lieu of love? This would be consistent with Sappho's Aphrodite.

In the sestet, we have the devotee of Venus leaving her lucrative and admired position at the temple, and heading toward the (Dantean) straight road. She is brought back, not by a Beatrice or a Virgil, but by Amor. Certainly this is unprecedented in Petrarchism: Amor performing the role of superego, as does Augustine in Petrarch's *Secretum*. Aragona's poetic persona (which seems to be female) is using Petrarchan conventions to create a new kind of *peripeteia*, or dramatic reversal of fortune in the poem. The speaker goes from being imprisoned or enslaved to love to renouncing its material advantages, from enjoying solitude to becoming imprisoned anew—by virtue. As in Dante, the beloved is a vehicle for spiritual growth.

Having paraphrased the poem, I now want to turn to its rhetorical and poetic figures and intertextual resonances. The construction "as *x*, so is *y*" derives from Dante rather than Petrarch. The way it is used by Dante, particularly in the *Inferno*, is that one or two whole tercets are devoted to the *x* part of the syllogism and then the *y* element is introduced. This rhetorical device has the effect of arresting the attention with a universally accessible visual image, searing it into the mind, then translating that image into the speaker's particular predicament.

So the first visual, as it were, is that of flight and freedom, of the Philomela-bird, a swallow or nightingale, having just escaped her hated cage. Whatever the cage represents, she is now free from it. The past participle "fuggita" (fled) rhymes with "vita"

(life): this bird has fled *into* a life of liberty from one of servitude. The *enjambement* of “fuggita/è” drives the first stanza with the tension of anticipation: having fled, what will the avian-human speaker do now? There is an echo in the second line between “è” and “e” [*is* and *and*]; as one act of being leads to another. The adjective “superba” (derived from the Latin *superbia*), is usually viewed negatively, as one of the seven deadly sins, though here it is lofty and triumphant in perspective. The attitude of the bird, and the height from which the “vista” is seen, provide a contrast to the “erba,” or grasses, below on earth, and there is a feminine rhyme between *superba* and *erba*. The “superbia” of the second stanza is also expressed in “schernendo”—here translated as “scorning” the pain that accompanies love. This disdain can be interpreted in two ways: the speaker is either scorning love and the pain it brings (as Ovid’s speaker ostensibly does in his three books on love, the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris*); or she is relishing the suffering, proud of the extent to which she can endure pain. For the truly Petrarchan lover, no suffering for love is too much; it is a noble suffering which can even be seen as a refining fire that purifies the soul.

From a superior vantage point, then, both in perspective and in haughty pride, the speaker surveys her former wooded haunts, enjoying her newfound liberty, a liberty all the more valued for its former nonexistence. In the second stanza, we are told at least one aspect of what constituted her imprisonment in the phrase “amorosi lacci.” Though I have taken some liberty in my translation, I sought to retain a sense of the Petrarchan element of masochism, similar to the way in which the poet imagines himself the victim of pain

inflicted by the hand of Amor. This poem resonates with poem V in the *Canzoniere*, in which the speaker is helpless before the arrows of love “Amor trovommi tutto disarmato” (“love found me all disarmed”). All the action, however, is performed by Amor: Laura cannot descend to this infernal level: she is the object of Love’s operations as well of the poet’s ensuing desire; yet she seems to have little agency.

The passivity of the female beloved is exactly what Tullia protests elsewhere. In her *Dialogue*, Tullia comments on Laura’s wordless position, positing the hilarious situation of a Laura-poet and a Petrarch-beloved. What a different story we’d have then, she remarks, tongue in cheek.³⁵ Passivity is precisely what Tullia’s speaker overcomes in this poem, in a more poignant key. In the third line, the speaker, having given the slip to her former bonds, chooses to leave her servitude at the temple of Venus. These bonds may be physical or metaphysical bonds to a love object, or to Love itself. The Petrarchan tradition had poetically established the psychological “reality” of an emotional tie that does not require the participation, or even the presence, of the beloved. This poem can be identified as belonging to that tradition by its vocabulary and imagery; but also by its exclusivity. Aragona’s speaker includes herself among those chosen to suffer through the special sorrow of loving too much (especially when the love is not reciprocated). The phrase “ch’in sè *riserba* qual ha per troppo amar l’alma smarrita” (literally, “which reserves for itself the one who has lost her soul through loving too much”) contains an implicit claim for the speaker’s membership in an elite coterie of love poets. Dante had

called the circle of poets “fedele d’amore” as if it were a brotherhood or sect. In this poem, Aragona takes orders in that sect.

Justin Vitiello has pointed out that such suffering ennobles the poet, in a Christian sense.³⁶ This is particularly true of Gaspara Stampa’s poetry. Tullia does not espouse Christian martyrdom in her poetics in the same way as Stampa does, but she inscribes her suffering on behalf of love in Christian terms: “martire,” “pena acerba,” and “incredibil duol.” However, she is not content to leave it at that, for suffering is not an end in itself. It is an opportunity to show her dexterity, originality, and, as is characteristic of Tullia’s writing, to stake a claim for her nobility of soul. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate her rhetorical *virtù*.

As is typical of Petrarch’s sonnets, the sestet contains a rhetorical turn. In addition to a sense of having been subject to the bonds of love, i.e. to Amor, there is also a sense of a relationship to the goddess of love as is found in the poetry of Sappho. “Love’s willing servant all too often,” the speaker seems to be saying, “this time I am renouncing love and lovers and their gifts (spoils) in favor of freedom of flight, perhaps in an attitude of haughty pride.” Contrary to the lascivious and venal images of courtesans presented in contemporary popular art and literature,³⁷ Tullia’s stance is more characteristic of celibate

³⁵ *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, translated by Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 69.

³⁶ I refer to the article by Justin Vitiello, “Gaspara Stampa: The Ambiguities of Martyrdom,” *MLN* 90 (1975), 58-71.

³⁷ Cf. the special issue of *Women’s Studies* dedicated to Renaissance women, which include Ann R. Jones, “Reading City Women with Men,” Cathy Santoro, “The Tools of Venus,” E.S. Cohen, “Whores and Courtesans: Words and Behavior in the Streets of Rome,” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. 19 No. 1 (1991).

Diana than of amorous Venus. It is as if she is leaving Venus for the nunnery. (In the next chapter, I will return to the question of Tullia's deliberate eschewing of the sinfulness of Petrarchan love). It is a farewell to arms like Ovid's, a determination not to be reensnared. As with Ovid's speaker-persona, however, the more he fights against the flames of love, the more they increase in intensity. The difference is that in Tullia's poem, this intensity of emotion results not in sexual fantasy or consummation but in penitence.

Given the wide range of references, we can assume that Aragona knows her sources too well to be evoking them by accident. There is not only an echo of Ovid's bound-and-gagged helplessness in Cupid's power and of Petrarch's wariness of earthly love; perhaps, too, Augustine's "amabam amare"³⁸ in the [sound and sense of the] phrase "per troppo amare l'alma smarrita" literally, "through too much loving has mislaid the soul." While in the *Secretum*, Petrarch struggles with loving the creature more than the creator, Aragona's poetic narrator knows that she has loved too much for her own good, to the point where she has lost her soul. In contemporary language, we might say "her sense of self," but in the symbolic order of this linguistic system, it is her soul that is at stake.

In Italian poetry, one cannot use the word "smarrita" without conjuring up the "familiar ghost" of Dante.³⁹ The word occurs in the third line of the *Inferno*: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai in una selva oscura/dove la diritta via era *smarrita*."

³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* III.1 "I loved the idea of love..." trans. Rex Warner (NY: Penguin, 1963), 52.

It also rhymes with “uscita.” Thus, escaping love’s bonds is contrasted with losing one’s soul through excessive focus on the love object. Dante can reconcile the two kinds of love in the *Paradiso*: he can be with Beatrice *and* be in the presence of God. However, for Petrarch, ostensibly, it is a sin to idolize the object of his affections.³⁹ In Petrarch, there is also a constant fear of the possible loss of soul, or self, which moves toward a renunciation of the decentering, chaotic, “bufera infernale” of love, yet is followed by “backsliding.” There is also the possibility that the adoration of the beloved can turn into idolatry—as in poem XXX, “idolo mio, scolpito in vivo lauro” (“my idol, sculptured in living laurel”). Aragona incorporates these two views of love into her poem. Love is both a means by which to lose oneself and possibly also the path out of the *selva*.

Has the speaker of XXX lost her soul, or is it just temporarily mislaid (“smarrita”)? I would suggest that the poem contains the possibility, even the likelihood, of conversion: a change of heart or stance with regard to love’s bonds. This is in keeping with the Neoplatonic rhetoric that runs throughout the *Rime*, which has been seen as an effort to mitigate the yellow veil incident.

I would like to suggest that the transcendent escapes of the first two *stanze* are meant to be parallel. In the six lines of the sestet, the three words which begin with “ri” or “re” connote an undoing of a prior action (“ritolte”), a moving backward (“retrose”), and

³⁹ Jones, too, points out the Dantean resonances in *Currency of Eros*, 116, and in “New Songs,” 274.

⁴⁰ In poem XXX, the phrase “idolo mio scolpito in vivo lauro” My idol, sculptured in living laurel) graphically illustrates the extent to which the poet has made a graven image of the laurel. John Freccero, in his canonical essay, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel” makes a similar point, contrasting Petrarch’s idolatrous Laurel/Laura figure to the fig tree under which Augustine had his conversion.

a renewing of a prior condition of sorrow (“rinovar mie doglie”). The poem moves from imprisonment to escape to psychic reincarceration: Amor will change the speaker’s perverse desires (“le tue retrose voglie/ Muterò”). The future tense is used to change the “backsliding,” unrepentant past, and this change is nicely echoed between the “retro” of the retrograde desires and the “[m]uterò” of his threat/promise.⁴¹ “Muterò” is also the Latin/Italian equivalent of the Greek word “metamorphosis.”

Ben’avevo *io* ritolte (ahi stella fera!)
dal tempio di Ciprigna le *mie* spoglie,
e di lor pregio *me* n’andava altera;

As the Cyprian knows well (oh, merciless star!)
I had gathered up my spoils from her temple
and for their proud price I had gone elsewhere;

quand’a *me* Amor: le tue retrose voglie.
Muterò, disse; e femmi prigionera
di tua virtù, per rinovar *mie* doglie.⁴²

when to me, Love said: *I will alter*
(to renew my pain) *your perverse will*.
And made me your virtue’s prisoner.

Although this poem both is and is not Petrarchan in philosophy, its language evokes the author of the *Canzoniere*. The repetition of various forms of “me” echoes Petrarch’s *incipit*: “Di me medesimo meco mi vergogna” (literally, “of me myself I am ashamed of myself with myself.”) In the sestet of Aragona’s poem, the personal pronoun is used six times in one form or another. By contrast, the pronoun “tu” (which I have boldfaced) is used twice. “Amor” is less the cooperating sadist in Petrarch’s sadomasochistic aesthetic and more the absolute ruler who declares to Dante, “ego dominus tuus” (“I am your lord/master.”) We will see a similar declaration by Actaeon.

The “tu” to whom the poem is addressed—the one whose “virtù” is the cause of the poet’s “doglie” (literally, “labor pains”)—is still a mystery. This poem follows others

⁴¹ Again, thanks to Rick Griffiths for his close reading of the poem.

⁴² Translation, italics, and boldface mine.

entitled “A Piero Manelli” or “allo stesso,” and critics have assumed that this poem too was written to him, Tullia’s much younger lover. Other poems praising the virtue of the addressee are dedicated to Pietro Bembo, who passed away in the beginning of the year these poems appeared in print.⁴³ By keeping hidden the identity of the addressee, as Jones suggests, Aragona can flatter potentially anyone.⁴⁴ Yet the quality of “virtù” suggested by this sonnet (“virtù” without the virility implied by “vir”) might be a difficult profile to fit, especially when one thinks of the possible candidates. The interpretation of the poem, however, does not depend upon the “tu” to whom it is addressed. Rather, the speaker is made “prigionera” in an *apprentissage* which seems more rigorous than any described by either Dante or Petrarch.

Whichever the case, she appears to be renouncing the bonds as enlacing snares (“amorosi lacci”), and leaving the temple of Venus (the Cyprian) when in the sestet, an unexpected turn occurs. On the threshold, as it were, Love stops her in her tracks. Not content with her renunciation of him, he is determined to alter her perverse will: as opposed to being the prisoner to a love that is sinful, as Petrarch claims to be, Amor will make her Virtue’s captive.

Muterò, disse, le tue retrose voglie,
e femmi prigioniera de la tua virtù.

*I will alter, he said, your perverse wishes—
and made me prisoner of your virtue.)*⁴⁵

⁴³ In a rather hagiographic representation, editor Mario Marti states that Pietro Bembo turned to “sublime truths and with zeal, to the sacred ministry of preparing for the afterlife. Though well-prepared, death took him, somewhat by surprise, on the 18th of January, 1547” (“sublimi verità...esercitava con zelo il suo sacro ministero, preparandosi all’al di là. E ben preparato la morte lo colse, anche se quasi di sorpresa, il 18 gennaio del 1547.”) *Pietro Bembo: Opere in Volgare*, edited by Mario Marti (Florence: Sansoni, 1961).

⁴⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros*, 116.

⁴⁵ This is a literal translation; see Appendix I for the poetic version.

Ovid, Petrarch, Dante are all present in this poem. Yet the result of this multivalent, intertextual web of allusions (like Arachne's, shimmering with "mille colores") is the production of an original lyric self, carefully fashioned out of love elegy and Christian repentance: a poetic metamorphosis of selves composed out of desultory Ovid, conflicted Petrarch, and the "pilgrim soul" of Dante, not to mention something of Tullia herself. Identifying with chastity when renowned for earthly love, Tullia d'Aragona creates a metamorphosis of Amor, from vice into virtue, in this triumphant poem.

As we have seen, Tullia's use of the myth of Philomela is itself a complex tapestry of literary allusion and code-switching, utilizing elements of Ovid, Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch to create a poem whose mystery has not been thoroughly solved. Perhaps the poem remains somewhat inscrutable because it is something truly original, even unthinkable: a poem in the voice of a female persona which respects—and yet alters—the conventions of the very sources of the male-authored traditions she ventriloquizes, plays with, subverts, and/or alters in quite interesting and inescapably gendered ways.

The nature of the past criticism of Tullia d'Aragona's work suggests the need for this new reading. On the whole, past critics have been inconsistent in their praise and blame; the originality of her poems has been questioned. Either Tullia⁴⁶ is labeled "cold"

⁴⁶ Georgina Masson, in *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, counts Tullia among the "cold whores of the mind." (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1975) 89.

or her poetry is (“un po’ fredda”)—⁴⁷or the reverse: she is accommodating, as her profession required her to pretend to be, and therefore not a poet. Either she has had help from others or the poems are substandard Petrarchan imitations. An article from only a decade ago cites the editorial assistance of Benedetto Varchi as tantamount to ghostwriting, disregarding similar practices by other male and female writers of the period. To put it bluntly, the critic in question also performs character assassination in the guise of philology, citing poems about Tullia d’Aragona (poems that she would have probably called “lascivissime”) as a way of critiquing her work.⁴⁸ What is true historically is that women poets had to be skilled strategically (as well as rhetorically and poetically) in order to advance their own literary fame: editorial assistance and well-connected friends were necessary for literary success. Poets of the classical past, as well as illustrious contemporary men of letters are featured as addressees or sources of allusion in her poetry. If Tullia’s birth pedigree was of dubious claim, her literary bloodlines are impeccable.

⁴⁷ Aragona’s poetry is described as “fredda” in the *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, vol. XII (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1949), 375.

⁴⁸ Francesco Bausi, “Le rime di e per Tullia d’Aragona,” in *Les Femmes Écrivains en Italie au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance*, Actes du colloque internationale, Aix-en-Provence, 12, 13, 14 novembre 1992. (Publications de l’université de Provence, 1994). Bausi spends more than half of the article citing Tullia’s correspondence with Varchi and spends the rest quoting scurrilous poems in which Tullia is supposedly featured, as if unproven *ad feminam* aspersions amounted to literary criticism. His “proofs” that Tullia did not write her own poems are unconvincing, as they do not take into account the practice, as common in the period as it is today, of circulating poems among friends.

“Laissez le aller:” Resisting Violence-by-Metamorphosis in Pernette’s “Elégie II”

I will introduce Pernette du Guillet with just a few biographical facts and then proceed with a close reading of her *Elégie II*. Pernette du Guillet faced a different set of circumstances, social and literary, from her contemporary Tullia d’Aragona. Social pedigree came at a price: du Guillet lacked the freedom to speak as frankly as Tullia did—to create irreverent, Lucianic satire or poetry that was too passionate. Her *Rymes*, a book of sixty poems, was published posthumously in Lyons in 1545. Pernette’s editor, Antoine du Moulin, is careful to preface the collection with an avowal of her chaste reputation. Born into an aristocratic family and married within her class, Pernette did not have to defend her honor or face accusations of “meretrix publica,” like her less well-born contemporary Louise Labé.

Superficially, then, Pernette (1520-1545) also has little in common with Tullia d’Aragona. Unlike Tullia, she was not consigned to the life of a courtesan with its many hazards, nor that of a public persona who had to fight for her reputation (as did Aragona, who ran afoul of the sumptuary laws in Siena and Florence).⁴⁹ Like her Italian counterpart, however, du Guillet is a Muse who also writes, the author of a poetry collection as well as the object of laudatory verse; like Tullia’s, her life as well as her poetry is subjected to scrutiny in literary-critical analyses.

Pernette is often mentioned in conjunction with a love interest, the poet Maurice Scève. For example, the entry in the *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises* for Pernette du

Guillet states, rather presumptuously: “La grande aventure de sa vie fut son amour pour Maurice Scève.” (“The great adventure of her life was her love for Maurice Sceve.”)⁵⁰ She is identified as “incontestablement” as his muse, “Délie, of whom he sang” (“la Délie qu’il chanta”). Saulnier further speculates, without “evidence” other than the poems, about the possibility that “one night...the two had been lovers” (“une nuit...furent-ils amants.”) “Unformed and immature” is the verdict of another critic, who naively (or fantastically) imagines that the poem in question is an account of a walk with her lover in the woods rather than reading it as a mythical scene playfully incorporated into a sustained lyrical fantasy.⁵¹ Yet another book on sixteenth-century French literature accords her mention (in name only) in a list of “femmes lettrées” under “Les Lyonnaises et la poésie” as “Pernette du Guillet, amie de Maurice Scève,” yet spends an entire page speculating as to what it might mean to be the “*objet de plus haute vertu*” of the subtitle of Scève’s *Délie*.⁵² This critic, Olivier Soutet, reaches the simplistic (and inaccurate) conclusion that “Délie est à Scève ce que Laure fut au poète du *Canzoniere*” (i.e., making

⁴⁹ For a history of the yellow veil controversy, see the introduction by Rinaldina Russell, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 24-26.

⁵⁰ Verdun L. Saulnier, *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. Le seizième siècle*, ed. Arthème Fayaud (Paris, 1951).

⁵¹ M. Léon Feugère makes the following rather condescending judgment: “...nous y avons reconnu, sous l’enveloppe d’un style un peu rude ou embarrassé, des idées ingénieuses et de nobles sentiments. Il y a même, dans quelques-uns de ces morceaux, de la facilité et de la grâce” (“We have discerned [in the poetry of Pernette], under the [aegis] of a style a bit unformed or encumbered, ingenious ideas and noble sentiments. In some of these bits, there is even fluency and grace.”) *Les Femmes Poètes au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1860), 25.

⁵² Olivier Soutet, *La littérature française de la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 66-7, 68.

an equation Délie:Scève = Laura:Petrarch, ignoring the fact that Pernette, unlike Laura, wrote poetry).⁵³

Contrary to the assertions of these critics, we know neither Pernette's intentions nor the details of her personal life. One wonders what Pernette would have thought about such claims. What we do know is that her verses echo those of Maurice Scève, and his name appears in anagram form in some of her poems. While Scève had a somewhat notorious reputation, however, Pernette did not.⁵⁴ Her self-fashioned poetic persona creates a parallel with the chaste goddess Diana. References to chastity, "amitié", and "honnête contentement" occur liberally in her work, which also incorporates learned allusions to classical literature such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Plato's *Lysis*, as well as references to the love theory of Leone Ebreo (translated by Pontus de Tyard into French).⁵⁵ In her *Rymes*, Pernette creates metamorphic revisions of the texts of both Ovid and Maurice Scève, transforming both plot and style.

Pernette du Guillet's "Elégie II" is a tale from Ovid in which the metamorphosis is interrupted. The original story of Actaeon's transgressive glimpse of Diana bathing is fraught with potential—and actual—violence. It is also unusual among Ovid's narratives in that the gender dynamics are reversed: instead of a female mortal at the mercy of Jove

⁵³ Tullia d'Aragona's comment about Laura writing to Petrarch is the source of my title, *Laura's Laurels*.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the life (and art) of Maurice Scève, see Jerry Nash, *The Love Aesthetics of Maurice Scève*. (New York and Cambridge): Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁵⁵ Editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were published in France from 1510-28 in the version edited by Raphael Regius, accompanied by the "moralizing" commentary of Petrus Lavinius, a friend of the Neoplatonist Symphorien Champier. Pernette could have read Ovid in Latin, in Lavinius's version. She would have had access to the humanist edition with Regius's commentary as well. Ann Moss, *Latin Commentaries on Ovid from the Renaissance*, 103-7.

or Neptune, the victim of the goddess Diana is male. Pernette references other Ovidian transformations in her *Rymes*, but her version of the Actaeon story is unique in its resolution: as *metamorphosis interruptus*.⁵⁶

Like Tullia d'Aragona, Pernette du Guillet works within existing traditions in a transformative, even playful way. Her expansion and revision of contemporary notions of Neoplatonic love has subsequently been called "l'amour humaniste."⁵⁷ I propose that she does something even more radical with Petrarchism: tantamount to putting into practice the hypothesis proposed in Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue: Laura had written poems to Petrarch?⁵⁸ There are traces of her "maistre" in Pernette's responses to the poems of Maurice Scève, but these are more than the ancillary echoes of a docile pupil. Readings that focus solely upon Pernette's "in response" to Scève's work miss the transformative quality she brings to her *apprentissage*.

Admittedly, some of Pernette's poems do partake of the quality of smitten ephebe, but that is only half the story. Robert Cottrell perceptively identifies the dual voice of her persona:

Finding her own identity in the eyes of the male Other and becoming what he wishes her to be, she assures us that she is happy. Gradually, however, the speaking subject shifts into a second register, allowing us to hear fleetingly an angry voice that condemns the Petrarchist model with its reified female idol.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Her Chanson X, "Conde Claros d'Adonis," is critiqued in du Bellay's *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* but defended by Barthélemy Aneau and Guillaume des Autelz.

⁵⁷ V. Saulnier, "Etude sur Pernette du Guillet et ses *Rymes*," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 4 (1944), 75.

⁵⁸ *Dialogue*, 69; see also above, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Robert Cottrell, "Pernette du Guillet," in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of French Literature*, ed. Eva Martin Sartori (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1999). See also Cottrell's essay "Pernette du

This voice is by turns droll, ironic, critical, witty, subversive and playful. Colette H. Winn sees Pernette's poetry as embracing the duality of subject-object in a voice she defines as

la voix d'une femme: femme-amante, femme nommée, femme-écrivain, femme sans nom...dans l'ombre de son 'maître.' Ce sont ses expériences féminines, diverses et contradictoires, ces relations duelles (sujet-objet), ce constant va-et-vient entre ces deux poles qui font...la spécificité de cette écriture.... ([T]he voice of a woman: woman lover, named woman, woman writer, woman without a name...in the shadow of her 'master.' These are her experiences as a woman, diverse and contradictory, these dual relations (subject-object) this constant coming and going between two poles which creates...the specificity of her writing....)⁶⁰

A dynamic of reciprocity is embodied in Pernette's poems: in love: one can be subject and/or object rather than perform only one role.⁶¹ The following quote illustrates this "va-et-vient":

Prenez le cas que, comme je suis vostre—	Making the case that as I belong to you,
Et estre veulx—vous soyez tout à moy:	and wish to be—you are all mine:
Certainement par ce commun bien nostre	Certainly by this our good in common
Vous me debvriez tel droict, que je vous doy.	⁶² You owe such rights to me as I do to you.

Pernette makes it clear: if she is his (critics have identified other candidates for "him" besides Scève),⁶³ it is because she chooses to be. In the first two lines, with their

Guillet and the Logic of Aggressivity," in *Writing the Renaissance* ed. Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1992).

⁶⁰ Colette Winn, "La chant de la nouvelle née: Les *Rymes* de Pernette du Guillet" in *Poétique* 78 (1989), 207-17, 207.

⁶¹ Some critics are sensitive to the resistance of dichotomy in favor of a dynamic exchange in Pernette's poetry. As Lawrence Kritzman points out, "The scripting of du Guillet's fantasy lies in the self-appointed task of representing a female subject beyond the vulnerability of the traditional subject-object confrontation." *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the literature of the French Renaissance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26. This corresponds to Robert Cottrell's description of the "second register" in Pernette's poetry: in *Elégie* 2, the implicit threat of violence casts a shadow over the poem's comic resolution.

⁶² "Given that I am yours, and wish to be, you are all mine: surely by this our common good, I owe such rights to you as you owe me."

declarations of mutual ownership, Pernette uses the device of chiasmus: “come je suis vostre...vous soyez tout à moy....” (“as I am yours, you belong to me entirely.”) The effect of this repetition in a “crossed” or reversed form is not only to illustrate an oxymoron, as Petrarch does, but also to signify a newfound reciprocity not found in Petrarch or Petrarchism.

A source for this reciprocity has been identified (by critical consensus) as the *Dialoghi d'amore* of Leone Ebreo, also the basis for Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo...dell'infinità d'amore*. In Ebreo's theory of love, the lover and the beloved are converted into one another as they try to become one being.⁶⁴ In one of her most famous poems, “Epigram V,” Pernette transforms in writing both herself and her mentor/master/muse. In an anagrammatic pun, she rearranges the letters that compose “Maurice Scève” into “VICE A SE MUER” and then “CE VICE MUERAS.” Critics never fail to comment upon this witticism, but tend to overlook more important transformations in this poem, in which the transformation is carried out through form as well as content. Through her acquaintance with Scève, she acquires wisdom, “sçavoir,” transmuting “noir en blanche” (black into white), and herself into him.⁶⁵ “Qui seul en toi me pourra transmuer” (“That can alone transform me into you....” The transformation is

⁶³ Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, “La parole chétive: les *Rymes* de Pernette du Guillet,” *Littérature*, 73 (1989), 47-60

⁶⁴ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, quoted by V-L Saulnier in *Rymes* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), 12.

⁶⁵ “Si che desiando il ben` de l'amico il suo propria desia, et tu sai che l'amante si converte, e transforma ne la persona amata.” (“So that desiring the good of the friend one desires one's own desire, and you know that the lover converts and transforms himself into the beloved person.”)

mutual: she makes reference to an even exchange of duties ("esgal office").⁶⁶ However, it is not clear how the beloved will be transformed until we read another poem, whose confident tone implies an evolution from the master-pupil paradigm. Here is the text of that poem by Pernette, "Elégie II:"

Combien de fois ay-je en moy souhaicté
 Me rencontrer sur la chaleur d'esté
 Tout au plus pres de la clere fontaine,
 Où mon desir avec cil se pourmaine
 Qui exerce en sa philosophie
 Son gent esprit, duquel tant je me fie
 Que ne craindrois, sans aucune maignie,
 De me trouver seule en sa compaignie:
 Que dy-je: seule? ains bien accompagnée
 D'honesteté, que Vertu a gagnée
 A Apollo, Muses, et Nymphes maintes,
 Ne s'adonnanz qu'à toutes oeuvres saintes.
 Là quand j'aurois bien au long veu son cours,
 Je le lairrais faire apart ses discours:
 Puis peu à peu de luy m'escarterois,
 Et toute nue en l'eau me gecterois:
 Mais je voudrois lors quant, et quant avoir
 Mon petit Luth accordé au debvoir,
 Duquel ayant congneu, et pris le son,
 J'entonnerois sur luy une chanson
 Pour un peu veoir quelz gestes il tiendrait:
 Mais si vers moy il s'en venoit tout droit,
 Je le lairrais hardyement approcher:
 Et s'il vouloit, tant soit peu, me toucher,
 Lui gecterois (pour le moins) ma main pleine
 De la pure eau de la clere fontaine,
 Lui gectant droit aux yeulx, ou à la face.
 O qu'alors eust l'onde telle efficace
 De le pouvoir en Actaeon muer,
 Non toutefois pour le faire tuer,
 Et devorer à ses chiens, comme Cerf:
 Mais que de moy se sensist estre serf,
 Et serviteur transformé tellement
 Qu'ainsi cuydast en son entendement,
 Tant que Dyane en eust sur moy envie,
 De luy avoir sa puissance ravie.
 Combien heureuse, et grande me dirois!

How many times, within myself secretly
 have I wished all the more for us to meet
 by a fountain, in summer's heat
 where my desire promenades [sweetly]
 with one who exercises in philosophy
 his noble spirit, in him my faith is so sincere
 that I would not have the slightest fear
 if I found myself alone in his company.
 Why do I say, alone?
 Rather, well-accompanied—by honesty
 that Virtue has won
 for Apollo and the Nine,
 who dedicate themselves to holy pursuits.
 Then when I'd watched him from afar
 from him I would stand a little apart
 and listening to him speak,
 I would throw myself, all nude,
 into the water, and on my little lute,
 tuned for the task, I'd sing a song,
 to see what would be his response.
 Having known and heard the sound.
 But if he came to me too directly
 I would let him approach close to me
 and if he wanted just a touch
 I'd throw a handful, at least this much
 of the bright water (to stay chaste)
 in his eyes or in his face.
 Oh, that the waters could respond
 and transform him into Actaeon
 not so that his dogs would kill him
 or devour him like a Cerf
 But so he would be to me a serf
 a servant changed from a man
 and this would help him understand
 to the point that Diana would envy me
 to have robbed her of her majesty.
 How happy and great a fate for me!

⁶⁶ "Love, having assigned them equal happiness, assigns them equal duties as well." Ann Rosalind Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," in *Yale French Studies*, No. 62 (1981), 135-53, 139.

Certes Deesse estre me cuyderois.
 Mais, pour me veoir contente à mon desir,
 Vouldrois je bien faire un tel déplaisir
 A Apollo, et aussi a ses Muses.
 De les laisser privées, et confuses
 D'un, qui les peult toutes servir à gré.
 Et faire honneur à leur hault choeur sacré?
 Ostez, ostez, mes souhaitz, si hault point
 D'avecques vous: il ne m'appartient point.
 Laissez le aller les neuf Muses servir,
 Sans se vouloir dessoubz moy asservir,
 Soubz moy, qui suis sans grace, et sans merite.
 Laissez le aller, qu' Apollo je ne irrite,
 Le remplissant de Deité profonde,
 Pour contre moy susciter tout le Monde.
 Lequel un jour par ses escriptz s'attend
 D'estre avec moy et heureux, et content.

Surely a goddess I'd be said to be
 But for me to be content with my desire
 I should have to cause displeasure
 to Apollo and to every Muse
 leaving them bereft and confused
 without this one to serve their pleasure
 and bring honor to their sacred choir.
 So my wishes are to let him be, let him be,
 with you, for he does not belong to me.
 Let him go and serve the Nine
 without wanting him to serve as mine
 (for I am lacking in merit and grace).
 Let him go, for Apollo's sake
 by all means, let's not irritate
 his wrath profound: the world would agitate
 against me: but let's await the day we'll see
 his writing, and how happy we'll all be.

In *Elégie II*, as mentioned, the speaker stops short of transforming the beloved into Actaeon. In poem XXX of her *Rime*, Tullia begins where Ovid's tale ends. In *Elégie II*, however, Pernette simply suggests the *possibility* of metamorphosis.⁶⁷ Pernette borrows not only from Scève, and from the vocabularies of Petrarchism and Neoplatonism, but also from the disturbing tales of Ovid. In Ovid's version of the "heroine's text," she creates a response to the unequal gender roles found in Petrarchism: vocal poet and idealized, mute muse.⁶⁸ Pernette's poems subvert the Petrarchan vocabulary to other purposes:

Rather than effacing the tensions raised by an idealized figure who begins to declare her subjectivity in terms taken from the idealizing vocabulary, her poems call into question

⁶⁷ In XXIII Petrarch, after suggesting several scenarios of metamorphosis, reverts to the original *figura* of the laurel:

"né per nova figura il primo alloro/seppi lassar, ché pur la sua dolce ombra/ogni men bel piacer del cor mi sgombra." ("nor for any new shape could I leave the first laurel, for still its sweet shade turns away from my heart any less beautiful pleasure.") Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*.

⁶⁸ Again, I borrow a phrase "the heroine's text," from Nancy Miller. Instead of describing a pattern of narrative, I reinscribe the phrase in its classical (and Renaissance) context: Ovid's *Heroides*, epistolary fictions narrated from a female point of view. Among Ovid's texts, I argue, Renaissance women poets found a sympathetic narrator.

the role postulated for her in Scève's *Délie* even while she seems to be cooperating in a lyrical dialogue with him.⁶⁹

In this quote, Ann Jones strikes a more balanced note than the earlier critics who see Pernette in more subordinate role. Robert Cottrell calls this ambivalence a "double register" in her poetry. Unlike the critics who situate Pernette's poetry in the shadow of the Other,⁷⁰ Cottrell underscores the little rebellions that occur in the poems written presumably to Scève.⁷¹ Other recent criticism focuses on the extent to which Pernette is a recalcitrant pupil to her "maistre," echoing back his words with a note of reproach or cynicism. *Elégie I* is a perfect example of this.

Elégie I, in some ways a prefatory poem to *Elégie II*, debunks some of the myths nurtured by the French poetic tradition, such as the sincerity of the troubadour. Foregrounded in this poem is the love of fame as an ulterior motive for writing the lady's praise. Entitled "Parfaict Amytié" after Antoine Héroet's "La Parfaicte Amye," *Elégie I* is

⁶⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," in *Yale French Studies*, No. 62 (1981), 135-53. Pernette's Petrarchism is examined by Gillian Jondorf in "Petrarchan Variations in Pernette du Guillet and Louise Labé," *MLN*, 71 (1976), 766-78. For a reading of Pernette's poetry as more assertive as well as more sexualized, see Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani's essay, "La parole chétive: les *Rymes* de Pernette du Guillet," *Littérature*, 73 (1989), 47-60. The latter essay draws upon deconstructive criticism to explore some of the slippage and ambiguity in lines such as the one quoted above, "je fais errer tout homme qui me loue."

⁷⁰ I borrow not only this phrase, but also the psychoanalytic theory of Jessica Benjamin in a book of the same title, *In the Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998). The critics who see Pernette as a successful yet docile pupil include: Leon Feuguere, V.L. Saulnier, and Albert-Marie Schmidt.

⁷¹ One should keep in mind that with the injunctions to chastity, silence, and obedience for women, "little rebellions" would have been the only ones permissible for a woman of Pernette's social status. Cf. Virginia Cox, "Seen but not heard" in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000). Though Cox's study focuses on Italy, she provides an extremely detailed picture of the Continental cultural climate.

already a *contre-discours*, contradicting the claims made for love by other poets, living or dead.

Quand est d'Amour, je croy que c'est un songe,	As for love, I think that it's a dream
Ou fiction, qui se paist de mensonge(s)	or a fiction, which feeds [itself] on lies:
Tant que celuy, qui peult plus faire encroire	whoever puts his grand fantasies into ink
Sa grand faintise, en acquiert plus de gloire.	is the one who acquires the most glory.

Of course, as a poet herself, Pernette is guilty of the charge she levels at contemporary male poets. However, she draws a key distinction: they flatter her with untrue praise. Her response to being the object of such praise is ambivalent: “Qu’errer je fais tout homme qui me loue” (That I make every man to err who praises me). This claim is delightfully ambiguous: it can be read as a use of the modesty *topos* (“you flatter me”), as seductiveness (“I lead men astray”), or as both. Though the poems of Du Guillet constitute dialogic responses to those of Maurice Scève, they are also transformations of his rhetoric and images. She echoes her mentor in imagery, theme and form: while he presents her as the moon goddess Phoebe of Delos (Délie) and thus associated with the night (Nuit), she depicts him as the sun-god Apollo, or the day (Jour). This is a creative revision of the Petrarchan equation of the beloved with the sun. (Phoebus) Apollo and Phoebe are brother and sister, implying a connection that is fraternal, if ambiguously so.

Through this redistribution of signifiers, Pernette’s poetry escapes the clichés of Petrarchism. Instead, love is redefined in the celestial terms of “Jour” and “Nuit” in Epigram II, the beloved as Apollo in IV; the figurative day “Jour” as a light for the speaker’s spirit, giving insight beyond literal eyesight in poem VII. The trope of the sun is literalized as an awakening imaged as the coming of dawn. This is the moment in

Pernette's poetry defined by Colette Winn as being born, or becoming: "la nouvelle née." Yet there is an element of roguery, of *contre-dire* to the fictions of love as put forth in the chivalric tradition of French poetry: what has passed for courtly love is but a series of fictions, dreams, and lies ("fictions" "songe(s)," and "mensonges.")

Pernette du Guillet exploits the fact that literary discourse is artificial, and situated in a social milieu. She knows that her poetry will be linked with Scève's, but underscores this linkage in anagrams and puns on his name. All critics point out the anagram of Scève's name in "Ce vice mueras", but few note the undermining presence of the word "vice" in his name, perhaps distracted by the Neoplatonic cover story of the poetry. Though this may be a coincidence, other poems imply the possibility of trouble in this Neoplatonic-courtly paradise. XXVIII is a good example of this:

Si je ne suis telle que soulois estre,
Prenez-vous en au temps, qui m'a appris
Qu'en me traictant rudement, comme maistre,
Jamais sur moy ne gagnerez le priys.

If I am not that which I used to be
Take note of time, which has taught me
that in acting like a master, rough-handed,
You'll never gain over me an advantage

Et toutesfois, vous voyant tousjours pris
En mon endroit, vostre ardeur me convey
Par ce hault bien, que de vous j'ay compris,
A demeurer vostre toute ma vie.

And if always, seeing yourself taken always
in my place, to me your ardor conveys
by this high good from you I've understood
then I'll belong to you for life, for good.

The above references to her "maistre" contain reproaches as well as praise. This fact is helpful to keep in mind when reading the next poem, which references the Actaeon myth and its pivotal scene of (non)recognition in which he exclaims, "Actaeon ego sum: dominum cognoscite vestrum!" ("I am Actaeon: recognize your master!") Potential betrayal is implicit in the dialectic of master and slave—and pupil? This pupil seems to have ambivalent loyalty toward her master.

If Ovid is to be read on the level of moral fable, then the Actaeon story is as much about ingratitude as it is about scopic transgression. However, in versions of the *Ovide moralisée* to which Pernette would have had access, the theme of ingratitude embodied by Actaeon's dogs is stressed more than the prohibition of seeing Diana naked. In sixteenth-century Lyons, editions of Ovid's text included a commentary by the humanist Raphael Regius along with the allegorical interpretation of Petrus Lavinus. A similar commentary written by Petrus Berchorius in the tradition of the *Ovide moralisée* was reprinted in the early 1500's. The "moralized" aspect of these versions of Ovid functioned as a selling point in the popular reader-reception of the *Metamorphoses*.⁷² Partaking of a medieval *mentalité* in the worst sense, Berchorius attempts to allegorize the text, interpreting Actaeon's dogs as the Jews who did not recognize Christ and allowed his body to be dismembered.⁷³ We would not countenance such an interpretation; nor would most sixteenth-century humanists, but the point here is the dominant theme of ingratitude toward the master.

A humanist, Pernette du Guillet does not belong to this Scholastic interpretative school. However, the way in which the original tale by Ovid is situated in this particular

⁷² According to Moss, "Badius is cashing in on a fashion that...promoted allegorical reading." Paris, where this version was published, had "more traditional attitudes than in Italianate Lyons." Moss, *Latin Commentaries*, 67.

⁷³ The *Metamorphosis ovidiana moraliter a magistro Thoma Walley's Anglico...explanata* was actually written by Peter Bersuire, (Petrus Berchorius, 1290-1362). See Moss, *Latin Commentaries*, for Bersuire's far-fetched allegorical reading of the dogs' failure to recognize Actaeon (93). Anachronistic and illogical, the practice of applying the allegorical method was pervasive in the Middle Ages. Even more curious, however, was the reprint in Paris in 1509, 1511, 1515, and 1521 of an edition of Berchorius by Jodocus Badius, editor of the much more philologically sound Regius commentary. As Moss states, Regius "does not translate entire fables into the language of Christian morality but uses them as exemplary apologues from which a moral may be drawn" (57). Recognition is the key here.

borrowed text does foreground the master's *non*-recognition by his dogs in a disturbing way, one that we might call the master-slave dialectic. Most critics have acknowledged some sort of dialogic relationship between the *Délie* of Scève and Pernettes's *Rymes*; but this poem is particularly relevant to an interpretation of Pernettes's role as ephebe and apprentice. A glance at the source text will help us to see how Pernettes departs from both "maistres."

Ovid's story begins in a grotto so shapely that Nature imitates art; or rather art representing Nature imitates art, for clever Ovid lulls us into the illusion of verisimilitude: "Simulaverat artem ingenio natura suo" ("Nature by her own cunning imitated art"). We are also told the scene takes place at noon.⁷⁴ These details foreshadow other illusory perceptions about to take place. The beauty of the visual scene, which is the scene of (one-way) speaking, is also enhanced: Diana speaks and deprives Actaeon of a voice. Rather, Actaeon is in the tragic position (common in Ovid) of having the voice of an animal while his mind is still completely intact. His moans ("gemitus") are the result of experiencing human emotions in an animal form.

If Actaeon is bereft of a voice, who is the narrator of this scene? In fact, Ovid's narration defies (and foregrounds) Diana's very prohibition against speech: "narrate this, if you can." As in the Arachne tale, the poet-narrator comes perilously close to competing with the gods. An analogy of Ovid as the *poete maudit* (or hubristic weaver in peril of the

⁷⁴ Noon is the time traditionally associated with lust in classical and Continental literature. Paul Claudel's *Partage du Midi* partakes of this same trope. See also Nicholas J. Perella, *Midday in Italian literature: Variations on an Archetypal Theme* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 8-9.

gods' wrath that I mentioned earlier) sheds light on Pernette's poem. Not only does she stop just short of angering Diana by competing with her, but she almost dismembers her "maistre" in the guise of Actaeon.

Perhaps a poet so young, not to mention one who was in love with her mentor, did not have sufficient acerbic motivation to carry out his transfiguration and dismemberment as Actaeon. Pernette is no maenad in a Bacchic furor, wishing to tear apart her adorer because he has had a glimpse of her nude body. On the contrary, it seems that she derives pleasure from the idea of his gaze (and possibly, from being his muse).

What this poem depicts is a narcissistic fantasy in which the beloved wants to be desired but not touched. In Petrarchism, however, if the lady consents to love's consummation it would render her unsuitable as object of ideal love; no longer could she occupy the category of "donna angelicata." Pernette seems to realize the Petrarchan trap into which she is heading: a possible reason for *metamorphosis interruptus*, where violence is only hypothetical. I am suggesting that what Cottrell calls "lowering the veil"—raising the possibility of the scene of seeing and its violent aftermath and then capriciously deciding *not* to punish the voyeur—is quietly effective in its own way: Pernette's speaker is reminding her addressee of her power. Epigram XXVIII, cited earlier, is another poem which "performs" an admonitory function, in its threat of abandonment and its stated preference of loving "ardeur" over presumptuous mastery.

The power dynamic is similarly reversed in *Elégie II*. Instead of presenting herself as a victim of Actaeon's gaze, the speaker flirts with the possibility of becoming the all-

powerful Diana. Following the poem's movement, we find a *peripeteia* akin to the double reversal in the Philomela poem by Tullia d'Aragona (XXX). The poem seems to be heading in one direction, but we are taken somewhere else.

Elégie II opens with the desire of the speaker to be with the beloved in a *locus amoenus*. This desire, associated with summer's heat ("la chaleur d'esté"), is not necessarily temperate. Furthermore, in Ovid the scene takes place at noon, the time of day associated with lust, "le démon du midi" in the French poetic tradition. As previously mentioned, the wooded place implies the dark side of pastoral, with its threat to female chastity. Yet this speaker, a subject desiring the philosopher's company, brushes aside any implication of threat to her own safety. She is accompanied by "Apollo, Muses, et Nymphes" and by "honesteté, que Vertu a gagnée/ A Apollo...." Robert Cottrell suggests "Vertu" represents Diana, the goddess of chastity.⁷⁵

Though chastity is a *motif* of du Guillet's work, the same critic also identifies the presence of desire "circulat[ing] throughout the remaining *Rymes*, interrupting and contradicting the female's overdetermined expressions of socially endorsed modesty, self-sacrifice, and effacement."⁷⁶ Already one senses that the speaker is protesting too much: as evidenced by his behavior toward Daphne in the myth, Apollo is not to be trusted alone in the woods; nor are Muses and nymphs known to protect the virtue of

⁷⁵ Diana represents chastity both in the myth and in the medieval exegetical tradition found in the French editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as mentioned earlier. Cottrell, "Pernette du Guillet and the Logic of Aggressivity" in *Writing the Renaissance*, ed. Raymond C. la Charité (Lexington, KY: French Forum, Publishers, 1992), 93-113, 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

young women. Despite the speaker's claim that these classical figures give themselves to nothing but holy works ("A Apollo, Muses, et Nymphes maintes,/Ne s'adonnantz qu'à toutes oeuvres saintes"), they are actually complicit in the speaker's aural seduction of her Actaeon-philosopher.

Furthermore, the allegorized Virtue is reminiscent of Ovid's fellow captives in the parade of slaves to Love (*Amores*, I.iii). The motif occurs subliminally in this poem by du Guillet. The captivity of Ovid's speaker is more overt:

Mens Bona ducetur minibus post terga retortis,
et Pudor, et castris quidquid Amoris obest.

(Conscience shall be led along, with hands tied fast behind her back, and Modesty, and all who are foes to the camp of Love.)

as well as in her poem "Le Triomphe des Muses Contre Amour:"

Lui qui par ses efforts
A vaincu les plus forts,
Il est vaincu des Dames:
Et par elles reprins,
Lyé, mené, et prins,
Et souffre grands diffames.

He, who by his efforts,
has vanquished the strongest
is vanquished by women:
and by them retaken
tied, dragged, and taken
and suffers great shame.

Je l'ay veu promener
par la ville, et mener
Ayant au col la corde:
Estant ainsi captif,
Cupido deceptive
Croyoit misericorde.

I saw him promenaded, taken
throughout the village,
a spectacle, the cord around his neck
being thus captive,
Cupid, deceptive
cried out for mercy.

The textual presence of Ovid's *Amores* brings to mind other Ovidian texts, which almost invariably take a cynical, if not a violent view of love. As *Elégie II* makes evident, the only alternatives in the "kind of warfare" that is "love" are to entrap or be trapped. The trap is also a test, commonly found in French literature, like chaste lovers sleeping with a naked sword between them. The test in this text is as follows:

Je le lairrais hardyment approcher:	I would boldly let him approach,
Et s'il vouloit, tant soit peu, me toucher,	and if he wanted, to touch,
Lui gecterois (pur le moins) ma main pleine	I would throw at least, however, slight,
De la pure eau de la clere fontaine,	a handful, of pure water from the bright
Lui gectant droict aux yeulx, où à la face.	fountain straight into his eyes, or at his face.

In other words, the previously seductive speaker, at the moment of consummation, becomes (though only in the form of a suggestion) the goddess Diana. She even goes as far as to splash him with the waters of the fountain, which have the power to change him into Actaeon. The fantasy ends abruptly with the decision not to make him Actaeon, devoured by his dogs, but into her Cerf/serf: substituting, with metonymic slippage,⁷⁷ the position of servant for the animal the deer or “cerf” (Latin, *cervus*, as opposed to *servus*).

The many chapters and articles written on this passage fail to mention a possible intertextual source for the cerf/serf motif in the poems of Scève himself. His *dizain* XXXVI nicely incorporates Neoplatonic and Ovidian imagery into a play upon the same two words. Desire, he begins, is the mirror of the thing, making the memory appear of the one in whom his desire rests:

Si le desir, image de la chose	If desire, the image of the thing
Que plus on ayme, est du coeur le miroir,	that one loves most, the mirror of the heart,
Qui tousjours fait par memoire apparoir	who, through memory, is always made to appear
Celle où l'esprit de ma vie repose,	the one in whom the spirit of my life rests,
A quelle fin mon vain vouloir propose	to what end, my vain will, do you propose
De m'esloingner de ce qui plus me suyt?	To distance me from the one that follows me more?

The Neoplatonic image of desire mirrored in the heart by memory is reminiscent of Dante's *La Vita Nova*, and continues to haunt literature as a theme. In the next lines, we find the Ovidian trope of “venator sequitur fugentia:”

Plus fuit le Cerf, et plus on le poursuyt,	the more the cerf flees, the more pursued
--	---

⁷⁷ This is Robert Cottrell's term for what happens in this passage. *Ibid.*, 103.

Pour mieulx le rendre aux rnetz de servitude:	the better to catch him in servitude's nets
Plus je m'absente et plus le mal s'ensuyt	The more I stay away the worse pain
De ce doulx Bien, Dieu de l'amaritude.	Ensues from this sweet Good, a bitter god.

The more the beloved/*Cerf* flees, the more appealing it (in this case, he) becomes. She is also more apt to be caught in the nets of "servitude." Critics disagree on the chronology of the poetry, and therefore the direction of influence between Scève and du Guillet is unclear.⁷⁸ In this case, however, it would seem that the paronomasia between *Cerf* and *serf* exists already. Scève seems to be referring back to a private joke that could have ensued from the *cerf/serf* pun of *Elégie II*.

Once the speaker has the male object of desire in her power, she sings him her siren song, though his response to her presence is couched in fairly solipsistic, egotistic philosophical terms ("ses discours"), her response is other-directed: vocal, musical and seductive. After having drawn away from him and thrown herself, completely nude, into the water, she tunes her lute and sings a song. The speaker's consciousness of her own nudity and its appeal is balanced by the prohibition against seeing Diana, for which vengeance is wreaked upon Actaeon. By behaving more benevolently than the goddess, by making him into her *serf* instead of a *cerf*, the speaker (Pernette) can keep his adoration, prevent his metamorphosis into an animal who has lost altogether the ability to speak in rational language, and even compete with the goddess Diana.

O qu'alors eust l'onde telle efficace
De le pouvoir en Actaeon muer,
Non toutefois pour le faire tuer.

Oh, that the waters could respond
and transform him into Actaeon
not so that his dogs would kill him

⁷⁸ Joyce Miller pays particular attention to this problem in her article "In the Margins of Amatory Discourse: The *Responces* of Pernette du Guillet," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XXIV/2 (1993) 351-68. Of all the critics who have written on *Elegie 2*, however, none has connected the *cerf/servitude* reference in *dizain XXXVI* of Scève's *Délie* with *Elégie 2*.

Et devorer à ses chiens, comme Cerf:
 Mais que de moy se sensist estre serf,
 Et serviteur transformé tellement
 Qu'ainsi cuydast en son entendement,
 Tant que Dyane en eust sur moy envie,
 De luy avoir sa puissance ravie.

or devour him like a Cerf
 But so he would be to me a serf
 a servant changed from a man
 and this would help him understand
 to the point that Diana would envy me
 to have robbed her of her majesty.

This section of the poem takes place in the subjunctive tense: Pernette's grammatical and lexical choices underscore the tension and ambivalence surrounding the completion of the metamorphosis. She wishes that "the waters had the power to transform him..." but they do not, just as she does not have the power to transform him into one willing to be in the subordinate role. We are in the realm of art, like Ovid's "realistic" grotto imitating nature imitating art, or his use of the subjunctive "putares" ("a real bull and real waves, you would think them").⁷⁹ In this hypothetical situation, Diana would envy the poet; she would *be thought* a goddess (as opposed to a mere Muse in the eyes of others).

In a bid to stave off the effects of her hubristic desire, Pernette's speaker claims to be unworthy of such power: "Sans grace, et sans merite." After such powerful claims, Pernette often pulls back, "lowering the veil" on the scenes of violence or nudity. She claims that she just wants him to be changed into Actaeon in the courtly, not bestial, sense of Cerf/serf. As *serviteur*, he will be "free" to compose more poetry in her honor, and she will be praised by others as well: "Combien heureuse, et grande me dirois!/Certes Deesse ester me cuyderois."

Her first impulse to a wish to usurp Diana: "sa puissance ravie" ("that her power be ravished"). It does not happen, however, which is good: for this would put the speaker

⁷⁹ This line reminds me of Marianne Moore's definition of poetry: characterized by "fake gardens with real toads."

into roughly the position of Arachne. Just as she stops short of transforming her Actaeon into a stag, she stops short of competing with the goddess, perhaps recalling the lessons of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The exigency of the poetic task supplants the need to punish the male philosopher for his desire. Instead of turning him into a "cerf" he is "released" to serve the speaker as her serf, or servant. He is "free" to serve her—and poetry. However, it is the speaker's benevolent word that releases him from the "spell" of the transforming waters to serve not herself but the Muses. "Ostez, ostez, mes souhaitz, si hault point/D'avecques vous: il ne m'appartient point." (Away, away, my wishes, such a high point, to you/He does belong to me.") He is not hers to give away, or rather she is renouncing that option. Instead of being her servant, he is to serve the Muses. This solution renders everyone happy: the speaker, the gods, the Muses, Apollo, the poet-turned Actaeon-turned poet, and ourselves, his future readers. However, this "happy ending" is not achieved without the dark suggestion of the metamorphosis of the poet into a beast without a voice, a master without servants, the ardent lover into disembodied flesh because of the momentary, capricious wrath of this poet-nymph.

His suggested transformation does accomplish two things: first, as a creature of the woods, he is read as a sign of the other, the animal, corresponding in Petrarch to the *fera*, the lady who is animal and cruel as opposed to male and rational. The second subtle reversal is a close reading of Ovid's text by Pernet: the master is only a master when he is recognized by his subjects. It is not Diana's splashing of the water which is fatal *per se*, but Actaeon's failure to be recognized by his own dogs or by his companions. "I am

Actaeon, your master. Recognize your master!" is his plaintive, unheeded plea (VI, 230). By withholding her discipleship from her own master, he ceases to exist in his tutelary role. Pernette herself, wielding the pen as opposed to the handful of water, becomes a creator of forms, and an artificer of the "mots doretz" she has previously ascribed to him (Epigram 34, l.10). This is the true power of the poet's lute-song.

In sum, Pernette becomes the subject of her own text, as opposed to the object of Scève's. Her recasting of the traditional Actaeon narrative provides an opportunity to display her sensuous chastity,⁸⁰ wit, and magnanimity: eliminating the need to be a victim or a victimizer. As we have seen, Pernette du Guillethe transforms Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Scève's *Délie*. Resisting the violent resolution found in Ovid's text, Pernette gains the worship of her devotee. This improves upon Diana's treatment by Actaeon in her source text—and ensures her legacy as poet *and* muse. Most critics have conceived of the power positions of inspired poet and inspirer-Muse in a sort of Hegelian master-slave dialectic. As everyone knows, the master is also enslaved by his mastery: Tereus, by his violent lust for Philomela, which turn familial and power relations upside down ("omnia turbasti"); and Actaeon, consumed by his desire for Diana.

⁸⁰ This phrase was coined by T. Anthony Perry to describe Pernette du Guillet's poetry, "Pernette du Guillet's Poetry of Love and Desire," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 35 (1973), 259-73; the term is found on p. 268.

In the following chapter, I propose that the narrative of Tullia d'Aragona's poem XXX recuperates the "voice of the shuttle," taking up where Ovid has left off. It is the narration of an escape from a prison fashioned by circumstance and fate's cruelty—and the prison-house of (Petrarchan) language. Writing her way out of an impossible condition she has not chosen, Aragona effects an escape, through language, from the equally unsatisfactory situations of courtesan or married nonentity. While in the dialogue Aragona treats social and philosophical inequities with witty *ripostes*, in the *Rime* we catch glimpses of the vicissitudes of her position as court poet, as the friend of other poets, and as a fellow-traveller with the scholars of her day, many of whom compose poems in her honor. Through the *proposta-risposta* format of the *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* was probably the publisher's choice, the fact remains that the work partakes of the same dialogic dynamic discussed in the last chapter. Not only do her fellow poets address Tullia with esteem and admiration, but also honor her for her intellectual accomplishments as well as for her physical beauty.

As we have seen in this chapter, the Muse writes back. In the poems by Tullia d'Aragona and Pernette du Guillet, the role of woman as Muse is supplemented by that of the woman poet. Both of these poets clearly state their ambitions for their work: in her *Rymes*, Pernette speaks of the "mots doretz" she will produce, and Tullia declares a desire to transcend earthly limitations. As this is a single-author study, I have given more attention to the work of Tullia d'Aragona than that of Pernette du Guillet. However, du

Guillet and Aragona form a suitable pair for the theme of this chapter: woman as Maker and Muse, subject *and* object of representation and desire.

The common thread I have explored in this chapter is that both Aragona and du Guillet gravitate toward female characters in Ovidian myths. Ovid provides a good starting point in the search for an author sympathetic to their plight—after all, Ovid had his own conflicts with patriarchal authority in the person of Augustus Caesar. In fact, Ovid's representations of the gods' injustice can be read as his attitudes toward the Roman emperor that exiled him for "due crimine, errore, et carmen," (two crimes, a mistake, and a poem). By the same token, when Aragona bemoans her fate, we might read this as a veiled protest against the injustice of her social position. Without belaboring this point, the same ruler that condemned her to wearing the courtesan's yellow veil could, with the stroke of a pen, exonerate her from the same statute. The fact that Cosimo de' Medici wrote "fasseli gratia per poetessa" on the legal document indicates both the exceptional nature of Tullia d'Aragona *and* the capriciousness of those in power.⁸¹

In the case of Pernette du Guillet, her married state and early death may have helped preserve the hagiographic representation that has come down to us in the form of a verbal portrait drawn by her editor Antoine du Moulin. The reputation of Pernette du Guillet has not been subjected to the same disparaging comments as that of Tullia d'Aragona or even her contemporary Louise Labé.⁸² Her strategy of subtly couched

⁸¹ Masson, Georgina, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 120.

⁸² John Calvin called Louise Labé a "plebeia meretrix" ("common whore"): "Hunc ludum quam saepe tibi praeibit plebeia meretrix, quam partim a propria venustate, partim ab opificio mariti, Bellam Corderiam vocabant." ("This festival pastime [women carousing dressed in men's clothing] is often suited to this

subtextual rebellion and the “double register” of obedient pupil/vengeful goddess possibly indicate that Pernette du Guillet was not content to see herself “in the shadow of the other,” to borrow Jessica Benjamin’s phrase. contrary to the critic quoted earlier in this chapter, I would like to suggest that the great adventure of her life was not her love for Maurice Scève, but her role as producer of “mots doretz.” While biographical speculation is by definition indeterminate, her poems give us a glimpse of her own self-fashioning.

In sum, the muse who writes describes both Pernette du Guillet and Tullia d’Aragona: both poets achieve a resolution of the Petrarchan problem for women: to be an object is not to be a writer at all, but to pen the “mots doretz” as well as inspire them is a more reciprocal solution. Though there is always a disproportionate balance between lover and beloved, one can take turns as object and subject of poetry and desire. As in the love theory of Leone Ebreo, a source for both Pernette and Tullia, the “contentement” of the self lies in part in the joy of the other.

Like Tullia d’Aragona, Pernette du Guillet posits a dialogic reciprocity of poet and muse. A major difference between the two poems analyzed is that du Guillet achieves this reciprocity with the beloved through an implied but thwarted metamorphosis; while in Aragona’s poem, the speaker must undergo three metamorphoses: first, that of Ovid’s myth, secondly, an escape from the imprisoned condition of Philomela, and the third, a

common whore they call La Belle Cordière [beautiful rope-maker] due as much to her beauty as to the profession of her husband....”) *Gratulatio ad venerabilem presbyterum dominum Gabrielum de Saconay, pracentorem ecclesiae lugdunensis* (1560). Quoted in François Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise ou la Renaissance au féminin* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1997), 11.

different sort of captivity (by virtue), which reverses Petrarchism and undoes the dichotomy by which earthly love is seen as sinful. Thus the use of Ovidian tropes in a Renaissance context produce composite poetic creatures: the female pilgrim as a prisoner of *virtù*; the female poet as benevolent, virtuous goddess.

CHAPTER FOUR
APOCALYPSE AND/OR METAMORPHOSIS:
CHRONOGRAPHIA AND TOPOGRAPHIA IN PETRARCH'S SESTINA XXII
AND TULLIA D'ARAGONA'S SESTINA LV¹

In the following short chapter, I compare the sestina that is the closing poem in Aragona's 1547 *Rime* to a poem with similar form and content by Petrarch, *Canzoniere* XXII. An attendant pleasure of translating Aragona's sestina LV was sharing it with students in a class on Renaissance literature. Having taught the two poems (in translation) together, I found that students were drawn to Aragona's pastoral scene of absent longing more than to Petrarch's depiction of an ideal moment outside of the constraints of time. For me, sestina XXII of the *Canzoniere* had always constituted a peerless example of the poetic sublime. When I read Aragona's poem, I realized that she was writing her own version of Petrarch's sestina, although she does not follow Petrarch in situating that love in an impossible moment outside of time.² Rather, her trope of absence is spatial; her *inventio* is applied to a lyric poem no less sublime than Petrarch's but with pastoral imagery that seems more palpable and concrete, envisioning her relationship to the beloved as the orbit of a planet to the sun. Aragona takes the venerable trope of the beloved as the sun and makes it original in its re-gendered and re-imaged form. We can almost feel the gravitational pull of the speaker's distance from this powerful and compelling planet. I propose that what Petrarch does with *kronos*, Aragona does with *topos*: her speaker finds no comfort in the pastoral location to which she flees for respite and perspective. While Petrarch's desire is for an impossible moment, Aragona's is for a nonexistent place. Following is Aragona's sestina, poem LV—and my translation.

¹ This chapter is forthcoming as an article in the journal *Comitatus*, No. 33, 2002.

² Nesca Robb claims that Aragona's poetry radiates "the warmth of experienced emotions." *op. cit.*, 205.

LV³

Ben mi credea fuggendo il mio bel Sole
 scemar (misera me) l'ardente foco
 Con cercar chiari rivi, & starne a l'ombra
 Ne i piu fronzuti, & solitarii Boschi;
 Ma quanto più lontan luce il suo raggio
 Tanto più, d'hor in hor cresce'l mio vampo.

Chi crederebbe mai che questo vampo
 Crescesse quanto è più lontan dal Sole?
 E pur il provo, che quel divin raggio
 Quant' è più lunge più raddoppia il foco.
 Né mi giova habitar fontane, o boschi,
 Ch'al mio mal nulla val, fresco, onda, od ombra.

Ma non cercherò più fresco, onda, od ombra,
 Che'l mio così cocente, & fero vampo
 Non ponno ammorzar punto fonti, o boschi:
 Ma ben seguirò sempre il mio bel Sole,
 Poscia che nuova Salamandra in foco
 Vivo lieta, mercè del divo raggio.

Deh perché non m'alluma il vivo raggio
 Ovunque io vado, o per sole, o per ombra?
 Che lieta soffrirei sì dolce il foco,
 Et contenta morrei del suo gran vampo.
 Ma non spero giamai (lassa) che'l Sole
 Scopra giorno sì chiaro in questi boschi.

Ond'havrò sempre in odio i monti, e i boschi
 che m'ascondon la luce di quel raggio,
 Che splende, & scalda più de l'altro Sole.
 Biasmi chi vuole, & fuggai raggi a l'ombra,
 Ch'io per me cerco sempre, & lodo il vampo,
 Che m'arde, & strugge in sì possente foco.

Quanto dunque mi fora grato il foco,
 Ingrati i monti, & le fontane, e i boschi,
 U non veggo il mio Sole, & sento il vampo
 S'io potessi appressar l'amato raggio,
 Et del mio stesso corpo a lui far ombra,
 Et quando parte, & quando torna il Sole.

Prima fia oscuro il Sole, & freddo il foco,
 Né faranno ombra in nessun tempo i boschi,
 Che del bel raggio in me non arda il vampo.

I thought, fleeing my beloved Sun,
 to diminish (oh, misery) this constant fire
 by seeking clear rivers, and staying in the shadows,
 in the most leafy, the most lonely woods;
 but the further extend his shining rays
 the stronger, hour by hour, grows my flame.

Whoever would believe that this flame
 would increase with distance from the sun?
 And yet I feel it: this divine ray,
 the longer it is, the more it redoubles its fire.
 Nor do any please me, inhabiting fountain or wood:
 no salve to my pain are breezes, waves, or shade.

I no longer seek fresh breezes, waves, or shade
 for this, my blazing and fierce flame
 cannot be extinguished in stream or wood:
 but I will follow always my beloved Sun
 Just as a salamander lives anew in fire.
 I live in joy, thanks to his divine ray.

Then why does not the living ray illumine me
 wherever I go, in sunlight or in shadow?
 With pleasure would I suffer such a sweet fire,
 and die content from its great flame.
 But I do not hope (alas!) to see the sun
 unveil so bright a day in these woods.

I will hold in hatred the mountains and the woods
 which hide from me the light of this bright ray
 which shines, and burns more than the other sun.
 Blame me if you wish, flee these rays for the shade,
 but I myself will always seek and praise the flame
 that burns me, and be consumed in such potent fire.

So gracious to me therefore is this fire,
 that unkind are the mountains, streams and woods
 where I cannot see my Sun, but feel the flame;
 if only I could come nearer the beloved ray
 and of my own body make for him a shade
 both at the setting, and the rising of the sun.

But the sun would become dark, and cold, the fire,
 and never would there be a shadow in the woods,
 before this lovely ray no longer burns in me, this flame.

³ LV, from *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* (Venice: Giolito, 1547). It is placed last in the 1547 and 1560 editions; in the 1891 Celani edition, it is followed by two short *ottave* (eight-line poems with an *abababcc* rhyme scheme). For the convenience of other scholars, I have followed his numbering. I believe the placement of "Oscuro" at the end of the collection is intentional, insofar as Tullia had editorial control. The transcription is based upon all three (1547, 1560, and 1891) editions of the *Rime*. I have retained archaisms such as "havro" instead of "avrò" while updating accent marks and punctuation; and corrected what seem to be orthographic errors (line 5, "luce" for "lace"). My translations of I, XXXVIII, XL, and LV of Aragona's *Rime* appear in *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* (Spring 2002).

The above poem, LV, is from the collection of lyric poems, *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* (1547). Her only sestina, it occupies an important place—the last poem of the collection.⁴ The poem falls well within the parameters of Renaissance *imitatio* in its Petrarchan themes and in the use of the sestina form, and yet it achieves its own unique narrative resolution. The sestina form is a challenge, a vehicle by which to display one's *techne*, but it is also particularly appropriate to the circular, solipsistic nature of unrequited love. Aragona's sestina evokes those of Petrarch, in particular his XXII ("A qualunque animale s'alberga in terra.") Like Petrarch, she creates a solitary world in which the lover cannot find solace from suffering, even in a pastoral setting. For Petrarch, pastoral solitude does not always yield the desired tranquility; whatever the locale, he cannot escape his aesthetic, spiritual, and erotic preoccupations.⁵ Aragona's poem expresses a similar desire to escape, but it focuses upon *topos* rather than *chronos*: space rather than time. In the close reading that constitutes this chapter, my aim is to contrast Petrarch's *chronographia*, or poetics of time, with Aragona's *topographia*, or poetics of place. In her work in general, Aragona appropriates the discourses of both Platonism and Petrarchism: exposing the gender inequities and logical gaps, positing an alternative to Neoplatonic philosophy; and in this case, bringing the Petrarchan sestina "down to earth." The *adynaton topos* is replaced with that of an absent presence; the impossible moment of erotic fulfillment is transmuted into a restless search for place, situating the love poet's alienation spatially rather than temporally. The ultimate consequence of this alienation is metamorphosis for Petrarch and apocalypse for Aragona.

⁵ Petrarch's inability to find inner repose, even in the most peaceful of locales, is well-documented in his works *De vita solitaria*, *Familiares*, and *Secretum Meum*.

Despite differences between the two poems, Aragona's sestina is faithful to the spirit and the letter of her "source" text, her Petrarchism demonstrating a certain loyalty to the master of the form more than a radical newness. Imitations of Petrarch, especially in English, often miss much of what is most unique about his poetry. In comparing the two poems, I hope to demonstrate how Aragona is a particularly incisive and attentive reader of Petrarch. In order to do so, I have made use of two schools of thought, one being influence theory, especially the more comparatively-informed approach of Thomas Greene.⁶ The metamorphoses of Petrarchism in the work of later poets, especially women, have not been sufficiently explored from an intertextual perspective. On another front, the pioneering scholarly work of Ann Rosalind Jones has shed light on the social aspects of poetry and its link in court politics. In her reading, early poets are models and later poets are renegades appropriating those models, following paradigms of imitation, appropriation, and negotiation. Jones's phrase "assimilation with a difference" best describes what Tullia d'Aragona does in her creative *imitatio* of Petrarch.

To demonstrate this phenomenon, I'd like to take a very brief look at Petrarch's poem.⁷ The world of poem XXII is a circular world of day and night, neither of which brings relief to the speaker, a being apart from all others, human and animal.

⁶ Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982). The theory proposed by Harold Bloom in his *Anxiety of Influence* is useful, but Bloom's own critical practice is limited by the fact that Latin and Italian intertexts are not considered. Greene's concept of influence, however, is linguistically as well as thematically intertextual. Beginning with the premise that the convention of imitation is a given in Renaissance poetry, Greene identifies categories of imitation, coining terminology for those categories. Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jones, in "New Songs," 271; "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," in *Yale French Studies*, No. 62 (1981), 135-53. Combining these theories of influence, one can distinguish relationships between different "post-Petrarchisms" without being reductive.

⁷ Influenced by Cicero and Augustine, Petrarch is famously obsessed with the passage of time—with eternity, mortality, and the relative impermanence of fame. The *Canzoniere* itself has a relationship of synechdoche with time, especially if we take its 366 poems to represent a year and a day. Such a reading underscores the

A qualunque animale alberga in terra,
se non se alquanti ch'anno in odio il sole,
tempo da travagliare è quanto è 'l giorno:
ma poi che l' ciel accende le sue stelle
qual torna a casa et qual s'annida in selva
per aver posa almeno infin a l'alba.

For every animal that lives on earth,
except the few who hold in hatred the sun
the time to work is while it is day
but when heaven lights up its stars
some return home and some next in the wood
to have rest at least until the dawn.⁸

The poet, then, is a creature apart from the laws of nature. Not only can he not find rest at night, but day also brings no truce with sighing. When day comes, he desires the night, and vice versa:

Et io, da che comincia la bella alba
a scuoter l'ombra intorno de la terra,
svegliando gli animali in ogni selva,
non ò mai triegua di sospir col sole;
poi quand'io veggio fiammeggiar le stelle
vo lagrimando et disiando il giorno.

And I, from the first signs of lovely dawn,
that shakes the shadows from around the earth
awakening the beasts in every wood,
never have truce with sighing while there is sun;
then when I see the flaming of the stars
I go weeping and longing for the new day.

In the third stanza, "our" darkness corresponds to others' dawn ("le tenebre nostre altrui fanno alba"), but for the poet, dawn is the beginning of a different cycle of the same misery. He regards with melancholy the stars which govern his birth and curses the day he first saw the light:

Quando la sera scaccia il chiaro giorno,
et le tenebre nostre altrui fanno alba,
miro pensoso le crudeli stelle
che m'anno fatto di sensibil terra,
et maledico il dì ch' i' vidi 'l sole
che mi fa in vista un uom nudrito in selva.

When night drives out the clarity of day
and our own dark is others' dawn,
I gaze full of care at the cruel stars
that once created me of sentient earth,
and I curse the first day I saw the sun
which makes me seem a man raised in the wood.

It is somehow implied that this sun or these stars—or Love itself—have determined Petrarch's solitary existence as a *selvaggio*. We know from Petrarch's letters and other writings that he craved solitude and the company of books. Boccaccio thought of Petrarch

importance of the anniversary poems, in which the beginning of a new year underscores the sameness of the lover's desire. The poems themselves display various strategies for marking, stopping, and perpetuating time. This point of view is well-represented in Petrarch criticism, although no one has written about Aragona's use of the sestina in this way. Cf. Jones, Frederic J., *The Structure of Petrarch's Canzoniere: A Chronological, Psychological, and Stylistic Analysis*. (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1995).

⁸ Modified from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, trans. Robert Durling (Cambridge, MA and London 1976), 57-58.

in this way, too, for he gave him the epithet “Silvanus.”⁹ Ironically, Petrarch’s paradoxical desire to flee the allurements of *women* leads him to a pastoral retreat in which he writes obsessive but unforgettably masterful love lyrics to an absent or unyielding beloved...*woman*. His own frustration at this paradox is expressed numerous times in his poetry, and also in his letters:¹⁰

Nullus locus aut plus otii prebuit aut stimulos acriores: ex omnibus terris ac seculis illustres viros in unum contrahendi illa michi solitudo dedit animum; solitariam vitam religiosumque otium singula ibi singulis voluminibus perstringenda et laudanda suscepi; *denique, iuvenilem estum qui me multos annos torruit, ut nosti, sperans illis umbraculis lenire, eo iam inde ab adolescentia sepe confugere velut in arcem munitissimam solebam. Sed, heu michi incauto! ipsa nempe remedia in exitium vertebantur; nam et his quas mecum advexeram, curis incenditibus et in tanta solitudine nullo prorsus ad incendium accurrente, desperatius urebar.* Itaque per os meum flamma cordis erumpens, miserabili, sed ut quidam dixerunt, dulci murmure valles celumque complebat; hinc illa vulgaria iuveniliuim laborum meorum cantica, quorum hodie pudet ac penitet, sed eodem morbo affectis, ut videmus, acceptissima. (No place has offered me more leisure or keener stimuli to work: in this solitude I dedicated myself to the task—there, in that very place, compiling [the works] of illustrious men from all lands and [all] eras into a single volume; I undertook the work of criticism and the singular praise of the solitary life and cloistered peace; *finally hoping, in those shady places, to alleviate the youthful fire which, as you know, consumed me for many years; there since adolescence I would often seek refuge: just so, I would go to the woods, as to a most fortified stronghold. But, alas for me, how I was caught off guard! To be sure, the very same remedy was subverted into my ruin; and you see, I would bring with me there those very burning cares, deprived, in such solitude, of that which might aid me against this fire, I burned all the more desperately.* And in the same way in my misery, as the flame in my heart burst forth through my lips, it filled the valleys and the air with a murmur of lament (though some say it was sweet). From this came those vernacular songs, the labors of my youth, of which today I am ashamed and of which I repent—but which, as we will see, are pleasing to those afflicted by the same malady.)¹¹

We will come back to this quote, but suffice it to say that Petrarch relished the idea of freedom from “the attraction of women, the more fascinating it is, the more dreadful and baleful, to say nothing of their dispositions, than which there is naught more fickle or more

⁹ Gordon Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1999), 16.

¹⁰ *Le Familiari*/Francesco Petrarca, ed. Vittorio Rossi (Florence 1968). Translation mine. Also quoted (in part) in Braden, *Petrarchan Love*, 16.

¹¹ Petrarch, *Familiars* 8.3. My translation. Italics mine.

inimical to the love of repose.”¹² Women, real or ideal, seemed to pose a threat to his tranquillity; even in solitude he was not free from their torments.

Indeed, not a little of this hostility toward the object of the speaker's love is betrayed in poem XXII. The poet feels cursed, and his frustration becomes externalized and transferred to the female Other. She is figured as a wild female creature of the woods, a cruel beast (“si aspra fera”). The *fera*, like the poet, is an exceptional being: there was never a beast so harsh and cruel as she. The poet, too, is singular in his alienation from all others, nocturnal and diurnal; human and animal.¹³ However, this alienation sets him on a different, higher plane than ordinary mortals: though he is “a creature of mortal earth,” his firm desire comes from the stars:

Non credo che pascesse mai per selva	I do not think there ever grazed in any wood
si aspra fera, o di notte o di giorno.	so cruel a beast, whether by night or by day,
come costei ch' i' piango a l'ombra e al sole;	as she for whom I weep in shade and sun,
et non mi stanca primo sonno od alba,	from which I am not stopped by sleep or dawn:
ché ben ch' i' sia mortal corpo di terra	for though I am a body of this earth,
lo mio fermo desir vien da le stelle.	my firm desire comes from the stars.

Here we have the paradox of a mortal body trying to cope with the infinite desires of an immortal soul—a phenomenon described in Plato's *Timaeus*. In the first line of the next stanza, we will see another Platonic idea: at death the soul will return to its star. This is reflected in the speaker's apostrophe to the stars:

Primo ch' i' torni a voi, lucenti stelle	before I return to you, shining stars,
o tomi giù ne l'amorosa selva	or fall down in the amorous wood
lassando il corpo che fia trita terra,	leaving my body which will be dry earth
vedess'io in lei pietà, ch' un sol giorno	might I see pity in her, that one day
può ristorar molt'anni, e 'nanzi l'alba	could restore many years, and before dawn
puommi aricchir dal tramontar del sole.	I could enrich myself from the setting of the sun.

¹² Braden, 17.

¹³ The “fera” will return, in Petrarch's poem CXXVI, “Chiare, fresche, e dolce acque,” a poem with similar imagery and a similar conclusion: “Torni la fera bella et mansueta” (“return...beautiful and mild [female] beast”). The latter poem presents an image of her seeking him, only to find him (the speaker) transformed into earth under her feet—another metamorphosis. Her image in fantasy or in “sweet” memory (“Dolce ne la memoria”) only serves to accentuate the poet's loneliness and alienation. *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 245–47.

The only relief from Petrarch's Sisyphean, circular misery is a day that occurs outside of earthly time. Just as a day represents a symbolic year in the cyclical structure of the *Canzoniere*, in this poem Petrarch collapses all of time (or all of the years of his life) into one day.

Clearly the day in question will never come, and yet it—and its impossibility—form the rhetorical center of the poem. An entire stanza is devoted to this nonexistent night (which is not surprising, in a lyric *raccolta* largely devoted to describing a nonexistent relationship).

Con lei foss'io da che si parte il sole,
et non ci vedess' altri che le stelle,
sol una notte et mai non fosse l'alba,
et non se trasformasse in verde selva
per uscirmi di braccia, come il giorno
ch' Apollo la seguia qua giù per terra!

That I could be with her at the fading sun,
and be seen by no one, only by the stars,
for just one night, and that dawn would never come,
and she not be transformed into green wood
escaping from my arms as on the day
Apollo had pursued her here on earth.

The strength of the fantasy is reinforced by scansion and verb tense. The first line of the sixth and last full stanza, "Con lei fosse io da che si parte il sole" is unusual in its stress of each syllable in the first half of the line, the rhetorical equivalent of underscoring. We might also note that the construction "*da...a*" (from...to) is never completed. There is no *terminus ad quem*, for the poet wills dawn not to arrive. There is also no metamorphosis—for Laura. Unlike the act of becoming-laurel, which prevents Daphne from being possessed as a woman in the myth, Petrarch-Apollo desires to change the myth by willing her not to escape and thus not to become transformed.

Desired events accelerate at a dizzying pace—leading to linguistically-mediated consummation of this impossible love. In this stanza, Petrarch asks that time itself be prolonged for this eternal night of imagined erotic fulfillment and consummation. The present tense of the previous part of the poem gives way to the hypothetical condition of

the past subjunctive, only to be replaced in the *tornada* by a definitive future tense.¹⁴ There are other grammatical curiosities as well. The word “and” (instead of “but”) is used in an adversative sense in this stanza: “sol una notte, e non mai fosse l’alba” (just one night, *and* that dawn never come.) The speaker impetuously changes his request from the humble “just one night” to a timeless night composed of all nights.

The penultimate stanza, expressed in the future tense, is the representation of this never-ending night which transcends time and defies the gods, refusing the traditional narrative resolution of the Daphne-Apollo myth. The speaker asks that Daphne-Laura *not* undergo metamorphosis into the “green wood” of the laurel (“non se trasformasse in verde selva”) in order to escape from Apollo-Petrarch. However, only in the imagined moment outside of time is the erotic pursuit successful. The culmination of the poem is one in which the lover is dead—or metamorphosed into one of the stars. The end-words are pastoral in nature, yet the impossibility of his love—and the certainty of his bodily transformation—are expressed in the language of the *adynaton*, a challenge to the natural order of things and a formula for hoping for the impossible. Any Christian overtones of this hope are undercut by the very Ovidian imagery.

Ma io sarò sotterra in secca selva,
e ‘l giorno andrà pien di minute stelle,
prima ch’a sì dolce alba arrivi il sole.

But I’ll be under earth in dry wood
and the day will dawn full of tiny stars
before such a sweet dawn will see the sun.

In apocalyptic time, as Shapiro suggests, such a night might be possible. In poem XXII, however, the earth (“terra”) becomes a grave in which he is buried (“sotterra”). The death of the lover and the reversal of natural phenomena will occur before this magical dawn ever sees the light of day.

¹⁴ To quote Braden, “The only alba is in the subjunctive.” *Petrarchan Love*, 24.

After reading the aesthetically satisfying sestina XXII, one wonders how anyone could attempt a similar feat. Examining Aragona's sestina, we will see similar imagery put to an interestingly different rhetorical purpose. The six end-words used by Aragona recall traditional images of the love lyric and the pastoral: *Sole, foco, ombra, boschi, raggio, vampo* (sun, fire, shadow, woods, ray, flame/desire.) However, they are put to an anti-pastoral use: the speaker of the poem struggles against the relief that such a setting might provide. There is a tension of absence and presence, reflected in the images of sunlight and shadow (*sole* and *ombra*). The poem derives its strength from opposition, oxymoron, and paradox, as Petrarch's poetry does. In both *sestine*, the speaker contrasts two alternate states, neither of which brings relief. As Petrarch's lover flees from night to day and v.v., Aragona's speaker flees from place to place without finding rest.

The conceit in this poem is the incredibly simple, standard *topos* of the beloved as the sun. Yet the speaker of the poem, ambivalent or thwarted in her desire, flees the beloved/Sun rather than bask in its rays. The desire (signified by *foco/vampo*) grows in direct proportion to the absence of the beloved:

Ben mi credea fuggendo il mio bel Sole	I thought, fleeing my beloved Sun,
scemar (misera me) l'ardente foco	to diminish (oh, misery) this constant fire
Con cercar chiari rivi, & starne a l'ombra	by seeking clear rivers, staying in the shadows,
Ne i più fronzati, & solitarii Boschi;	in the most leafy and lonely woods;
Ma quanto più lontan luce il suo raggio	but the further extend his shining rays
Tanto più, d'hor in hor cresce'l mio vampo.	the stronger, hour by hour, grows my flame.

Like Petrarch's *selvaggio*, Aragona's speaker seeks relief from the sun's intensity in the cool streams and leafy shadows of the woods. This wood is not a *selva* in which to err, but a *locus amoenus*, a space free from the tormenting proximity to the beloved. The fallacy of the belief that this pastoral setting will cure love—*locus amoenus qua remedia amoris*—is the poem's first rhetorical movement.

The speaker's flight to a sylvan space proves futile, as desire (*vampo*) grows with distance from the sun. The beloved's presence or absence rules the lover's life, just as the sun determines the length of the shadow. This sun's powerful rays and other metaphors of burning confirm this trope. The speaker asks a rhetorical question: who would believe that the flame of desire grows when it is further from the sun?

Chi crederebbe mai che questo vampo
Crescesse quanto è più lontan dal Sole?
E pur il provo, che quel divin raggio
Quant' è più lunge più raddoppia il foco.
Né mi giova habitar fontane, o boschi,
Ch' al mio mal nulla val fresco, onda, od ombra

Who would ever believe that this flame
would increase with distance from the sun?
And yet the proof, that this divine ray,
when it is further, redoubles its fire.
Nor is it any good to inhabit fountain or wood:
nothing abates my pain—breezes, waves, or shade.

As we know from Ovid, however (and the courtly love tradition), denial only fans the flames of love.¹⁵ Another Ovidian truism, "venator sequitur fugentia," comes to mind.¹⁶

Aragona's imagery seemingly defies nature, but makes logical sense: as shadows lengthen in the woods, the *vampo* (in its figurations as "fire" and "ray") exists in a synecdochical relationship to the beloved Sun. It increases with distance from it/him, rendering equally odious the usual haunts: no solace is to be found in fountains or wood, fresh breezes, waves, or shade. Apart from the beloved Sun she has paradoxically fled, the speaker can find no consolation. This realization leads to an antistrophic movement in the following stanza: the speaker will turn away from the woods where she has fled for comfort, and *toward* the face of her beloved Sun. In another version of this poem, this Sun's ray is written as "divine" ("divin raggio") and as "sacro volto" ("sacred face"), the

¹⁵ This image comes from Ovid's *Amores* I.ii.11-12 (Loeb): "[V]idi ego iactatas mota face crescere flammās/et rursus nullo concutiente more." ("I have seen flames flare up, when fanned by movement of the torch and die down again, when no one waved it any more....More bitterly by far and fiercely are the unwilling assailed by Love than those who own their servitude.")

¹⁶ In the Ovidian lexicon, "venator sequitur fugentia" (the fleeing prey is followed by the hunter): usually a female creature (like Daphne) is fleeing a male pursuer out of fear. In Aragona's poem, however, it is the presumably female speaker who flees by her own choice. The female speaker is also expressing a somewhat socially constricted desire.

object of her idolatry. The vaguely idolatrous worship of the face of the beloved is reminiscent of another Petrarchan sestina, XXX, in which the beloved is “idolo mio, scolpito in vivo lauro” (“my idol, sculptured in living laurel”).¹⁷ We will also note that this new desire to follow the Sun is a reversal of her former desire to flee.

Ma non cercherò più fresco, onda, od ombra.	I no longer seek fresh breezes, waves, or shade
Che'l mio così cocente, & fero vampo	for this, my blazing and fierce flame
Non ponno ammorzar punto fonti, o boschi:	cannot be extinguished, in stream or wood:
Ma ben seguirò sempre il mio bel Sole,	but will follow always my beloved Sun,
Poscia che nuova Salamandra in foco	so as a salamander lives anew in fire
Vivo lieta, mercè del divo raggio.	I live in joy, thanks to its divine ray.

Not unlike Gaspara Stampa's famous line, “vivere ardendo e non sentire il male” (“to live burning and not feel the pain”), Aragona's “new salamander” lives in fire and even derives pleasure from this. Only a noble soul would voluntarily choose such suffering, though in this poem it is a clear and even a joyful choice.

Deh perché non m'alluma il vivo raggio	Then why does not the living ray illumine me
Ovunque'io vado, o per sole, o per ombra?	wherever I go, in sunlight or in shadow?
Che lieta soffrirei sì dolce il foco,	With pleasure would I suffer such a sweet fire
Et contenta morrei del suo gran vampo.	and die content from its great flame.

The oxymoronic “lieta soffrirei” and “contenta morrei” capture the paradoxical pleasures of pain. When the speaker wishes the living ray—“il vivo raggio”—would follow her everywhere (“ovunque io vado”) the way she would follow him, this implies her faithfulness in the light of the beloved's possible inconstancy. Though she would die gladly in his great flame (“contenta morrei del suo gran vampo”), she will not have the opportunity to do so. A foreshadowing of the final stanza's *adynaton* occurs in the last two lines of the fourth stanza:

Ma non spero giamai (lassa) che'l Sole	But I do not hope (alas!) to see the sun
Scopra giorno sì chiaro in questi boschi.	unveil so bright a day in these woods.

¹⁷ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, XXX. The “idolatry” of the beloved also occurs in Shakespeare's Sonnet 105.

In these lines we hear an echo of the *adynaton* in the final *tornada*, or *envoi* of Petrarch's *sestina*: "prima ch'a sì dolce alba arrivi il sole" (before such a sweet dawn sees the light of the sun). Aragona is building the climax to her poem upon the *dénouement* of Petrarch's.

The next stanza and a half is an exact reversal of Petrarch's CCXXXVII: "le città son nemiche, amici i boschi" ("the cities are enemies; the woods, friends"). Everything *not* the beloved Sun, including the pastoral wood where she has expressly chosen to flee him, is held in contempt by Aragona's speaker. This speaker adores the flame that burns her, stubbornly seeking out and praising it/him. The only constancy lies in the "hatred" of any obstruction, perceived or real, to the speaker's desires:

Ond'havrò sempre in odio i monti, e i boschi che m'ascondon la luce di quel raggio.	I hold in constant hatred the mountains and the woods that hide from me the light of this bright ray
Che splende, & scalda più de l'altro Sole.	which shines, and burns more than the other sun.
Biasmi chi vuole, & fugga i raggi a l'ombra.	Blame me if you wish, flee these rays for the shade.
Ch'io per me cerco sempre, & lodo il vampo.	but as for me, I always seek and praise the flame
Che m'arde, & strugge in sì possente foco.	that burns me, and am consumed in such a potent fire.

achieving in its power a sort of consummation. While Petrarch's speaker suffers, it is not the self-immolation of the speaker in this poem.

The *topos* of potential blame from others is balanced with praise for the flame that consumes the speaker.¹⁸ In Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, poems such as "Benedetto sia il giorno" balance out poems with more overtly negative and frustrated sentiments toward the beloved. However, the dominant tone (at least in XXII) is arguably plaintive. The tone here is one of praise and gratitude toward the *foco* (fire) or *vampo* (desire):

Quanto dunque mi fora grato il foco, Ingrati i monti, & le fontane, e i boschi.	So gracious therefore to me is this fire, that unkind are the mountains, streams, and woods
U non veggio il mio Sole, & sento il vampo	where I cannot see my Sun, but feel his flame.
S'io potessi appressar l'amato raggio.	If I could I would come nearer the beloved ray
Et del mio stesso corpo a lui far ombra,	and of my own body make for him a shade
Et quando parte, & quando torna il Sole.	both at the setting, and the rising of the sun.

¹⁸ The rhetorical formula of "praise or blame" occurs in Aragona's *Dialogue* 94; *Trattati*, 226; quoted in chapter 2.

In the astonishing closing lines of the penultimate stanza of sestina LV, the speaker defies the laws of nature and pastoral by proposing the idea that her own body could be a shade for the beloved ray. The last three lines are particularly striking: if she could only come closer to her Sun, both when he departs and when he returns (“Et quando parte, & quando torna il Sole”), she would herself make a shade for him with her own body. The alternate version of this poem is even more explicit: “col mio stesso corpo al suo far ombre,/ben d’arder godrei toccando il sol” (“with my own body make for him a shade / we would quite enjoy burning, touching the sun.”) When a female poet makes such overt reference to her own body, she is doing so in the face of considerable period social proscriptions against women using such expressions.¹⁹ These moments are few in Aragona’s *Rime*: in part, the poetry served to fashion an image of virtue.²⁰ There may be self-censorship in this last poem of the collection, for the less ardent version is the one that appears in the 1547 and 1560 editions of the *Rime*.

This (presumably) female speaker is a desiring subject rather than a forlorn solitary or a penitent ex-idolator. The closing *adynaton* expresses the strength of the speaker’s desire, not its *impossibilità*:

Prima sia oscuro il Sole, & freddo il foco,	The sun would become dark, and cold, the fire,
Nè faranno ombra in nessun tempo i boschi.	and there would never be a shadow in the woods.
Che del bel raggio in me non arda il vampo.	before this lovely ray no longer burn in me, this flame.

The first line of the *tornada* conjures a world without the light and warmth of the Sun, underscoring the speaker’s sense of deprivation and loss. There is also an intimation of apocalypse: the sun will darken and no longer produce shadows, fire will be cold, before the intensity of the lover’s flame will die out. The dark sun and cold fire (“oscuro il sole &

¹⁹ Gordon Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, *op cit*, 122.

²⁰ See chapter five, “The *Rime* as the Book of a Courtier” “Self-Fashioning an Image of Virtù”

freddo il foco”) create a stark contrast with the predominant imagery of light and heat of four of the six end-words: *Sole*, *foco*, *raggio*, and *vampo* as opposed to *ombra* and *boschi* (sun, fire ray, flame/desire—as opposed to shadow and woods). Yet there is a subtle complexity in the poem’s overall conceit: the lover and the beloved are as dependent upon each other as sun and shadow: without the sun, there would be no shadows in the wood. If the beloved is the sun and the lover is the shadow, the latter cannot exist without the former. Yet in these last lines the poet-speaker-lover embodies the flame or the ray, as if she partakes in the essence of her beloved sun. The closing *adynaton* expresses the constancy and faithfulness of the lover’s desire, even in the face of the difficulty or impossibility of its consummation—an appropriation of the Petrarchan poetic discourse of unrequited desire. There is pathos, but there is also nevertheless a note of triumph in the persistent endurance of this flame.

While in sestina XXII, Petrarch’s speaker posits and then negates a sustained erotic fantasy, in the *Familiare*s he seeks refuge from his desires in the pastoral setting of Vaucluse. Aragona’s speaker seeks a similar refuge, but not because her desires are sinful; they are simply overwhelming. Unlike the Petrarch of the *Secretum* or the self-fashioned penitent of the first poem of the *Rime Sparse*, in Aragona’s poem there is no Christian guilt associated with desire. Rather, desire’s constant strength is what is important—a power that can potentially overcome the constraints of the natural world. Aragona’s poem builds upon this desire for solitude—but unlike Petrarch, she does not espouse the solitude of monasticism. I leave readers to judge for themselves as to whether Petrarchism as a discourse is suited to a female speaker. At any rate, Renaissance women poets (as well as their male counterparts) used Petrarchism as a vehicle for their poetic virtuosity. As we

have seen in this chapter, Tullia d'Aragona employs Petrarchan discourse to express desire and loss from the point of view of a female speaker. To summarize the previous chapter: While poem XXII in the *Canzoniere* focuses upon an uncanny, impossible moment outside of time in which the speaker's desires are fulfilled, Aragona's LV depicts a landscape in which the construct of pastoral refuge fails or the persistence of desire overcomes the construct: if not, the sun becomes dark, and fire becomes cold. Desire is life; extinction of desire is the winter's tale this poem so aptly tells.

CHAPTER FIVE
ETERNAL LINES TO TIME: EMBODIED SOULS, IMMORTAL POEMS.
POETIC PROGENY IN TULLIA D'ARAGONA AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

But were some child of yours alive that time,
 You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme.
 —Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 17

Non lo crediate, no Piero, ch'anch'io
 fatico ogn'hor per appressarmi al Cielo
 e lasciar del mio nome in terra fama.
 (I do not think you can conceive, Peter
 that like you I labor, aspire to reach the firmament
 and to leave my name renowned on earth.)
 —Tullia d'Aragona, *Rime*, XXXVIII¹

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
 nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.
 cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
 ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:
 parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
 astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum.
 quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
 ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
 siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.
 (And now my work is done: no wrath of Jove
 nor fire nor sword nor time, which would erode
 all things, has power to blot out this poem.
 Now, when it wills, the fatal day (which has
 only the body in its grasp) can end
 my years, however, long or short their span.
 But with the better part of me, I'll gain
 a place that's higher than the stars: my name,
 indelible, eternal, will remain.
 And everywhere that Roman power has sway,
 in all domains the Latins gain, my lines
 will be on people's lips; and through all time—
 if poets' prophecies are ever right—
 my name and fame are sure: I shall have life.)
 —Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV, 870-879²

Begetting is, by human standards, something eternal and undying. So if we were right in describing love as the desire always to possess the good, then the inevitable conclusion is that we desire immortality as well as goodness....love must be desire for immortality as much as for beauty. —Plato, *Symposium*. Diotima of Mantinea³

¹ (27th) in *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* (Venice: Giolito, 1547). Translation mine.

² *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, transl. Allen Mandelbaum (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1993), 549.

³ Plato, *Symposium*, translated by Tom Griffith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 207a.

In this chapter I will trace a poetic-philosophical trajectory from Petrarch to Shakespeare, and determine where Tullia d'Aragona falls in relation to these two canonical poets. In keeping with the rest of this dissertation, the discourses of Neoplatonism and Petrarchism will be my starting point. Since this subject is potentially exhaustive, I will limit myself to three rubrics: the "rhetoric of the body;"⁴ responses to Petrarchism by Aragona and Shakespeare; and the continued existence of the poet through his or her immortal words: in Shakespeare's phrase, "eternal lines to time." A constant among the variables is that Shakespeare and Aragona follow Plato more than Neoplatonism, expressing a desire for immortality in terms of beauty and love—much as in Diotima's speech, quoted above.

In another passage in Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima draws a parallel between procreation and artistic creation: creative bodies produce children; creative souls, works of art, compositions,⁵ poetry, philosophy, "thought and all other human excellence."⁶ Using Diotima's "categories:" creations of the body versus creations of the soul, I will demonstrate how Tullia d'Aragona and William Shakespeare present the mortal body's immortal longings in tropes of reproduction and literary immortality. I see Shakespeare's well-known "procreation sonnets" as akin to his larger project of monument-making, while Aragona's desire for immortality through poetry is *not* linked to themes of maternal *pietà* and loss. Both Aragona and Shakespeare had—and lost—children, though the two poets treat the subject differently.⁷ Both envisioned poetry as a means of attaining

⁴ The phrase is borrowed from Lynn Enterline's title, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*.

⁵ In this speech, composition is originally given a musical definition (205c), and expanded to the other arts.

⁶ *Symposium*, 209a. Diotima, not present at the banquet, is quoted by Socrates.

⁷ While biographical information is readily available on Shakespeare, information about Aragona's children is sketchy: she provides for her son Celio in her will, but her sister (daughter?) Penelope is already dead.

immortality—for the lover as well as the beloved (as did other poets of the time). Both authors engage in a “dialogue” with their future readers, hoping their work would last.

While it is obvious that a dialogue has “dialogic” qualities, I stress Aragona’s dialogism in a very specific sense for each genre in which she works. As we have seen in her dialogue, Aragona engages in a dialogue with Neoplatonist philosophy as it was understood in her time: instead of dividing love into bodily *versus* soul love, she offers the innovative solution of integrating the two. In her *Rime*, she not only enters into a dialogue with poets of the past (and present), but also readers of the future—for Aragona, immortality is conceived in terms of textual fortunes. In a poem to her friend and fellow poet Piero Manelli, Aragona inscribes her desire for immortality using the Latin-derived word “fama” (“fame”): “e lasciare del mio nome in terra fama” (“and to leave my name renown[ed] on earth”). Fame, used in this sense, is a word embodying the honor associated with one’s name.⁸ Like Petrarch in his “Letter to Posterity,” Aragona expresses a desire to be remembered as a poet. To that end, she “signs” her *Rime* as one signs a painting: claiming authorship, literally inscribing her name within the poems: “così dicea Tullia in riva di Arno.” I will discuss the phenomenon of the literary signature later on in the chapter.⁹

In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare departs from a disembodied Petrarchism, focusing upon procreation as one means of attaining earthly immortality, and poetry, another. Shakespeare’s poetic meditations on these subjects range from the procreation sonnets to

⁸ Various forms of the word “fama” occur in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Book IV, mostly in passages about Dido’s reputation. “Fama” can convey either honor or dishonor. As the figure of Rumor in the *Aeneid*, *fama* conveys the latter: 4, 173; 4, 174; 4, 298; 4, 323; 4, 387; 4, 666; *famae*: 4, 221; *famam*: 4, 91; *famamque*: 4, 218. In Dryden’s translation she is depicted as a gossip: “Millions of opening mouths to Fame belong./And ev’ry mouth is furnish’d with a tongue,/And round with list’ning ears the flying plague is hung.”

⁹ Cf. Fiora Bassanese, “What’s in a Name? Self-Naming and Renaissance Women Poets,” *Annali d’italianistica*, Vol. 7 (1989), 104–115.

meditations on art—and tortured poems to the dark lady—though arguably, even the procreation poems are also about poetry. The *Sonnets* are filled with references to bodily change and decay—in contrast to the permanence of art. Like Ovid, Shakespeare foregrounds the act of telling. Many critics have cited Ovid as a formative influence upon Shakespeare, probably by way of Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁰

In her *Rime*, we find very little of the body. However, Aragona does address the *topos* of artistic immortality, in language reminiscent of Ovid.¹¹ As she writes in poem XXXVII (quoted above) if fate does not deter her efforts, her name will live on in the poetic firmament. As demonstrated in chapter three, Tullia d'Aragona was very much influenced by Ovid: both by the tales of the *Metamorphoses* (with which she engages in dialectic imitation) and by his claim, in Book XV, that he will live on through his book. Acclaimed for proficiency in Latin in her youth, Tullia probably read Ovid in the original.¹² She expresses her desire for immortal fame in a way that recalls Book XV of the *Metamorphoses*:¹³ when she finally escapes the “corporeo velo” the veil of her body, she will take her place in the firmament.¹⁴ Thus, she “translates” Ovidian and

¹⁰ Gordon Braden devotes an entire article to this theme, in a collection entitled *Shakespeare's Ovid*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press; NY: Oxford University Press, 1993). Cf. also Garth Tissol, *The face of nature: wit, narrative, and cosmic origins in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹¹ References are to “Poi che mi diè Natura,” XXXVIII (1891 *Rime*, ed. Celani), 27th in the 1547 *Rime*.

¹² In “Breve Vita di Tullia d'Aragona,” the hagiographic introduction to the 1864 edition of the *Dialogo... della infinità d'amore* (Milan: Daelli, 1864), xxii, Alessandro Zilioli writes, “fu sentita...in età ancor fanciullesca, disputare e scrivere nel latino e nell'italiano cose degne d'ogni maggior letterato” (it was said [Tullia could] argue and write things worthy of the great *literati*, in Latin and in Italian while yet a girl.)

¹³ Ovid declares that after his body is separated from his soul, or ‘better part’: “...parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis/astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum” (still in my better part I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name) *Metamorphoses* XV.875-6.

¹⁴ Though in the period poetic language was often Neoplatonic, Aragona it is not accurate to call her a Neoplatonist. Her transformation of the Neoplatonist idiom is only one of the ways in which her poetry (and philosophy) is an example of the Renaissance phenomenon of “creative imitation.”

Neoplatonist rhetoric into her version of earthly fame, envisioning future readers just as Shakespeare—and Petrarch—do.

Body Language: Immanence and Transcendence

Philosophically, Shakespeare refuses Neoplatonic transcendence in favor of bodily immanence. In her *Rime*, Aragona stresses a paradoxical immortality through the immanence of art rather than through procreation: she does not attempt to poeticize the hazardous vicissitudes of childbirth. By contrast, Shakespeare champions the idea of childbirth to the first addressee of his poems, the lovely youth. The poems will be progeny, too—monuments to the beloved's beauty and the poet's skill. Though Shakespeare lived after Aragona, I will discuss his work first, as he is the more well-known poet. Using the phrase "rhetoric of the body" to mean both procreation *and* bodily immanence, I will demonstrate how the *Sonnets'* theme progresses: from bodily procreation, in the first seventeen poems, to artistic creation from Sonnet 17 onwards. I will then discuss the relevant poems in Aragona's *Rime*, poems that explicitly reference immortality and procreation—the latter, in terms of erotic loss and maternal mourning.

Not all critics agree that Shakespeare is championing immanence over transcendence in his *Sonnets*, or even agree as to what constitutes immanence. Gordon Braden claims that the lyrics of the English and Italian Petrarchists are far bawdier than the Bard's, and that Shakespeare had not necessarily read Petrarch (in Italian).¹⁵ Braden further argues that Shakespeare's departure from Ovidian themes used by other

¹⁵ Gordon Braden, "Ovid, Petrarch, and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*," in *Shakespeare's Ovid* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96–112. Braden does not indicate why he believes that Shakespeare did not read Petrarch. (See the passage in *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4.33–36) a bawdy speech in which Mercutio mocks Romeo's lovesickness, comparing it to Petrarch's idealization of his Laura.) See also Braden's *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

Renaissance sonneteers makes his own sequence “unusually austere” by comparison, remarking “There is less of the flesh in it.”¹⁶ Joseph Pequigney argues basically the opposite, decoding the homoerotic semiotics in the *Sonnets*. Rather than arguing about Shakespeare’s sexuality (or the presence or absence of “naughty bits” in his poetry) I am interested in the antithetical relationship of the Sonnets to Neoplatonic thought and in Shakespeare’s revision of some of the clichéd features of Petrarchan poetry.

Body Language: The Rhetoric of Immanence in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*

Renaissance translations of Plato had an impact upon upon the work of Tullia d’Aragona and upon later versions of Petrarchism. If one imagines a rhetorical spectrum, with the Petrarchan idealized body at one end and the Shakespearean procreative, immanent body at the other, Tullia d’Aragona would fall somewhere in between the two famous poets—and probably closer to Shakespeare. Of course, I do not claim that Aragona influenced Shakespeare directly, but that he comes at a decisive point in the anti-Petrarchan trajectory: a cultural moment when Neoplatonic transcendence was waning.

Poets who satirized Petrarchan conventions helped to bring the object-beloved “down to earth,” as did women poets, writing to decidedly earthy and real (though perhaps absent) men.¹⁷ Poetic responses to Petrarchism by women (as discussed in the previous chapter) constitute rhetorical representations of female agency and bodily immanence hitherto unprecedented in the subgenre. Shakespeare’s rhetoric is innovative,

¹⁶ Braden, *op cit.*

¹⁷ For example, in her *Rime* (poem I, ll.6-7) Gaspara Stampa takes a stance directly opposite to the penitential mode of Petrarch’s opening sonnet. While Petrarch’s plea is “Spero trovar pietà, non che perdono” (“I hope to find pity, as well as pardon”), Gaspara Stampa declares that she desires not pity but glory: “gloria, non che perdon, de’ miei lamenti/spero trovar fra le ben nate genti” (“Through my laments, I hope to find glory, as well as pardon, among well-born people.”) Both poets seek the understanding and compassion of those who have the nobility of spirit to empathize with their plight: unrequited or lost love.

too, in reimagining genre and gender: the potentially reproductive *male* body and the immanent *female* body play important roles in his revision of Petrarchism.

In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare imposes his own “will” upon Petrarch’s legacy. Like Laura, Shakespeare’s young man will be immortalized, but not without his faults: narcissistic self-love and onanistic sexuality. Some of the other sonnets fall into a courtly, or perhaps courtierly, idealizing of the young man as “fair, kind, and true” (Sonnet 105). Gender is “performed” in myriad ways in Shakespeare’s plays. However, the same-sex gendering of the beloved in the *Sonnets* is a significant departure from the Petrarchan tradition, and his depiction of the lusty “dark lady” could not be more antithetical to Petrarch’s Laura. Petrarch becomes the butt of jokes in the plays:

O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified! Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in.
Laura to his lady was a kitchen wench—marry, she had a better love to berhyme her—
Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a gipsy, Helen and Hero hildings and harlots...¹⁸

Among other things, this passage pays a backhanded compliment to Petrarch at Romeo’s expense. On the one hand, Romeo is viewed by his friends as weak, effeminate, and given to Petrarchan idealization of his beloved, whom he has only just met. (It is worth noting that when the play opens, Romeo was indulging a similar hopeless passion for Rosaline). The lovesick comedy of this scene will nevertheless take on tragic dimensions.

One could view the Shakespearean trajectory I mentioned earlier in terms of the evolution from blonde angelic Laura into the earthy sensuality of the “dark lady”—and the vain, childish (and childless) young man. The young man’s childlessness (and his apparent refusal to procreate) dominate the first subsequence of the *Sonnets*. Selfishly concerned with his own beauty, the young man is like one of the characters in

¹⁸ Mercutio makes this speech, mocking the lovesick, Petrarchan Romeo, in *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.3.33-6.

Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, a work lampooned in Shakespeare's plays.¹⁹ Perhaps Shakespeare is satirizing Neoplatonism by making the "young man," a person with what Freud would call narcissistic tendencies, represent an idea—"Socratic" love. The beloved youth does seem to possess a Neoplatonic suspicion of the body: refusing, for example, to "bless" some woman's womb with, in the poet's words, "the tillage of [thy] husbandry." The *Sonnets*' speaker considers the youth's reproductive abstinence to be in error, as if he is emulating the wrong text: instead of "go forth and multiply," the latter is espousing a program of transcending corporeality to become a philosopher-angel, the higher type of being described in Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.²⁰

For the speaker of the *Sonnets* to urge the young man to reproduce is, to say the least, unusual. The *Sonnets* contain neither the fruitless appeal to virtuous maidenhood of Petrarchism nor the *carpe diem* theme of later poems like Robert Herrick's "To the Maidens, to Make Much of Time."²¹ Not many precedents exist in the lyric tradition for a

¹⁹ As Stephen Greenblatt argues, the characters are obsessed with performing their social roles to the point of endangering Hero's life as well as her reputation. Many examples of the superficial rhetoric of courtly performance (and its antithesis, in Don John) occur in *Much Ado About Nothing*. See the introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare*, vol. I: (Comedies), general editor, Stephen Greenblatt (NY: Norton, 1997), 522.

²⁰ Even if one aspired to such a goal, Neoplatonic authors like Pico wrote about this subject in difficult, hermetic metaphors for an elite, highly specialized audience. Here is an excerpt from Pico's *Oration*: "It is not a lack of body that makes an angel an angel, rather it is his spiritual intelligence. If you see a person totally subject to his appetites, crawling miserably on the ground, you are looking at a plant, not a man. If you see a person blinded by empty illusions and images, and made soft by their tender beguilements, completely subject to his senses, you are looking at an animal, not a man. If you see a philosopher judging things through his reason, admire and follow him: he is from heaven, not the earth. If you see a person living in deep contemplation, unaware of his body and dwelling in the inmost reaches of his mind, he is neither from heaven or earth, he is divinity clothed in flesh." *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, ed. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, (Bologna: Benedetto Faelli, 1496), transl. Richard Hooker, 1994 and found at: www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/text/ov.html. Hamlet's soliloquy bears uncanny similarity to Pico's rhetoric in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Here are some of his lines: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension, how like a god—the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.293-4)

²¹ "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, / Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today, / To-morrow will be dying." Robert Herrick, "To the Maidens, to

male poet to persuade another man to “breed.” Joseph Pequigney coins a most wonderful phrase to describe the speaker’s obsession with the young man perpetuating his beauty by procreating: “aesthetic eugenics.” Pequigney further remarks, “If some other sonneteer did strive for sexual gratification ...reproduction was definitely not the objective.”²² To use Shakespeare’s phrase, the speaker “doth protest too much.”

Pequigney’s book, usually quoted for its interesting (and plausible) speculations about the semiotics of homoeroticism in the *Sonnets*, has other scholarly merits as well. He presents a holistic view of the poems’ progression, noting that the first poem does not correspond to any kind of *incipit*, Petrarchan or otherwise. Pequigney writes, “Instead of stating some overall intent, it presents an argument that is curious, autonomous, and disorienting.”²³ He is arguing against other scholars, who interpret the procreation sonnets as an endorsement of “normative” sexuality. The line “From nature’s fairest creatures we desire increase” is glossed by Helen Vendler as an allusion to Genesis.²⁴ Pequigney reads it in a more strictly sensual sense, and I agree.²⁵ The speaker is focused upon the erotic beauty of the Other and upon the sexual consummation of that beauty, even if he will only get vicarious pleasure from that consummation.²⁶ Those critics who see the “procreation sonnets” as conforming to Christian doctrine or “endorsing” wedded love are reading into the text what isn’t there, thus confirming W.H. Auden’s view of the

Make Much of Time,” from *Hesperides* (London: John Williams & F. Eglesfield, 1648; Facs. edn. Menston: Scolar, 1969). The *Sonnets*’ argument is a differently-gendered version of the *carpe diem* theme.

²² Joseph Pequigney, *Such is My Love*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ Vendler, 46.

²⁵ Pequigney, 8.

²⁶ One could read the speaker’s attraction as voyeuristic, vicarious, mediated: he drawn to the young man’s hypothetical insemination of the “maiden gardens” as well as to the promiscuity of the dark lady.

Sonnets as a touchstone, “distinguishing the sheep from the goats.”²⁷ Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* do not restrict the young man’s reproductivity to one woman; certainly not to a wife.²⁸ If anything, the tillage potentially takes place in many “maiden gardens.”

Clearly, the *Sonnets* contain more than an injunction to “go forth and multiply:” soon we will see the generative motive expanded into a literary one. We get the slightest hint of the *Sonnets*’ *telos* when the language of the first sonnet “from fairest creatures we desire increase” evolves into the language of reproduction (of books)—“print more.” In positing his pro-procreation argument, Shakespeare experiments with various kinds of images: agrarian (*Sonnets*, 1, 3), aesthetic (2), musical (8), distillatory (5, 6), prophetic (14), artistic (16 and 17, among others)—and this is by no means an exhaustive list. However, the consistent common denominator among these varied images is the idea of the continual rebirth of beauty as a Platonic Form. In this sense, Shakespeare follows Plato’s *Symposium*—a popular reference in the period for the spirit-matter debate.²⁹

Pequigney, quoted earlier, is one of the few to connect the philosophy of the *Sonnets* with Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* and with Neoplatonist philosophy.³⁰

²⁷ I.e. “those who love poems from those who only value poems either as historical documents or because they express feelings and beliefs of which the reader happens to approve.” W. H. Auden, introduction to *The Sonnets*, xvii (NY: Signet Books, 1965).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. Pequigney asserts that “Christian doctrine is notably absent;” likewise, the command “to ‘be fruitful and multiply’...cries out for inclusion but is not here.”

²⁹ Though I have devoted the first two chapters to this problem, I have not given references to the reception of Plato’s *Symposium* in Elizabethan England.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. Pequigney’s book deals most thoroughly with homoerotic semiotics in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. Thus, it is extremely helpful to my argument: such eroticism is anti-Petrarchan, eroticizing the male body. Pequigney correctly makes a connection with Neoplatonism, citing the dialogue *The Courtier*, “Love is nothing else but a desire to enjoy beauty” but mistakenly interprets the “enjoy” in a visual sense. The original word for enjoy is “godere” in the *Dialoghi d’amore* of Leone Ebreo. The Italian verb *godere* means “enjoy,” but with a sexual connotation corresponding to the French noun “jouissance:” the English word “enjoy” is less sensual. (The work is thought to be written in Lla[n]dino, the language of Castilian Jews, but the extant translations are in Italian, French, and English). Ebreo’s argument belongs to a renegade strain of “Neoplatonism” based on the Kabbala, one that celebrates the union of male and female in a cosmic sense. Cf. T. Anthony Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, *op cit.*

Yet the distinction of the “Neo-” must be preserved: the difference between Plato’s dialogue and the Neoplatonist *trattati d’amore*. With some exceptions, Neoplatonism and its source text, Plato’s *Symposium*, are largely absent from criticism of the *Sonnets*, apart from several references by Helen Vendler.³¹ Many critics are also skittish around the subject of Shakespeare’s sexuality.³² A better question would be: how is that sexuality is mediated through the traditional discourses of Platonism and Petrarchism?

Turning briefly to the *Symposium*, an important part of the answer can be found in the relationship of beauty to love and procreation, the theme of Diotima’s “speech.”³³ She defines Eros as “the love of the beautiful” (204b), and, slightly later, as the “permanent possession of the good” (206b). According to Diotima, Beauty’s role in procreation is that of a midwife, arguing for “this divine element, this germ of immortality, in mortal creatures—that is, conception and begetting” (206d). Shakespeare’s language evokes this argument: in fact, his *Sonnets* embody the core truths of Diotima’s speech, especially on generation: “What is mortal tries, to the best of its ability, to be everlasting and immortal. It does this in the only way it can, by leaving a successor to replace what decays.” On this point, Plato’s text can be seen as an extremely helpful “gloss” on the procreation sonnets—or vice versa.

Thus, Shakespeare not only celebrates the body’s material immanence but also takes a role of spiritual midwifery in encouraging the act of giving birth to children: a

³¹ Interpreting sonnet 105, Vendler perceives the revisionary use of Christian Neoplatonic language to describe the Trinitarian values of beauty, goodness, and truth. “Fair, kind, and true” is repeated three times.

³² *Shakespeare’s Philosophy of Love*, a book with a promising title, does not live up to its promise. H.H. Home refers readers to his pseudo-biographical Appendix for “a discussion” of Platonic love, which never occurs. Wishing, with Hallam that the sonnets had never been written, he reminds us that “Plato’s lofty philosophy of love...is based on Greek practices similar to those suggested in Shakespeare’s work.”(21).

³³ Socrates’ account of Diotima’s “speech” is reported speech, for she is not actually present at the banquet. In the theatre, offstage action reported by a messenger is often more crucial to the plot than onstage action. One should keep in mind Plato’s previous career as a tragedian in assessing the import of this detail.

form of (earthly) immortality, or at least the temporal continuity of life. To follow Pequigney's grouping, initial enamorment (1-9) gives way to persuasion (10-14) and finally to immortalizing the beloved (14-17). Poem 17, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, serves as a hinge between the procreative and the creative themes in the *Sonnets*: children and poems would both preserve his legacy. The procreation sonnets give way to the idea that the poems themselves will be the instruments of the beloved's immortality.

The Body Language of Narcissus: Self-Love in the Young Man and Laura

Anti-Petrarchan, and more Platonist than Neoplatonist, Shakespeare's concern as to whether or not the young man produces children is argued repeatedly, obsessively in the procreation subsequence, until the idea of continuity in all of its aspects is firmly implanted within the reader's brain. For example, the youth's "hoarding" of gifts is seen as a waste of resources, similar to the biblical injunction against hiding one's light under a bushel.³⁴ Chastity, a virtue in the beloved in the courtly and Petrarchan traditions, is seen as a fault in the young man, an affront to nature. Because he does not follow the natural order of things, the beautiful young man will become his own "tomb." out of excessive self-love.

Ironically, in directives such as that of Sonnet 3, "Now is the time that face should form another," the poet-speaker encourages that very vanity, that self-love, as a reason to procreate: "Look in thy glass" he exhorts (5), and chides the youth's "unthrifty

³⁴ Vendler, 48. The metaphor is used less in a doctrinal sense, and more as a part of common folk speech.

loveliness” (4). Reproducing solely to perpetuate one’s beauty is a reason as seemingly superficial as the young man’s sterile autoeroticism.³⁵

The trope of vain and sterile self-love is present in Petrarch’s poems as well, figured with particular eloquence in XLVI, with its image of “micidiali specchi” (“murderous mirrors”). Just as Petrarch accuses Laura of causing Amor’s silence by her narcissistic desire that ends in herself,³⁶ so the first poem of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* syllogistically scolds the young man for being potentially the end of the family line, the fruitless “tomb” of his own self-love: “or who is he so fond will be the tomb/of his self-love to stop posterity?” Arguably, Petrarch’s love for Laura is as sterile and autoerotic as the young man’s narcissism: in both Laura and the youth, there is a perverse refusal to grant the body material reality in consummated love. In the Italian poetic tradition, we take this refusal for granted, suspending our disbelief or judgment because of the underlying presence of Neoplatonism implicit in Petrarchan love: *of course the beloved is ideal instead of real!* However, Tullia d’Aragona—and Shakespeare after her—will problematize and challenge these assumptions.

In poem 62, the speaker himself admits to the “sin of self-love,” using a mirror again as his metaphor. This poem differs from the other sonnets in that the speaker usually refrains from self-praise. The first three quatrains seem to indulge in this very thing, but the truth comes out in the couplet: “‘Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise/Painting my age with beauty of thy days.” In the next poem the poet, obsessed with the youth’s aging, dreads the day “When hours have drained his blood and filled his

³⁶ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, XLVI: “veggendo in voi finir vostro desio” (“seeing that your desire ends in yourself”). Ed. Piero Cudini (Milan: Garzanti, 1983).

brow/With lines and wrinkles, when his youthful morn/Hath traveled on to Age's steepy night" and proceeds to fortify himself against that day with poetry. The beloved shall be preserved, unaging, in art, to use Yeats's phrase, in the "artifice of eternity." "His beauty shall in these black lines be seen, /And they shall live, and he in them still green." Compared to the (failed) reproductive option, poetry proves the more reliable legacy.

One suspects that poetry has been the real business all along. Instead of functioning as the rhetorical vehicle used to "seduce" the young man into procreating, now poems are seen as the "love children" of which the creative mind is the progenitor. While the "fertile brain" trope is used repeatedly in the poems and plays, in this case Shakespeare connects writing and procreation in a mode different from the final couplet of 17 ("But were some child of yours alive that time/He should live twice, in it and in my rhyme"). In poem 63, the addressee is not encouraged to breed *per se*, but to pursue the sort of procreation in which the poet has been engaged: "Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find/Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain"—just as the poet's muse is the "Onlie Begetter" of the *Sonnets*.³⁷ Though the metaphor is fairly common in the period, Shakespeare inscribes poetic creation with the value previously placed upon reproduction—with similar imagery.³⁸ The process of fancy's conception and engendering is wittily displayed in Portia's song:

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourishèd?...

³⁷ The phrase "Onlie Begetter," added by Thorpe in 1609, might as well be Shakespeare's. As Katharine Duncan-Jones states, "There is every reason to believe the 1609 edition was authorized by Shakespeare himself" (*Sonnets*, 34); "there is no dispute about the volume to which the Stationers' register of 20 May 1609 refers: "Tho. Thorpe. entred for his copies....a booke called Shakespeares sonnettes" (7).

³⁸ In poem 50 of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, 50, Astrophil refers to the thoughts with which he labors as "poor babes." Sidney, Sir Philip, *An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2001).

It is engendered in the eyes,
 With gazing fed; and fancy dies
 In the cradle where it lies. (*Merchant of Venice*, 3.2.63-69)

This quote is, of course, not only a clever allusion to the *stilnovistic* conceit that love enters through the eyes, but the imagery is also ingeniously linked to that of the *Sonnets*. The imagination is fed by the gaze: hence all the visual imagery of reflection (windows, mirrors, “thy mother’s glass”) and representation (painting, drawing, printing).

The conception/engendering of love occurs in the realm of the imagination, of fancy, the same creative matrix in which poems are born. The common denominator in the speaker’s arguments is beauty: the youth’s beauty should live on in children and in the *Sonnets*. The same link between immortality and beauty exists in Diotima’s speech and in Shakespeare’s poetry. Beauty is always present at the conception of love, longing to reproduce itself, whether in physical form or in poetry, for “....love must be desire for immortality as much as for beauty.”³⁹ In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare gives us both—embodied souls and immortal poems.

The Immortal Self, Embodied: Claims to Fame in Tullia d’Aragona’s *Rime*

In the last section, I have demonstrated how Shakespeare not only concretizes the body in its materiality but also celebrates the “immortal” continuity of mortal life through “begetting” children—and poems. Though Tullia herself was a mother,⁴⁰ her meditations on immortality have neither to do with procreation nor with Christian conceptions of the soul. Like Shakespeare, Aragona conceives immortality in terms of earthly fame; unlike

³⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 207a (cited in the beginning of this chapter).

⁴⁰ Aragona had two children: Penelope and Celio. Although official records list Penelope as Tullia’s sister, critics now believe she was Tullia’s daughter. It was to her advantage to hide this fact, as motherhood was a potential hazard for an “honest” courtesan.

him, she does not celebrate childbirth as a means to the end of continuing one's presence on earth. In her dialogue, Tullia d'Aragona imagines the possibility of infinite love against the finitude of the body. In her last poem, as we have seen in chapter three, she envisions a love so infinite that it will survive not only the ravages of time but apocalypse: time's end and the sun's death ("The sun will become dark, and cold the fire, / and there would never be a shadow in the woods/Before this lovely ray no longer burns in me, this flame"). Through her *Rime*, Aragona will survive even the death of the body in an infinity of love and fame—or rather, her name will live on earth through her poems. Therefore the *Rime* is a the portrait of a female poetic subjectivity.

On the subject of immanence, Aragona is closer to Shakespeare than to Petrarch in her refiguration of the ontological and social roles of women as authentic, desiring, articulate beings. It is not enough to *feel* desire, to be a desiring subject, as a certain strain of feminist theory seems to imply. The style must be equal to the subject, intellectually ambitious: "*alto desio*" (*high desire*), and one must achieve the successful articulation of that desire.⁴¹ Then, language itself becomes a kind of immanence.

Reading Tullia d'Aragona's poetry has broader implications for feminist theory: I have found her writing to be resistant to the idea of "*écriture féminine*." While writing—or rewriting—the body might occur in the *Dialogue*, it is not evident in the *Rime*. Aragona's poetry calls for a school of criticism that would take into account her resistance to gender-based differentiation. Even though she writes about motherhood, for example, Aragona argues against the notion of a difference of essence. Thus, her ideas contradict the essentialism of an earlier school of feminist thought *and* Renaissance

essentialist notions of woman's essential inferiority. To briefly explain what I mean by feminist essentialism, I will use a quote from Hélène Cixous, taken a bit out of context:

Sexual difference is not determined simply by relation to anatomy...No, the difference, in my opinion, becomes most clearly perceived on the level of *jouissance*, inasmuch as a woman's instinctual economy cannot be identified by a man or referred to by the masculine economy.⁴²

The *jouissance* proposed by Cixous would have to happen in a literary vacuum, "innocent" of any relationship to other texts. Without wishing to disparage other feminist scholars, I find it necessary to be vigilant against the temptations of anachronism. Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa, Pernette du Guillet, and Louise Labé write Petrarchan poetry, like (and unlike) male poets of the period. Similarly, I object to critics who see female Petrarchists as inauthentic, self-betraying, contaminated by their relationship to male literary tradition; as well as those who see tradition debased by an invasion of Amazons.⁴³ Yet Aragona does just that: predicates her emotional and libidinal economy in a semiotic system invented by a man, one whose practitioners were mostly men. For a writer like Aragona, steeped in the traditions of Petrarch and Plato, such a theory is inapplicable. One cannot separate this sixteenth-century woman poet from the traditions preceding her and surrounding her when she implicates these very traditions within the text itself. Aragona's genius lies in the *transformative* nature of creative imitation she has wrought within forms of thought and verse not designed for her (or any other woman, for that matter). She argues, in her poetry and prose, for women's ontological and intellectual immanence—as artists, as desiring beings, as public figures. In her *Rime*, Tullia d'Aragona presents herself as a courtier, not a courtesan.

⁴² Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, transl. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁴³ For an example of the former, see Fiora Bassanese, "Private Lives and Public Lies: Texts by Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance," in *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 30 (1988), 295-319.

Aragona's *Rime* as the Book of a Courtier

In her *Rime*, her intellectual immanence is asserted in a linguistic performance in person and in print, in time and space: Florence, 1547, the court of Cosimo de' Medici and Eleonora de Toledo. "Signora Tullia" is glorified in these moments, ironically enough, even as she is glorifying others, through patronage and through dialogic, reciprocal relationships with men of letters. The word "dialogic" describes the relationship she creates with her audience, between writer and addressee; a genre in which she wrote; and also the form in which her poems were published. *Rime della signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei* (Poems by Aragona and by others to her) is literally dialogic: a section of poems written by Aragona is followed by a section in which poems by her alternate with poems to her, "Sonetti della Sig. Tullia, con le risposte" and one with just her responses "Sonetti di diversi alla S. Tullia con le risposte di lei." As Ann Jones has observed, it is a group portrait, aglitter with reflected light.⁴⁴ Collective publication was an opportunity for her to inscribe her own name in the firmament, to assert her own literary presence—a poetic "I" which is a strong presence.

In an essay entitled "What's in a Name?" Fiora Bassanese discusses the phenomenon of the literary signature—without fully exploring the use of that signature by Aragona herself.⁴⁵ In poem VIII of the *Rime*,⁴⁶ Tullia "signs off" with her own name:

⁴⁴ Ann Jones, *The Currency of Eros*, 87.

⁴⁵ Fiora Bassanese, "What's in a Name? Self-Naming and Renaissance Women Poets," *Annali d'Italianistica*, Vol. 7, 1989, 104-115. The poem quoted is not an example given of self-naming, but one in which the poet's friend Girolamo Muzio "names" her (the first poem of the "diversi" section of the *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona et di diversi a lei*). Bassanese's argument is well-constructed, but she

“Così dicea Tullia in riva di Arno” (“so spoke Tullia on the shores of the Arno”). The poem connects the Muses (goddesses descended from “Helicon”) with Tuscany in general, and with the realm of Cosimo in particular. She implores them to weave a crown for the illustrious ruler “who adorns the world with virtue”—and also to sing through her, recalling other invocations to the muses by other well-known poets:⁴⁷

Allo stesso (Cosimo de' Medici)

Dive che dal bei monte d'Elicon
Discendete sovente a far soggiorno
Fra queste rive, ond'è che d'ogni intorno
Il gran nome Toscan più altero sona:

D'eterni fior tessete una corona
A lui, che di virtù fa 'l mondo adorno.
Sceso col fortunato Capricorno,
Per cui l'antico vizio n'abbandona.

E per me lodi, e per me grazia a lui
Rendete, o Dive, che lingua mortale,
Verso immortal virtù s'affanna indarno.

Quest' è valor, quest' è soggetto tale,
Che solo è da voi sole, e non d'altrui:
Così dicea la Tullia in riva d'Arno.

Goddesses from the beautiful Mt. Helicon
who sojourn here often, come down
to these shores, where all around
rings the great Tuscan name, with louder sound:

Of ageless flowers weave for him a crown,
he who with virtue the world adorns
descended from fortunate Capricorn
through whom the ancient vice is disallowed.

And through me praise, through me gracious thanks
render to him, o Goddesses, that a mortal tongue
not labor in vain toward immortal virtue.

This, the valor; this, the subject so worthy of you:
I sing praises, not for others, but for you alone:
Thus declared Tullia on the Arno's banks.

The Golden Age is evoked in this flowery poem, as if Cosimo de' Medici's Florence were *the* time and place of the rebirth of classical antiquity. Astrological and mythical images combine to make Cosimo resemble the sort of prelapsarian Saturn figure that ruled mythic Rome.⁴⁸ Elsewhere she alters his name to “Cosmo,” creating an image of

leaves out poems such as V, in which the poet names herself. Her equation of the Philomela myth to a statement about women's voicelessness differs from my own reading of the poem (see chapter 4).

⁴⁶ Poem VIII in the 1891 *Rime* edited by Celani; this poem is sixth in the 1547 edition of Aragona's *Rime*.

⁴⁷ Dante's invocation to the muses, which doesn't come until Book II of the *Inferno*, reads as follows: “O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate; / O mente che scrivesti ciò ch'io vidi, / qui si parrà la tua nobilitate. (“O Muses, o high genius, help me now: / O memory that set down what I saw, / here shall your excellence reveal itself!”) *Inferno* II.7-9, transl. Allen Mandelbaum (NY: Bantam, 1980).

⁴⁸ *Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the world as his never-ending empire.⁴⁹ The first fourteen poems of the 1547 edition are poems dutifully addressed to her patrons the Medici and to the relatives of Cosimo's consort, Eleonora de Toledo. They tend to be composed of the same repeated words, a courtier's formulaic language of praise. Even these poems, however, indicate the poet's ambition for immortality and her self-fashioning as Medici scribe.

Praises of Cosimo occur in various figures: the poet's offerings are compared to the incense offered by shepherds to Pan in order to win their beloved nymphs (poem I, below). It is interesting to note that these offerings were made in advance.⁵⁰ The imagery is reminiscent of offerings made by victorious armies at pagan temples, and the poem's speaker is a priestess making an offering—at least a rhetorical one:

I

Al Duca di Firenze

Se gli antichi pastor di rose e fiori
sparsero i tempj, e vaporar gli altari
d'incenso a Pan, sol perché dolci e cari
avea fatto a le Ninfe i loro amori:

quai fior degg'io Signor, quai deggio odori,
sparger al nome vostro, che sian pari
a i meriti vostri, e tante, e così rari.⁵¹
ch'ognor spargete in me grazie e favori?

Nessun per certo tempio, altare, o dono
trovar si può di così gran valore,
ch'a vostra alta bontà sia pregio eguale.

If the shepherds of old with roses and flowers
scattered the temples, and perfumed the altars
with incense to Pan, since he had made
the sweet and dear nymphs their loving maids,

Lord, what flowers should I scatter,
what incense spread in your name, to compare
with your merits, granting favor
unceasing, bestowing graces so rare?

Where can the temple, altar, or gift be found
of such valorous worth as to be on par
with the high bounty of your noble crown?

⁴⁹ Poem III of the 1547 *Rime* works by synchdoche: the empire of Cosimo's Florence becomes the world.

⁵⁰ Perhaps this is coincidental, but many of the poems in the *Rime* were written in advance of the legal waiver she obtained from Cosimo in 1546, releasing her from the dress statutes for courtesans. Contrary to claims that Aragona only published to defend herself from legal charges, her correspondence establishes her as a working poet, not a dilettante who sought to cover up a shameful life by means of publishing work.

Gloria Allaire, who has researched the chronology of Aragona's work, predates the existence of her poetry manuscript before she met Varchi in 1546: "Perhaps [Varchi] was responsible for some corrections to her sonnets, but the fact remains that she was able to produce a lengthy manuscript prior to meeting him." "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* altramente detto *il Guerrino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work," 40. Even Francesco Bausi, intent on discrediting Aragona, admits that Aragona's writing career was flourishing pre-Varchi: *Il periodo aureo de'll'attività letteraria di Tullia d'Aragona coincide col suo soggiorno fiorentino degli anni 1545 (o '46) –1548.*" ("The golden period of literary activity for Tullia d'Aragona coincides with her Florentine sojourn in the years 1545 (or '46) to 1548.") "Le Rime di e per Tullia d'Aragona." (275).

Si dunque il petto vostro, u'tutte sono
le virtù, tempio; altare, il saggio core;
Vittima, l'alma mia, se tanta vale.

Let then the temple be your breast, the living
seat of all the virtues; an altar, the wise heart;
an offering, my soul—if it is worthy of giving.⁵²

Images of classical gods (and the goddess Venus) will take on a darker tone in later poems such as “Qual vaga Philomena,” but here a pleasant pastoral scene from antiquity is poetically equated with the Medici court: Cosimo is equated with the god who is given tributes in the hope that he will grant favors.⁵³ His protective custody is further invoked as a refuge against the “acerbi, e ingiuriosi strali...di fortuna aspri” (bitter and treacherous arrows of harsh fortune) in poem V. No doubt Cosimo had earned Tullia’s gratitude in releasing her from the injunction to wear the requisite yellow veil of the courtesan. Yet even in the poems of gratitude, she asserts her desire for fame. This is One example of this combination occurs at the end of poem VII:⁵⁴

Et s'al caldo disio fia mai concesso
Stile al soggetto ugal, ritrarne spero
Fama immortal dopo la morte anchora.

And if it be that ardent desire concedes
my style equal to the subject, I hope it breeds
immortal fame, even after my death.⁵⁵

The poems about fame are where we find expressions such as “caldo desio”—rather than where one might expect them: Petrarchan poems in which the speaker freezes and burns.

In fact, “Tullia” pokes fun at such Petrarchan clichés in her dialogue.

“E quinci è che gli amanti or piangono, or ridono; anzi (il che è non solo più meraviglioso, ma del tutto impossibile agli altri uomini) piangono e ridono in un medesimo tempo, hanno speranza e timore, sentono gran caldo e gran freddo, vogliono e disvogliono parimente, abbracciando sempre ogni cosa e non istringendo mai nulla, veggono senza occhi, non hanno orecchie ed odono, gridano senza lingua, volano senza moversi, vivono morendo, e finalmente dicono e fanno tutte quelle cose che di loro scrivono tutti i poeti, e massimamente il Petrarca, al quale niuno si può compare, né si dee, negli affetti amorosi.” (“This is the reason why people who are in love can be crying

⁵² This translation is more literal; I have provided an alternate, more poetic version in Appendix I.

⁵³ Cosimo exonerated Tullia d’Aragona from being subject to the sumptuary laws, writing on the petition: “Fasseli gratia per poetessa” (“Give her grace [on the grounds of her being] a poet.”) Russell, *Dialogue*, 26.

⁵⁴ Another example of the assertion of the strength and endurance of her desire occurs in the *envoi/tornada* of the last poem, LV, or “Oscuro il sole,” discussed in detail in chapter four.

⁵⁵ Tullia d’Aragona, *Rime*, VII. 12-14.

one minute and laughing the next. They can even be found laughing and crying at the same time. This phenomenon is amazing in itself and quite impossible for mere normal mortals! Lovers entertain both hope and fear. Simultaneously, they feel great heat and excessive cold. They want and reject in equal measure, constantly grasping things but retaining nothing in their grip. They can see without eyes. They have no ears but can hear. They shout without a tongue. They fly without moving. They are alive while dying. They say and do the myriad strange things that the poets write about, especially Petrarch, who towers incomparably over all others in the description of the pangs of love.”⁵⁶

This passage, worth citing for its humor alone, praises Petrarch while poking fun at Petrarchism. At any rate, she hopes that fame will be the result of her ardent desire—with the hope that her style is equal to the task. Though Aragona’s ambitions are lofty, throughout the *Rime* she expresses doubts as to whether her ability, talent, and style are equal to the task. Self-doubt alternates with self-assertion. In the second poem, the ineffability *topos* is used to describe the virtues of this ruler who will “Por sempiterno fine a tante offese” (“Put everlasting end to so many offenses....”) “Quai sien, che possan mai tante, & si rade/Doti vostre cantar prose, ne versi?” “Who are the poets,” she asks, “who can possibly sing so many (and such rare) gifts in prose or verse?”⁵⁷ In the *Rime*’s preface, Aragona contrasts her humble position in court with the boldness of her desire to be recognized as the author of poetic compositions that give pleasure:

...presi ardimento, et mi risolsi finalmente di non mancare a me medesima. ricorda[n]domi che i componimenti di tutti gli scrittori hanno in tutte le lingue, et massimamente quegli de Poeti havuto sempre cotal gratia, et preminenza, che niuno quantunque grande, non solo non gli ha rifiutati mai, ma sempre tenuti carissimi. Perche io anchor che (come ho detto) conosca benissimo cosi l’altezza della stato suo, come la bassezza della condition mia, presento humilmente con divotissimo cuore queste mie poche basse et picciole fatiche....(so finally, taking these ardent tasks to heart, I resolved not to be delinquent to myself, remembering that the compositions of all writers, in every language, especially those of Poets, have always had such grace and preeminence, that not only has no one, however great, ever refused them, but all have always held them most dear. Because, again, I know very well the height of her state, and the humble stature of my condition, I present humbly and with most devoted heart these my few, base, and humble labors....)⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Trattatisti*, 216; *Dialogue*, 84.

⁵⁷ *Rime*, II.4-5.

⁵⁸ See Appendix II.

Fiora Bassanese notes the Ciceronian Latinity of Aragona's address to her patrons in the preface to the *Rime*, dedicated to Elonora di Toledo, wife of Cosimo.⁵⁹ Previous critics have had trouble seeing past the modesty *topos* in Aragona's poetry, and saw her poetry as *fredda* (cold).⁶⁰ Declarations of humility belong to the realm of social form rather than poetic content—and the proof of this assertion is the fact that Aragona stakes a claim for her skill in the *Rime* subtextually. Though Tullia does not write as ardently of her love affairs as does Louise Labé, her poems do strike a balance between the modesty *topos* and a burning desire—for fame.

Tullia d'Aragona's Self-Fashioning: An Image of *virtù*

For Tullia d'Aragona, fame also implied respect. The following poem is addressed to Pietro Bembo, who died in 1547, the same year the *Rime* were published.

A Pietro Bembo

Bembo, io che fino a qui da grave sonno
oppressa vissi, anzi dormii la vita.⁶¹
[H]or da la luce vostra alma infinita,⁶²
O sol d'ogni saper maestro e donno,

Desta apro gli occhi, si ch'aperti ponno
scorger la strada di virtù smarrita:
ond'io lasciato ove l'pensier m'invita
de la parte miglior per voi m'indonno:

E[t] quanto posso il più mi sforzo anch'io,
scaldarmi al lume di sì chiaro foco,
per lasciar del mio nome eterno segno.

E[t] o non pur da voi si prenda a sdegno⁶³

To Pietro Bembo

Bembo, oppressed by a slumber so deep
I lived until now, as one in waking sleep:
now let your soul shine its infinite light to uplift,
sun of all knowledge, master of every gift:

awake, with eyes open wide I look straight ahead
so I can discern the path from which I strayed—
the straight road, where thought still invites me—
to cultivate the better part, to gain self-mastery:

and even I, how much more able to aspire,
warming myself in the light of so bright a flame
to leave an eternal record of my name.

And yet I hope to meet with no disdain

⁵⁹ Fiora Bassanese, "Selling the Self," in Marotti, *Italian Women Writers*, *op.cit.*, 73-4.

⁶⁰ In the next poem XVI, the line "Mia fredda Musa a voi già non s'invia" might be the source of the critical assertion. *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, vol. XII (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1949), 375.

⁶¹ B. dormi; C., D.dormii. This note and the two that follow contain textual variations by Celani, *op.cit.*

⁶² E. dalla

mio folle ardir, che se l'sapere è poco,
non è poco. Signor, l'alto disio.

by you: though my knowledge is limited, my ardor vain
even so, Lord, there is no limit to my high desire.

The Dantean word “smarrita” is used in this poem (as in “Qual vaga Philomena.”)⁶⁴

Presumably, what Aragona wanted the reader of her poems to know was that Bembo was a guiding light, a model for her, poetically if not spiritually. Biographical notes on Bembo's life do confirm a period of focused spiritual “preparation” for the *al-di-là*.⁶⁵ In her epic's preface, Tullia refers to Bembo as “il mio Bembo” (“my Bembo”). Whether their relationship was that of spiritual advisor-advisee is not clear, but it does seem to imply a poetic *apprentissage*.

Again, Aragona feigns modesty regarding knowledge—in contrast to her limitless desire. In the *Dialogue*, Tullia passes off her extensive learning as “limited.”⁶⁶ Though in her youth there had been money to pay for tutors,⁶⁷ presumably from Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, after his death she apparently joined the ranks of her mother's profession. The stigma of courtesan weighs upon her lyric poetry in a way which is difficult to detach from literary analysis of the poems' meaning: for example, terms such as “smarrita” (associated with Dante's penitent pilgrim) could refer to a real or to a fictive change of heart, or perhaps to a more complex web of beliefs and emotions than I have implied.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ed oh!

⁶⁴ In the *Rime* edited by Celani (Bologna, 1891), this is XVIII; in the 1547 *Rime*, it is the fifteenth poem.

⁶⁵ “[Pietro Bembo turned to] sublime truths and with zeal, he practiced the sacred ministry while preparing for the afterlife. And well-prepared, death took him, somewhat by surprise, on January 18, 1547.” (“sublimi verità...esercitava con zelo il suo sacro ministero, preparandosi all'al di là. E ben preparato la morte lo colse, anche se quasi di sorpresa, il 18 gennaio del 1547.”) *Pietro Bembo: Opere in Volgare*, edited by Mario Marti (Florence: Sansoni, 1961).

⁶⁶ In the beginning of the *Dialogue*, the “Tullia” character claims to have neither rhetoric nor learning: “né ornamenti di parole né dottrine delle cose” nevertheless using a rhetorical figure to make this claim.

⁶⁷ Salvatore Bongi, in *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de'Ferrari*, mentions a loving father who hired tutors for the precocious Tullia.

⁶⁸ See chapter six for my analysis of Aragona's penitence *topos* and its relationship to period exigencies.

Literary criticism, in my view, does not include assessing Aragona's spiritual condition: an impossible task at any rate. By tracing the connotations of various ideas, however, images, and expressions used consistently in Italian poetry and in the *Rime*, one can reach conclusions, at least tentatively, about what posture is being conveyed. Critics of another age might say "what the author of the poems wants readers to think about the *persona*."

In the above poem, does the author of the *Rime* wish to convey a sense of penitence or intellectual awakening—or both? The fact that Aragona uses "Dantean" words does not imply that the two writers accord the terms the same signification.⁶⁹ Having lived in a state of "waking sleep," Tullia's speaker now wishes to become enlightened by the light of Bembo's "infinite soul," to warm herself at the flame of one so famous ("chiaro" means both "bright" and "famous"). Tullia did not have the same close editorial relationship with Bembo that she had with Benedetto Varchi. Nevertheless, it is probable that Bembo is the unnamed source of "virtù" of the Philomel poem analyzed in chapter three—the virtuous one with whom the persona falls in love after renouncing earthly love, the spoils of the temple of Venus, and escaping from the hated cage ("odiata gabbia"), and the bonds of love ("amorosi lacci") that seem as constricting as handcuffs. Once free from the snares in which she was implicated, the speaker becomes Love's prisoner once more, but in this case she is a prisoner of "virtù," not vice. In the above poem, she credits Bembo with helping her discern the way of "virtù" that she had lost. (In the period, the word also meant poetic virtuosity.)

⁶⁹ Dante (or the author of the *Epistle to Can Grande della Scala*) notes the polyvalence of words in his theory of allegory. Cf. *The Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Robert S. Haller. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973).

If the unnamed man of *virtù* is indeed Bembo, then Aragona is making ingenious use of the Dantean and Petrarchan convention of the deceased beloved, one with whom earthly love is now impossible. The word *virtù* also has connotations of poetic finesse and masculine strength, moral as well as physical. In this sense, the “*virtù smarrita*” seems to refer to a path of intellectual as opposed to venal pursuits. The “awakening” implied by the reference to “grave sonno” and the open eyes (“*Desta apro gli occhi*”) may at least in part refer to the mind’s enlightenment to higher truths, comparable to the emphasis upon knowledge in the sestet: “*se’l sapere è poco.*” Balanced against the speaker’s less-than-adequate knowledge (at least in comparison to the erudite Bembo) is “*l’alto disio:*” the desire for intellectual and poetic pursuits. Intellectual desire forms a counterpoint with the sensual slumber implied by the first stanza. The lines in me “*Ond’io lasciato ove’l pensier m’invita/De la parte miglior per voi m’indonno*” (literally, [so I can discern] the straight road, where thought invites me, to cultivate the better part, you give me mastery over myself. I am reminded of the moment when Virgil gives the pilgrim Dante sovereignty over himself, having led him back to the straight road:

Tratto t’ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
 lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;
 fuor se’ de l’erte vie, fuor se’ de l’arte....
 Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno
 libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
 e fallo for a non fare a suo senno;
 per ch’io te sovra te corono e mitrio.

I have led you here through genius and with art;
 now you will take your own pleasure for a guide;
 you are beyond the steep and narrow roads....
 Don’t wait for me to tell you more nor give a sign
 your own will is free, just, and whole,
 it would be wrong not for you not to follow your own
 judgment: over yourself I crown and miter you.⁷⁰

The Language of *materna pietate*: Eros and Mourning

Though Tullia d’Aragona also creates an “honest” version of erotic love in her dialogue, her poems generally show restraint toward erotic themes in favor of a secular Platonism

⁷⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), XXVII 130-132, 139-142. Translation mine.

of poetic immortality and love of virtue. Misunderstanding this completely, more than one critic has called Aragona's *Rime* "cold." The poetry deals with desire, but not sexual desire *per se*; often, a desire for the absent beloved is expressed. Female desire, endlessly discussed in feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, is but one aspect of female agency. Aragona writes about desire and agency, but her stance regarding desire foregrounds the linguistically-mediated expression of that desire over desire itself.

The *Dialogue* addresses that issue to some extent. Like Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, or one of Shakespeare's other witty heroines, Tullia d'Aragona shows herself to be a match for the verbal and intellectual dexterity of her male literary counterparts. Aragona produces discourse as well as desire, poems about maternal loss as well as children, and demonstrates, in my reading (and translation) of her words, a "capacity for lofty thought." Helen Vendler argues that silence is a characteristic of the love sonnet's addressee and not a gender-specific issue.⁷¹ Nevertheless, in 1547 Tullia d'Aragona saw the issue as gendered. She remarks upon the silence of Petrarch's Laura and fills that silence with words. She wishes to be remembered through her contribution to philosophical thought—and immortalized in print, in her own "eternal lines to time."

The following poem is a manifesto of this desire. In the process of stating her own ambitions to her fellow poet Piero Manelli, Aragona also raises the question of her own ontological equality as an artist and a female human being. In this poem, the imagery of Neoplatonism (the body as a veil for the soul) is beautifully combined with Tullia's desire for immortality on earth. Though Tullia's interlocutor does not necessarily seem to

⁷¹ Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19.

share her views, we might be moved intellectually and affectively, by the way she presents her argument:

XXXVII (*A Piero Manelli*)

Poi che mi diè natura a voi simile
forma e materia, o fosse il gran Fattore,
non pensate ch'ancor disio d'onore
mi desse, e bei pensier, Manel gentile?

Dunque credete me cotanto vile,
ch'io non osi mostrar, cantando, fore.
quel che dentro n'ancide altero ardore.⁷²
se bene a voi non ho pari lo stile?

Non lo crediate, no, Piero, ch'anch'io
fatico ognor per appressarmi al cielo.
e lasciar del mio nome in terra fama.

Non contenda rea sorte il bel desio,
che pria che l'anima dal corporeo velo
si scioglia, sazierò forse mia brama.

Since (like you) by Nature I was wrought
or by the great Creator, in form and matter,
Manelli dear, do you not think the desire for honor
wasn't also given me—a capacity for lofty thought?

Do you think me so spiritually poor
that I dare not show forth, singing
what in me would kill all other longing
though my style is not on par with yours?

No, I do not think you can conceive, Peter
that like you I labor, aspire to reach the firmament,
and to leave my name renowned on earth.

If evil fate does not triumph over high desire
then perhaps before my soul is rent
from its corporeal veil, I will satisfy this thirst.

The opening line takes as its premise the same argument for gender equity that I quoted in chapter on the *Dialogo*. Using Aristotelian terms familiar to her audience, “forma e materia” (“form and matter”) and the Ovidian construction “God or nature,”⁷³ Aragona posits an equality of essence between the two poets. Perhaps she phrases the question in the negative because Manelli, like her interlocutor in the dialogue, does not take this equality as a given, as he obviously ought to do. Since, contrary to classical thought, the two genders are equal in essence, is it unimaginable that she would not share his poetic longing, his desire for honor and his attraction to things of the spirit? Let us note that the

⁷² D. m'ancide

⁷³ In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid leaves the question of the creator and the organizing force of the cosmos indeterminate: “Hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit. / nam caelo terras et terries abscidit undas / et liquidum spisso secrevit ab aere caelum.” (“God—or kindlier Nature—composed this strife; for he rent asunder land from sky, and sea from land, and separated the ethereal heavens from the dense atmosphere.”) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I 21-23 (Loeb edition, op.cit.), 4.

premise is about essence, the conclusion about the application of the equality of essence in terms of an equal desire for poetry's rewards.

In this era, a courtesan would not be seen as an artist, as a noble being, or as having a soul. She not only makes these claims, but also equates her nature as a poet with that of the Great Creator. Michelangelo had expressed this idea implicitly in the Sistine chapel fresco of God and Adam; Aragona expresses a similar concept in verse. She is implying that creativity is essential, not accidental, for beings touched with the divine, for poets aspiring "to the firmament." The second stanza parallels the first, using the Petrarchan word "cantando," ("singing"), for the act of creating poetry. Her desire for poetry is stronger than any other desire, even if her style does not attain the heights of his. This is not abjection but a use of modesty necessary in the Renaissance. As it often does, the modesty *topos* conceals a more grandiose desire: that of poetic immortality.

Still phrased as a question, the poet now stakes a claim in terms of her tireless work—"fatico ogn'hor" ("I labor every hour")—as if Piero does not believe that she shares his desires to approach the heavens (*cielo*) and to be renowned on earth (*terra*). "Lasciar del mio nome in terra fama" ("to leave my name renowned on earth") translates into a concern not for the afterlife but for the afterlife of her poetry and her poetic reputation.

This "bel desio" ("high desire") for everlasting fame is pitted against the figure of "rea sorte" ("malevolent fate") often invoked in Aragona's lyric. Fate is seen as potentially standing in the way of her desire for renown on earth, but if circumstances can be overcome, she declares, I will satisfy this desire before my soul is loosened from its corporeal veil. The body was seen as a veil for the soul in Neoplatonic imagery, but the

veil also represented the imagination, the act of representation. In the Renaissance *mentalité*, language itself had power to transform reality and effect change. In an incantatory way, the language of this poem becomes a reality. In the act of writing—and publishing—this poem, in which Aragona stakes her claims for gender equality, for equality as a human being and as an artist, a certain immortality has been achieved.

Tullia d'Aragona and the Challenge to *Écriture Feminine*: The Maternal Body?

The challenge to feminist theory posed by Tullia d'Aragona is a formidable one. Increased attention to early modern women's writing could enrich contemporary feminist theory. Throughout my reading of Aragona's work, I have been searching for a feminist literary criticism suited to Aragona's particular choice of discourse(s), forms, and point of view. I have been led to question concepts such as *écriture féminine* and to reexamine how the rhetoric of the body is foregrounded in the work of Renaissance women writers. Though the body is immanent throughout her writing, Aragona equates male and female gender on the ontological level. Though she writes on subjects traditionally considered to be within the realm/sphere of women's experience, i.e. childbearing and loss, she does not do so in conventional terms. Her poems about maternal loss do not fall within cultural parameters of appropriateness, especially considering the cult of the mother, the powerful symbolic role of motherhood—and of the Virgin Mary—in Italy.

In fact, I found somewhat disturbing the syllogistic link in the poems I am going to discuss. In the first poem, a bereaved mother is equated with a bereaved lover; in the second, with a bereaved pet. I wondered what to make of her equation of a bereaved lover to the *pathos* of a female animal who has lost its offspring. Aragona is steeped in the

philosophy of Aristotle's categories and provocatively engaged in challenging those categories in her own original philosophical work. In the following poems, is she being intentionally provocative, or satirizing the excesses of Petrarchan hyperbole?

One of Aragona's most memorable poems, XLIII, presents maternal loss in surprising tropes: the particularly masculine occupations of sailor and captain.

XLIII⁷⁴

Se ben pietosa madre unico figlio
Perde talhora, e nuovo alto dolore
Le preme il tristo & suspiroso core;
Spera conforto almen, spera consiglio;

If a loving mother, her only child lost,
feeling anew the press of grief's weight
constant against her sad and sighing heart;
yet hopes for comfort; for counsel, at least;

Se scaltro Capitano in gran periglio
Mostrando alteramente il suo valore
Resta vinto, & prigion, spera uscir fuore
Quando che sia con baldanzoso ciglio;

If a cunning Captain finds himself in danger,
Having shown with pride his high valor in vain,
even if vanquished, languishing in prison
hopes with brave brow his escape to arrange;

S'in tempestoso mar giunto si duole
Spaventato Nocchier gia presso a morte.
Ha speme ancor di rivedersi in porto.

If a sailor braves a tempestuous ocean,
Afraid that death is near and land is far,
he still has hope of seeing himself safe in port.

Ma io, s'avvien che perda il mio bel Sole,
O per mia colpa, o per malvagia sorte,
Non spero haver, ne voglio alcun conforto.

But if I should ever lose my lovely Sun
By my own fault or by fate's treacherous star,
I would not hope to have, nor desire comfort.

The poem's last tercet reaches an unexpected conclusion.

In the first three *stanze*, Aragona establishes a three-way *zeugma* between the unlike professions of mother, mariner, and general. It is characteristic of Aragona's provocative stance on gender issues that she would equate normally male-gendered military situations with circumstances essential to female biology (reproductive) and socially constructed (romantic love). What these three categories—mother, captain, and sailor—do have in common is hope. That a forlorn lover should have even less hope than a bereft mother transforms the rhetoric of maternal loss into a puzzling variation upon the abandoned lover *topos*. Aragona's poetry anticipates some of the mind-bending

⁷⁴ This is poem XLIII in *Rime*, ed. Celani (Bologna, 1891); XXXIII in the 1547 *Rime*.

metaphors of Shakespeare as well as those of the metaphysical poets—but even so, this poem stands out. Poem XLIII dares to the loss of one's child, one's life, or the loss of hope with the loss of the beloved.

In a society obsessed with difference, and with distinguishing between categories,⁷⁵ Tullia d'Aragona stresses the existential sameness of these diverse conditions. Perhaps this is not so odd, given her ideas about women and ambition. At least one poem, XXXVIII, references that subject: the parity of women artists with men. In Aragona's epic *Il Meschino*, the narrator-persona identifies herself as a woman in armor, who will wield bloody swords, break lances, and show herself "converted" into an ardent warrior—even though she is a woman.⁷⁶ The idea of a woman warrior, found in Virgil's *Aeneid* as well as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, was both feared and enjoyed—in the literary realm. The epic's cross-dressing *persona* may shed light upon the *Rime*.

To consider another interpretation of the complex gendering of the *Rime*, perhaps Aragona is postulating the experience of loss and the desire for hope as universal needs. By demonstrating the equalizing effect of loss, and depicting the same affective response to different circumstances, Aragona demonstrates the likeness of human beings regardless of gender or other extrinsic markers.

I am suggesting that in this poem, the speaker voices a position contrary to the cult of maternal piety: the loss of a child, or liberty (the captain), or even the potential loss of life can be endured (the sailor); for the loss of a lover, however, no comfort exists.

⁷⁵ The yellow veil, for example, is a marker of difference, instituted by law to distinguish noblewomen from the courtesans who imitated them in appearance and dress, causing anxiety to the male patriciate.

⁷⁶ "Ch'io son disposta insanginar le spade, / romper le lance, e mostrarmi converso / In huomo ardito, ancor che donna io sia." ("I am disposed to bloody the swords and break the lances, and to show myself converted into an ardent warrior, even though I am a woman.") *Il Meschino*, Canto II (Venice: Sessa, 1560).

Italian Renaissance culture held motherhood as a sacred absolute, polarizing images of the Madonna and the whore. The dominant categories of femininity in literary and artistic representation were the voluptuous Venus nudes and the innumerable paintings of the Madonna and child. Certainly a person such as Tullia d'Aragona, both a mother and a courtesan, could possibly fit into both categories of this dichotomy. Perhaps, in a period inundated with these images, she is disrupting the received notion of dualistic categories, much as she has done in the *Dialogo*.

Perhaps this is why poem XXXIII, "Se ben pietosa madre" is so provocative."⁷⁷ Even if one takes into account historical facts (such as the high infant mortality rates of the period), what is disturbing about this poem is the seeming ease with which it passes off the loss of a child. To say that women routinely lost children and bore others does not make Aragona's lament more palatable. The poem says just that, however: the mother who has lost a child has the capacity to bear more, at least in theory. The captain has hope of escaping from prison. The sailor has hope of extricating himself from potential shipwreck. The bereaved lover, however, is inconsolable because of the loss of the beloved with his uniqueness: The irreplaceable nature of the beloved gives the last tercet the pathos of a truly irremediable loss, compared to the other quite dire circumstances. The speaker's grief is both like and unlike the others who also suffer. Gender is not the dividing line, however: but the unique nature of her love makes that object of infinite worth, an object for which there is no substitution.

⁷⁷ XLIII in *Rime*, ed. Celani, (1891).

Lest one find Tullia d'Aragona devoid of all maternal feeling, the poem discussed above should be read in juxtaposition with another poem, "Se materna pietate:"⁷⁸

XXXVIII

Se materna pietate afflige il core,
Onde cercando in questa parte, e in quella
Il caro figlio tuo LILLA mia bella
Piangi, & cresci piangendo il tuo dolore;

A te, ch'animal sei di ragion fore,
Et non intendi (ohime) quanto rubella
Sia stata ad ambe noi sorte empia, & fella,
Togliendo a te'l tuo figlio, a me'l mio Amore;

Che far (lassa) degg'io? qual degno pianto
Verseran gli occhi miei dal cor mai sempre?
Che conosco il tuo male, e'l mio gran danno.

Chi di Psichi potrà con alto canto
Cantar l'altre lodi? o con quai temper
Temprar quel, che mi da sua morte, affanno?

If you—by maternal sorrow, undone
running here and there, from place to place
seeking your pup, lovely Lilla, my dear one
you weep, and grief grows in your face

if even you weep, an animal bereft of reason
not understanding—alas—how it can be
that we are dealt one hand by fate's felon treason
Taking from you your cub, my love from me

then what should I do, when a constant stream
pours out through my eyes in a plaint of deep grief?
though I know your pain, to my great shame,

who will sing for me the songs of proud Psyche,
praising her love, in what timbre labor for breath
to diminish the anguish caused by his death?

While in the first "mother" poem, Aragona draws a parallel between unlike gendered categories (mother, sailor) in the second, human and animal share common experiences. In the above poem, the speaker identifies with her pet, recently bereaved of her offspring: they are both victims of "sorte empia, & fella" ("impious and cruel fate"). This is not the first negative reference in the *Rime* to fate, nor is it the last. In other poems by Aragona, the speaker is at the mercy of fate or enslaved to Venus, as Psyche is in the myth. First the speaker compares her loss to the pet's loss; then herself to Psyche.

It seems odd to suggest that the speaker and her pet share the hand that fate has dealt them, as if the grief seems to have had a deranging effect. Yet this poem shares a consistent theme with one of the important points of the *Dialogo*. Rather than accepting the Renaissance hierarchy of being posited by Pico della Mirandola, Tullia d'Aragona seems to take an almost perverse delight in rearranging of Aristotelian categories.

⁷⁸ XXXVIII, *Rime*, 1547.

Women—and animals—were both seen as being below men. In this hierarchy, philosophers considered women to be more driven by their passions than were men, who supposedly had more aptitude for reason. Women “lacked” the appetitive soul just like the beasts and had a rational soul as well, but lacked the intellective soul that would put them on the same level with men.

In the other “mother” poem, “Se ben pietosa madre,” a bereaved woman is given parity with the male captain and the sailor. In this poem, the pet’s sensitivity to her loss is yoked with the grieving female lover. Despite the fact that the pet is said to be “di ragion fore” (“without reason”), the speaker has anthropomorphized its feelings of grief. One does not have to be a pet owner to imagine the effective scene of the confused and bereaved pet the animal running here and there looking for her offspring. Linking the presence of the beloved with *place* is a common feature of grief—a theme discussed at length in the previous chapter.

Neatly divided between the octave and the sestet, the if-then construction assigns the “if” to the animal and the “then” to the woman: this dichotomy contrasts the pet, grieving without reason, to the speaker (a woman, I presume) who has lost her lover. Similar, too, is the parallel structure of the line: “Togliendo a te’l tuo figlio, a me’l mio Amore” (taking from you, your [son], and from me, my love”).⁷⁹ If the pet had been a bird, the classical allusion would be to the famous poem by Catullus in which the speaker mourns the death of his beloved’s pet sparrow, “Lugete, o veneres cupidinesque...” (“Mourn, all you Venuses and Cupids/The sparrow of my beloved...”) The Psyche

⁷⁹ In my translation, I have decided that the pet is a dog, based upon the iconography of Renaissance paintings, but it could just as easily have been a bird. Two pet doves that had been given as gifts died during a household journey. According to accounts nevertheless uncited by Masson, the young Penelope was extremely upset over the death of the birds. With tragic irony, the death of Penelope postdated the writing of this poem. Masson, *Courtesans*, *op.cit.*, 98-99.

reference is ambiguous, but her “high song” could be a birdsong or even refer to the act of mournful singing as metonymy for writing poetry, as in the line by Petrarch: “perché cantando il duol si disacerba” (“because singing dis-embitters the sorrow”).⁸⁰

As we have seen, the few references to maternity in Tullia d’Aragona’s *Rime* are rather unconventional, even provocative. In no way are they seen in the abstract (as the earthly perpetuation of the beauty of the beloved, for example). I read these images as a de-sentimentalizing of motherhood rather than as statements to be taken at face value.⁸¹ Just as Baroque paintings are shocking in their realism, so Aragona’s poems on the subject of “materna pietade” transgress the social order and the great chain of being. I do not think she is truly equating the children with pets, or a bereaved mother with a prisoner of war or shipwrecked sailor.

I do think, however, that Aragona constantly forces her readers to re-examine hierarchical categories and received truths. She equates women as mothers with men in military professions, and looks for commonalities between human and animal. The effect of this restless curious, intellect is to debunk myths of male superiority and even to question the Renaissance notion of man as the measure of all things. In her love poetry, she is both faithful in spirit to Petrarch and radically novel. This novelty continues to lend interest to her work, and my hope is that through this continued interest, Tullia d’Aragona will become more widely known among readers of early modern poetry—and thus achieve her “high desire” of posthumous literary fame, or “immortality.”

⁸⁰ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, XXIII.

⁸¹ Assuming that Penelope was Tullia’s daughter and not her sister, she would have had to face the difficult choice of inducting her daughter into the life of a courtesan. Imperia, the mistress of Agostino Chigi, had managed to send one of her daughters to a convent for her education, thereby avoiding the necessity of having her continue in her own profession. Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, 97-8.

Like Shakespeare, Tullia d'Aragona substitutes her own rhetoric of love for the *doxa* of Neoplatonism. Tullia d'Aragona's references to Plato's Diotima in her philosophical dialogue prefigure Shakespeare's position toward—or rather, counter to—Neoplatonism. (I am not the first to have noticed this: Helen Vendler takes Sonnet 105 to be a clever counter-doxology to Christian Neoplatonism,⁸² substituting the rhetoric of erotic love for the language of the Nicene Creed). In a sense, the dialogue and poetry written by Tullia d'Aragona performs an analogous function: substituting secular terms of love for the highly abstract, transcendent, and hermetic language of Neoplatonism. In her dialogue, Aragona argues for the possibility of a woman as an object of higher love, removing it from the exclusive sphere of male-male relations. In the *Rime*, she is situated in the center of a group of flattering and/or adoring poets—men to whom she also writes.

Much of the previous criticism has focused upon what men have written to Tullia and about her. Conversely, I have endeavored to treat her own poetry in a comparative analysis with canonical poets who precede her and in the case of Shakespeare, succeed her. Both poets, Aragona and Shakespeare, succeed in creating poetic embodiments to stand the test of time. Souls, only temporarily in bodies, can take on the “garment” of a poem, thereby outlasting mortal humans and even the physical “monuments” subject to time's ravages. Through the reading and translation of her *Rime*, I hope to give Tullia d'Aragona the literary afterlife she deserves. In closing, as she might say—with Ovid—“vivam.”

⁸² *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1997) 445. One could not wish for a more thorough reading of the *Sonnets* than Vendler's; however, she posits a hypothetical antecedent for the lover's “idolatry” of the beloved but fails to mention Petrarch. This Augustinian concept is found in Petrarch's *Secretum Meum* and in poem XXX: “idolo mio, scolpito in vivo lauro” (“my idol, sculptured in living laurel”).

CHAPTER SIX
A FINE ROMANCE: CINQUECENTO THEORY OF THE *ROMANZO*
AND TULLIA D'ARAGONA'S POETIC PRACTICE
IN *IL MESCHINO ALTRAMENTE DETTO IL GUERRINO*

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Tullia d'Aragona has received more critical attention in recent decades than in the past four centuries. Gloria Allaire, Fiora Bassanese, Ann Rosalind Jones, Constance Jordan, Rinaldina Russell, Janice Levarie Smarr, and Katharina Wilson are just a few of the scholars who have written about Aragona.¹ Most of this criticism, however, concentrates upon her lyric poetry (*Rime*) and her prose *Dialogo...della infinità di amore* rather than upon the epic published posthumously under her name. The work in question is a *romanzo* (a chivalric epic in *ottava rima*) entitled *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino* (meaning, approximately, The Little Unfortunate One, Also Known As the Little Warrior). This *romanzo* is adapted from a 15th-century prose narrative by Andrea da Barberino, called *Guerino decto Meschino*. With the exception of Gloria Allaire's extensive philological work on *Il Meschino* and on Barberino's version, barely any criticism of the epic exists in English. As is abundantly clear to anyone who has read the preceding chapters, the critical skepticism of nineteenth-

¹ Allaire has done extensive literary and philological work with the original prose narrative, *Guerino decto Meschino* by Andrea da Barberino, and she has also written on Aragona's subsequent *ottava rima* version of *Il Meschino* (which she takes to be not only authentic, but essential to a reading of Aragona's *oeuvre*). See Gloria Allaire, "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work" *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 16.1, (1995), 33-50. On the prose original, see Allaire's book *Andrea da Barberino and the Language of Chivalry* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), and her article "Un ignoto manoscritto di *Guerrino il Meschino* di Andrea da Barberino nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana," in *La Bibliofilia* 96 (1994) 233-41. Scholarly work on Aragona's rhetoric and the cultural milieu in which she wrote includes Fiora Bassanese, "Selling the Self, or the Epistolary Production of Renaissance Courtesans," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 69-82; Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros*; Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Rinaldina Russell, *The Encyclopedia of Italian Women Writers*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 26-34; Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Janet Levarie Smarr, "A Dialogue of Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Speroni Sperone," *Modern Language Notes* 113.1 (1998) 204-12; Katharina Wilson, *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* (New York: Garland, 1991).

century male critics with regard to women writers reaches its most dramatic levels with regard to Tullia d'Aragona. Literary criticism of Aragona from this period tends to consist of too much biographical speculation and too little emphasis upon the literary aspects of her work.² Unfortunately, this tendency may be exacerbated by Aragona's preface, which is marked by concerns about the morality of literature not overtly present in her *Dialogue* and her *Rime*. Questions of the *Meschino*'s authorship, then, must be addressed before proceeding to analyze the work.

Lacking access to the necessary archival materials, I am not in a position to give a definitive answer to the above question. However, the provisional answer I propose is as follows. The epic must be read in conjunction with other work by Tullia d'Aragona, and all three of her books evaluated for their thematic and textual similarities. Furthermore, the epic must be read against the prose narrative source text. (I have done all of the above as necessary preparation for writing this thesis). While it is nearly impossible to "prove" literary authenticity, my hypothesis is based upon a critical appraisal of her entire *oeuvre*. A common thread runs throughout the works attributed to Aragona: a proto-feminist engagement with ontological equality of gender; an anticipation of the subjectivities of women as potential readers, manifest in the portrayal of a hypothetical female subjectivity (as in that of a literary character) as well as a concern about actual women readers and the condition of their lives; an attack upon writers of misogynist satire; and an *apologia*—for courtesans in general and for the author's own life in particular.

Considering Aragona's stated ambitions, the work's authenticity makes sense. The chivalric epic, even more than the dramatic genre, was considered the *sine qua non*

² Nineteenth-century editorial misrepresentations of sixteenth-century women authors is the subject of a forthcoming article by Ann Rosalind Jones entitled "Bad Press: Modern Editors versus Early Modern Love

of literary accomplishment in the period. Given the lofty ambitions stated by Aragona in her *Rime*, producing work in the epic genre would have assured her the literary reputation she craved. Furthermore, my own comparative reading of Barberino's prose original *Guerino decto Meschino* and the 1560 version of the epic in *ottave* has yielded some interesting conclusions. The author of the latter work certainly has a protofeminist *mentalité* and a sense of humor, both characteristics of Aragona's. What the author does not find funny—and therefore excludes—are passages containing misogynist humor (a position consistent with the scathing condemnation of certain satirists in the preface). By the same token, “flat” female characters in the original narrative become fleshed out. Such details seem to be the work of an author with an inside track on female experience.

Despite the questions raised about the epic's authenticity, the leading scholar of the *Meschino* (who has studied the epic in its fourteenth- and sixteenth-century versions) takes the epic and its preface to be Aragona's.³ The author of the preface, whoever she might be, makes some very intentional statements about epic as a genre, about her potential audience, and finally about the potentially corrupting influence of literature upon the minds of young women, herself (as Tullia) included. Other critics, such as Francesco Flamini, consider the tone of the preface to be one of feigned penitence.⁴ An

Poets (Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Franco)."

³ See note 1 above.

⁴ Francesco Flamini, *Storia letteraria d'Italia: Il Cinquecento* (Milan: Casa Editrice, 1898-1902) takes the preface to be hypocritical profession of repentance: "dov'ella vitupera nella prefazione gli scritti immorali diffusi a' suoi tempi, e ringrazia Dio d'averla ricondotta in fresca età sul retto sentiero; ma probabilmente anche allora vivea de' proventi dell'arte sua..." ("where in the preface she vituperates the immoral writings published at the period, and thanks God for having led her, at a young age, on the right path; but probably she even then she lived off the earnings of her arts....") The passage contains assumptions without proof. Quoted also in Allaire, "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino*...as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work," 35.

image of Aragona as a repentant Magdalene fits in well with an autobiographical narrative tradition in which famous former sinners document their struggles with desire.⁵

Gloria Allaire has insightfully questioned the century-old assumptions that underlie the period's ideological treatment of courtesan poets as well as providing an earlier date for the epic's composition.⁶ On the basis of philological data, Allaire's hypothesis is that the epic was written between 1536 and 1546. My sense of the dating of the epic is later, because of the debates about epic poetry of the literary history of the period increased in intensity in the 1550's, and because the narrator pleads with the Virgin Mary for more time to live so that she can finish the work.

Aside from the repentant posture taken by Aragona (or pseudo-Aragona), the preface holds interest as a statement of literary theory. Among its themes are: the *utile* and the *dulce* as literary ends; the role of tradition versus *ingegno*; *exempla*, both moral and artistic; and the interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. With these criteria in mind, I will situate the epic in the context of period debates. Focusing upon audience, genre, and morality, I will compare the practice of Tullia d'Aragona (or the author of the chivalric epic *Il Meschino*) with the poetic theory of the Cinquecento, especially that of G.B. Giraldi Cinzio.⁷ Though most of the treatises on the epic were published after Aragona's death, her writing evinces a familiarity with the basic issues of period genre debates. Tullia d'Aragona also knew Giraldi Cinzio personally. As some sources indicate, there was ill will between the two after Tullia repelled Giraldi's advances, a fact that would⁸

⁵ Examples include Augustine's *Confessions* and Petrarch's *Secretum*.

⁶ Allaire, "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino*...as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work," 34.

⁷ These are some of the themes mentioned in Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio's discourse on the *romanzo*.

⁸ "[S]i potrebbe sospettare che quando Tullia apparve in Ferrara splendida di bellezza e nel colmo della sua gloria mondana, fra tanti adoratori non curasse gli omaggi del Giraldi. Sarebbe il solo modo di spiegare il

account for her knowledge of his unpublished work and for the unfavorable depiction of Tullia in the *Ecatommiti*.⁹

Brief Background of Period Literary Quarrels

The two textual sources of reference for the epic genre in the sixteenth century were Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica* (*Art of Poetry*).¹⁰ Though the romance epic differs from the classical epic, Aristotelian concerns such as unity of action were considered criteria for both. (Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* caused a stir, at least in part because of its absence of unity of action, which sparked some of the genre debates that inform this present study).¹¹ Italian *litterati* were concerned with maintaining a sense of *gravitas* (seriousness) in the epic and with defining what constituted literature in the vernacular.

Aragona's epic can be seen as occupying a point on the spectrum between the *piacevolezza* of Ariosto's multifaceted tale of erring ladies and knights and the *gravitas*

livore da lui posto nel parlare di lei, cui non solo attribuisce natura perversa ed inclinazione "a nuocere et a far male a tutti" ma nega fino il dono della corporale bellezza." ("One suspects that when Tullia appeared in Ferrara splendid with beauty and in the prime of her worldly glory, among so many admirers she did not cultivate the praises of Giraldis. This would be the only explanation for his spiteful malice against her in his speech and writing, in which he not only attributes to her a perverse nature and an inclinazione toward harm and ill will toward all, but he also denies her gift of corporeal beauty." Salvatore Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari* (Rome: Presso i principali Librai. 1890), 195.

⁹ Giraldis equates Tullia with her mother and questions her paternity: "che di madre vilissima & di quella medesima vita...la madre le habbia mai saputo dire cisuo padre fosse") Giraldis, *Ecatommiti*, I, 145, quoted in Bongi, *Annali* 154.

¹⁰ Important translations of Aristotle were the *In librum Aristotelis de Arte poetica explicationes*, (Florence, 1548) by F. Robortelli da Udine and *In Arist. libr. de Poetica explicationes* (Venice, 1560) by Vincenzo Maggi, the latter a commentary as well.

¹¹ One of the works resulting from this quarrel was the *Discorso di Giovambattista Giraldis Cinzio intorno al Comporre dei Romanzi* (published in 1554, though he had written about the *Poetics* earlier in a treatise on tragedy and comedy, in 1543). Giraldis corresponded with his pupil G.B. Pigna on the subject. In a letter written in 1548, Pigna asks his mentor to situate Ariosto's epic in relation to the *Poetics* of Aristotle: the *Discorso...Romanzi* is the result. G. B. Pigna writes a treatise, *I Romanzi*, in response, and from that point mutual charges of plagiarism ensue.

of Tasso's Crusade epic, *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Ariosto's *incipit*, "Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amore/le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto..." ("Ladies, knights, arms, love, *cortesie*, and boldly daring ventures I sing...") satirizes Virgil's "arma virumque cano," though in a different way from the treatment Aragona gives to the epic's *incipit*. Ariosto foregrounds the errancy of plot and the levity of theme of the *Furioso* by placing the word for "ladies" in front of "knights" and subordinating considerations of morality to colorful exploits of chivalrous (and unchivalrous) behavior. The focus of Aragona's epic is somewhat different: we are promised not only delightful entertainment (*eccelse maraviglie*) but also a knight whose strength is tempered with wisdom (*virtù saggia/ il valor vero, la religione*) for a properly didactic Christian epic. Rather than erring for pleasure, this knight is actually quite focused. Having been kidnapped by pirates and sold into slavery as a child, Meschino is on a mission to find his real father, a quest that takes him all over the known world, but there is much pleasure to be had in his rather goal-oriented erring.

Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio, in his *Discorso sopra il comporre...dei romanzi*,¹² describes the ideal *romanzo* as "founded on undertakings of exceeding warlike virtue, deeds of courtesy, of generosity, of piety, of religion." Following the classical tradition of the *incipit* from Homer to Virgil to Dante to Ariosto, Aragona states such themes in the beginning of the first canto. Each thematic signifier is extremely loaded, not only with the weight of the epic tradition (and its later counterparts), but also with the terms which

¹² Another such treatise was *I Romanzi* by G. B. Pigna, Giraldi's student and nemesis. In Pigna's "Lettera ove egli chiede Signore Giraldi la ragione della poesia de'Ariosto" (1548), he asks his mentor to situate this epic and he does. Giraldi's reply in turn encourages Pigna to write *I Romanzi*, and from that point mutual charges of plagiarism ensue. What Giraldi and Pigna share, however, is an admiration for Ariosto's unconventional *Orlando Furioso*, a theorizing of the *romanzo* as an Italian genre with roots in the classical tradition of the heroic poem, and a progressive outlook on assimilating ancient culture which came to be known as "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns."

form the core of the Italian literary debates of the period: *meraviglia/e*, *valor*, *virtu*, *religione*, and *paragone*.¹³ I quote the first stanza, which also contains the *incipit*:

L'eccelse meraviglie, il valor vero	Of exceeding marvels, of true valor,
La virtù saggia, la religione	of wise virtue, of religion
Canto, d'un franco e forte cavaliero	I sing: of a young and strong cavalier
Degno a star con ogn'altro al paragone	Worthy compared with any hero; a paragon.
Tu celeste Signore, perfetto, e vero	You, Heavenly Lord, perfect and true,
Guida mia pura e casta intentione	Guide my pure and chaste intention,
Ch'io non invoco Febo, Euterpe, o Clio	For I do not invoke Phoebus, Euterpe, or Clio,
Ma te sommo signore del mondo, e Dio.	But you, most high Lord of the world, and <i>Dio</i> . ¹⁴

Several things are implicit in this first stanza: for one, a response to an exigency to make the figure of the hero a paragon of Christian virtue, but also to appeal, simultaneously, to the popular taste for “marvels”—the stuff of fantasy literature, then and now. In her preface, Aragona has claimed to aim at a broad and diverse readership: the *mezzani*. She describes the extremes she wants to avoid: one being the base popular appetite for the pornographic (“lascivissime cose”). At the other end of the spectrum are the elite (“dotti”) who produce works so erudite that even the learned have trouble understanding them.¹⁵ She satirizes the constant production of commentaries on literary texts, even though her own preface constitutes such a commentary. Essentially, the incipit prefigures a balance in subject matter and her audience: between the exemplary morality of the Christian hero and the popular taste for the *romanzo*.

To summarize, the claims staked by the narrator at the beginning of the epic include true valor, wise virtue, (true) religion, and an exceptional man of arms with

¹³ Giraldis Cinzio describes the ideal *romanzo* as “fondato sovra l'imprese d'una eccelsa virtù bellica, i fatti di cortesia, di generosità, di pietà, di religione (“founded on undertakings of exceeding warlike virtue, deeds of courtesy, of generosity, of piety, of religion”) Giraldis Cinzio, *Discorso intorno comporre i romanzi* (Venice: Giolito, 1554).

¹⁴ *Il Meschino* Canto I 1, 1-8.

¹⁵ “Altri all'incontro havendo spirato à quasi piacer solo à i dotti, si sono alzati tanto, che non solamente à i *mezzani* [italics mine] & principalmente le donne...” “Others, having aspired to please only the learned, have lifted themselves up so much that not only the average reader but also, and especially women have trouble understanding....”) See Appendix II for the preface in its entirety.

chivalric prowess. The claims in themselves are not unusual for the *romanzo*, though each word resonates with the connotations of the very vexed questions in the literary discourse of the period. Other works in the epic mode provided precedents: some of the moments in Dante's *Inferno* however, did not pass muster with Counter-Reformation censors. The last two lines of Aragona's first stanza might be alluding to a problematic moment in Dante. In the *Inferno*, he invokes the Muses for literary divine assistance. In the *Paradiso*, Dante invokes Apollo for inspiration—literally:

O buono Apollo, al l'ultimo lavoro	O good Apollo, for this last work
Fammi del tuo valor sì fatto vaso,	make me a worthy vessel of your valor
Come dimandi a dar l'amato alloro. ...	as your require, to give the beloved laurel
Entra nel petto mi, e spira tue	Enter into my breast, and breathe there
sì come quando Marsia traesti	as when you drew Marsyas from the sheath
de la vagina de le membra sue.	of his members. ¹⁶

By contrast, the narrator of *Il Meschino* uses the topos of *praeteritio* to underscore the non-invocation of these pagan figures.

Ch'io non invoco Febo, Euterpe, o Clio,	For I do not invoke Phoebus, Euterpe, or Clio,
Ma te, sommo signore del mondo, e Dio.	But you, most high Lord of the world, and <i>Dio</i> .

In specifically *not* invoking Phoebus (Apollo) or the Muses, Aragona appears to be taking a cautious distance from the poet who is in other ways a classical model. (The epic *Il Meschino* contains a visit to the Sibyl and a trip to Inferno). I read this passage as a way to emphasize her difference from Dante while placing herself in the same epic tradition, yet remaining above reproach. While Dante's subtext is Apollo's punishment of Marsyas for his audacity in competing with the god as a flautist, Aragona seems to be trying to avoid potential censorship from more immanent authority figures—or perhaps she is simply speaking in the language of her contemporaries.

¹⁶ Dante, *Paradiso* (I 13-15, 19-21). Translation mine.

In the second canto of the epic, Aragona stakes a claim for her originality: she will not follow in the footsteps (“orme”) of the “antichi,” the poets and philosophers who have preceded her. The word “orme” has intertextual resonance with period genre theory. The phrase “the footprints of the ancients” is used by Giraldi Cinzio to refer to classical literary tradition, with which he has an ambiguous relationship. The ideal approach to the classical writers, according to Cinzio, incorporates both respect for the epic tradition and a certain amount of artistic license for the poet. Embedded in these theoretical discussions was also a concern with originality—within certain parameters. Aragona stakes a claim for her originality in the quote below:

Dei Filosofi antiche, e de' Poeti
Non seguo l'orme, in altro loco parmi
Da dimostrar de' cieli i bei segreti
Che dove pelegrinaggi, et armi.

Of the ancient philosophers, and the poets,
I will not follow the footprints, elsewhere
I'll demonstrate the heavens' beautiful secrets
Other than where pilgrims, and armies appear.

The phrase “footprints of the ancients” is an extremely referential signifier. Giraldi Cinzio, in his theoretical writings, uses the same metaphor to signify the paradoxical situation of the Renaissance poet: a respect for the epic tradition and the simultaneous claim of artistic license. Giraldi exhorts Pigna in his treatise: “lasciando talora le loro orme coi propri lor passi andarsi ad Elicona” (“leaving the footsteps of the ancients to go with our own steps to Helicon.”)¹⁷ In a letter to Bernardo Tasso on epic poetry, Giraldi writes that he despises those who only know how to step into the footprints of others.¹⁸ He stresses the necessary tension between the ancient (Aristotelian theory and classical precedent) and the moderns, emphasizing the nature, genius, and judgment of the artist; and citing the distance between antiquity and the present. Giraldi, at different moments in

¹⁷ G.B. Giraldi Cinzio, “Discorso intorno...romanzi,” in *Scritti critici*, ed. Giovanni Gambarin, 69.

¹⁸ “Lettera a Berardo Tasso sulla epica poesia” (1557), in *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, ed. Bernard Weinberg, vol. 2, 457.

his theoretical development, stresses one modality over the other. As he wrote to Bernardo Tasso, an author should be original. He should valorize his own genius/wit and artistic nature (“[valorizzare]...ingegno e natura dell’artista”) but should not take such license as to consider himself exempt from all laws ([ma] “non si dee pigliare tanta licenza...che si pensa d’essere fuori di tutti ordini e sciolto [degli] leggi...”). In the *Discorsi*, he proclaims a lofty independence from a slavish imitation of the ancients. However, his own poetic practice does not benefit from such an independence.¹⁹ I cite the first few canti of Giral di’s *Ercole* to demonstrate my point:

Le fatiche, i travagli, i fatti egregi
d’HERCOL i’ canto, et le sue fiamme accese.
Et quante palme egli hebbe, & quali pregi.
Et per lo colto, & per lo stran paese.
Come, via più ch’Imperatori, & Regi.
Il nome suo per ogni parte estese.
Com’al fine arse di celeste foco,
Et meritò di haver tra gli Dei loco.

Labors, travails and difficult deeds of Hercules
I sing, and of his ardent flames, and how many
palms he had, and such prizes, and of
the civilized, and the foreign places he
traveled and how, more than emperors and kings,
his name extends throughout all lands,
and how at the end he burned with
celestial fire, and had a place among the gods.

Et ciò comincerò fin da le fasce,
Che da le fasce Hercol mostrò quel, ch’era,
Perc’huom, simile à lui, sin quando nasce,
Indicio dà de la natura altiera.
Che, se bene ad alcun par che si lasce,
Nel cantar de gli Heroi, l’età primiera
Questi fanciul mostrò sì la sua viva
Virtù, che degno è che sen parli, et scriva.

I will begin my tale with his swaddling bands
for even at this time Hercules showed what he is,
because a man like him, even from birth
gives an indication of his high nature,
For, even though one leaves off at any part
in singing of Hercules, his early years
This little body show himself of such manly virtue,
that he is worthy of spoken and written praise.

Quindi è ch’io non mi vò fermar sovr’una
Sola ation di questa nobil alma,
Che, tra le illustri, non ne trovo alcuna,
Che di Lauro non sia degna, & di Palma,
Et non possa mostrar che la Fortuna
Hà forza sol ne la caduca salma
De i chiari spirti, che, ne corpi frali,
Attendon solo ad opre alte, immortali.

Therefore I do not want to limit myself
to recounting only one action of this noble soul
for among the illustrious cannot be found such a one
so worthy of the laurel or of the palm.
And it cannot be shown that Fortune
alone has power over the fleeting mortal coils
of illustrious spirits, for in frail bodies
immortals await only [the fruit of] high works.

Aspira, APOLLO, al mio debile ingegno,
E’infondi tanto in me del tuo valore,
Che spiegar possa in carte il bel disegno,
Di cui serbo l’imago in mezzo il core,

Breathe, Apollo, into my feeble wit
and instill in me some of your valor
that I will be able to explain in these pages
the beautiful design whose image is in my heart.

¹⁹ Giral di’s epic, *dell’Ercole*, is dry, pedantic, and almost unread. Its full title is: DELL’HERCOLE DI M. GIOVANBATTISTA GIRALDI CINTHIO NOBILE FERRARESE, SECRETARIO DELL’ ILLUSTRISIMO ET ECCELLENTISSIMO SIGNORE IL SIGNORE HERCOLE SECONDO DA ESTE, DUCA QUARTO DI FERRARA.

Se fatto m'hai del tuo bel nome degno,
 Non m'esser scarso hora del tuo favore,
 Et dammi voci tu, dammi parole,
 Da spiegar l'alte imprese al mondo sole.

If you have made me worthy of your name
 do not be lacking in giving me your favor
 and give me a voice, give me words
 to recount his high exploits alone to the world.

Couched in this invocation is the Giraldi's quarrel with the idea that an epic should have a single, unified action. While Giraldi protests that one's own *ingegno* (genius) should be balanced with tradition, he is ostensibly defending Ariosto, as he does elsewhere in his theoretical prose. He could also be referring to his heroic poem, *dell'Hercole*—quoted above—already written by 1557. Both *dell'Hercole* and *Il Meschino* lack the quality of multiplicity described in the period, as *errare* (“wandering”) for which Ariosto was so virulently criticized. Both epics have an extremely unified plot, tracing the life of a single, exemplary person—from the cradle (“dalla cuna”) as Giraldi states, somewhat pedantically, in the *incipit* to his poem.

According to the *terminus post quem* and the *terminus ad quem* posited by Allaire,²⁰ Aragona's *Il Meschino* would have been written by the time that Giraldi's theoretical writings appear in print. Aragona frequented the literary circles in Ferrara, where she was illustrious.²¹ Therefore, we can assume that she was familiar with the *Orlando Furioso* and other *romanzi* as well as with the emerging theoretical work by Giraldi, Pigna, and others.

Giraldi in particular was interested in creating the space for a type of *romanzo* which would uphold the dignified legacy of the heroic epic while pleasing courtly and popular audiences with their insatiable taste for this new hybrid genre. Authors aspiring

²⁰ Gloria Allaire, “Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work” *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 16.1, (1995), 35.

²¹ The poet Alessandro Arrighi wrote of Tullia d'Aragona's Ferrarese sojourn, “Dio fece quaggiù Vittoria un luna e Tullia un sole” (Here God made Vittoria a moon and Tullia, the sun.) Rime, 1547. See also Stortoni and Lillie, *op cit*, 81.

to write this new type of epic poem increasingly had to contend with critics on both sides of the elite/popular dichotomy as well as having to ascertain that the content of the work was not offensive to the Inquisition's censors. Torquato Tasso is one example that comes to mind, whose cautious spirit led him to seek approval before Church officials could condemn it. The two sides in the debate became known as the *Ariostisti* and the *Tassisti*.

Tullia d'Aragona's epic is published posthumously in 1560, when the influence of the Counter-Reformation was already underway. The restrictive climate of the 1550's is just one factor contributing to the concern among critics (and writers) with moral *gravitas* in the poetry—lyric and epic—and tragedy of the latter half of the Cinquecento. The preface to the readers of *Il Meschino*, entitled "A i lettori," reveals both an awareness of the contemporary critical debates and a sophisticated aesthetic response to the questions of genre, decorum, and moral exemplarity that this hybrid form provoked.

The approach that Aragona takes to these questions, especially that of decorum, is characteristic of her tendency to reconcile binary opposites into an *aurea mediocritas*. In the preface Aragona states her desire to follow *la via di mez[z]o*, and this can be applied to the content of her epic as well as the stylistic and linguistic choices she makes. On the one hand, there is a stated intention to combine arms and virtue (*virtù saggia*), to create a chivalric hero who is *franco, forte*—an especially worthy *paragone* of Christian virtues; on the other, to appeal to the taste of a popular audience that demanded "meraviglie", or "marvels"—the stuff of fantasy literature then and now.

How popular was the *romanzo*, and who was its audience? On the one hand, roughly one-third of Isabella d'Este's library was composed of vernacular romances.²² On

²² Marina Beer. *Romanzi di Cavalleria*. 237.

the other hand, part of the appeal of Ariosto's *Orlando* was its popular quality—Montaigne recounts examples of an unlettered woman who had nevertheless memorized and performed *romanzi*. Another anecdote tells of a performance at a dinner where people were eating with their hands.²³ This new audience of the *romanzo* demanded new theories of genre. Aragona defines this broader readership as honorable men and women of diverse categories and social classes. This position is counter to that of the elite literary critics who were disparaging (or envious) of the bestseller *Orlando Furioso*.

To most sixteenth-century critics, the literary audience consisted of *classici* in the original Latin meaning of the term (the highest tax bracket) as first used by Aulus Gellius in *Noctes Atticae*.²⁴ Thus, the term “classic” is used to signify antiquity and social class simultaneously. Model authors were usually upper-class citizens, and this distinction held in the sixteenth century as well. The erudite literary audience of Aragona's day, schooled in Aristotle and Horace, added a moral dimension to this already class-bound issue. They were extremely concerned with the *utile* as well as the *dulce*, and a large part of the apparent utility of the genre was an emphasis upon the paradigmatic text or the exemplary *personaggio*. However, the audience for which it was intended was probably assumed to be composed of *literati*.

Aragona's claim, in her preface, to aim at a readership of common readers flies in the face of these assumptions as well as literary claims made by Giraldi, though these

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “e cohorte illa duxtaxat antiquiore vel oratorum aliquis vel poetarum, id est classicus adsiusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius.” Sainte-Beuve's version: “un écrivain de valeur et de marque, un écrivain qui compte, qui a du bien au soleil, et qui n'est pas confondu dans la foule des prolétaires (“a writer of value and of rank, a writer who counts, one who has his place in the sun, and one who isn't implicated in the mob of the proletariat.”) [English translation mine] Quoted by Peter Stallybrass from E.R. Curtius in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 2.

claims are rather inconsistent. On the one hand, he advocated that Ariosto's multiplicity of plot—part of its popular appeal—was perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the laws of Aristotle and Horace; on the other, made it clear that writers of the epic should aim to please the best judges (“i migliori giudici”) not the common people (“vulgo”).²⁵ However, he writes that the *favola*, the epic's plot or subject, should contain one or more illustrious actions to teach honest life and good morals (“una o piu azione...insegnare onestà vita e buoni costumi”) presumably to the very same *vulgo*.²⁶

Unlike the nameless authors she criticizes in the preface, Aragona claims to cater neither to a base popular appetite for the pornographic (“lascivissime cose”) nor solely to the elite (“dotti”) with a work so erudite that even the learned have trouble understanding it. Yet such a definition is transgressive, mocking the very hierarchical social order by which people defined themselves. The preface makes amusingly scathing reference to overly literate works and the constant need for commentaries on such texts, comparing the practices of literary criticism to those in the professions of theology or law:

Et havendo considerato & inteso da molti giudiciosi la diversità de gli stili in quei libri di ottava rima, che fin qui si son visti, trovai, che alcun vanno tanto serpendo à terra, che ogni animo non del tutto basso si sdegna pur li vederli, non che possa dilettersi à leggerli. Altri all'incontro havendo aspirato à quasi piacer solo à i dotti, si sono alzati tanto, che non solamente, à i mezzani, & principalmente alle donne, ma anco à i dotti stessi danno in molti luoghi da fare per farsi intendere & si veggono ogn'ora comentatori & espositori sopra di loro, come nell[i] leggi, & nella filosofia.... (And having considered and understood from those people of good judgment the diversity of styles in these books of *ottava rima*, that up until now one can see, I find, that some go slithering on their bellies on the earth, so that every person who is not completely base and vile disdains to even look at them, let alone delight in reading them. Others, on the other hand, having aspired to please only the learned, have lifted themselves up so much, that not only the average reader and principally women readers, but also the learned themselves have to go to great length in many places to make themselves understand, and we see commentaries being produced every hour, as with books of law or philosophy....)²⁷

²⁵ Giraldi Cinzio, “Lettera a Bernardo Tasso Sulla Epica Poesia” (1557), in Bernard Weinberg, *Trattati di Poetica e Retorica del Cinquecento*, vol. 2 (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 454-75.

²⁶ *Discorso...romanzi*, in *Scritti Critici*, 53.

²⁷ “A i lettori” (“To the readers”), the preface to *Il Meschino* (Venice: Sessa, 1560). Translation mine.

Essentially, in her preface and in her *incipit*, Aragona appears to strike a balance between the high style and the vernacular, i.e. satisfying both educated and popular, textual and performative literary tastes in her witty but accessible *romanzo*.

Aragona had ample precedent among her acquaintances for the creation of a romance epic. She knew Bernardo Tasso and presumably benefited from the use he makes of the Spanish legend of Amadis of Gaul in his *Amadigi*. Ludovico Dolce, Girolamo Ruscelli, and Pietro Bembo, known for their poetic and critical works, also are mentioned by name in Aragona's preface. Giralaldi, Dolce, Aragona, and Ariosto shared the same Venetian publishers, Gabriel Giolito de'Ferrari et Fratelli and G.B. et Melchior Sessa.²⁸ Given her acquaintances and their mutual interests, it is unlikely that she was unfamiliar with the translated *Poetics*, with those who lectured and wrote about it, or with the application of Aristotelian theories to poetic practice. As we have seen, Tullia d'Aragona demonstrates a thorough and applied knowledge of contemporary Aristotelian thought in her *Dialogo*.

Applying Aristotelian principles to the *romanzo* genre, however, is a thorny and problematic undertaking for anyone. The epic is a polyphonic genre, so large in scope and possessing such multiplicity in its nature that it cannot really be employed for moral ends; this particular *romanzo* probably comes closer to the *dulce* end of the spectrum than the *utile*. To quote Marina Beer, it is "un poema aperto e irregolare, incoercibile a un progetto didattico o morale" ("open and irregular, unable to be coerced into a didactic or moral

²⁸ A quarrel over plagiarism or "plagio" erupted, in fact, between Dolce and Ruscelli, in 1552. Dolce's publisher Giolito became involved against his will, and Dolce changed publishers. Both Dolce and Aragona were first published by Giolito and later by Sessa, Tullia's epic posthumously in 1560 and Dolce's *Modi affigurati* in 1564 respectively. *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, vol. 4 (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1995), 681-91.

agenda.”)²⁹ Indeed, Aragona’s epic may not succeed in achieving Giraldi’s aim: “insegnare l’onestà vita e i buoni costumi” (“to teach honest living and good mores.”)

Morality

In the preface to her epic, Aragona seems preoccupied with the question of what constitutes suitable reading matter for a vernacular audience, especially for women. There is an enormous concern with the work’s morality as opposed that of other epics. Framed as an address to the reader (entitled “Ai Lettori”), the preface serves as an opportunity for Tullia to defend herself against potential detractors and a chance to critique other works of literature (including those of Boccaccio and Ariosto) for the immorality of their content.

Throughout the preface we hear a conservative moral tone, surprisingly different from the voice of the Tullia character in her *Dialogo dell’infinita di amore*. This penitential or moralizing tone (or the fictive adoption of such a tone) has led many critics to settle upon a later date for the epic than the 1540s. However, scholars have traditionally assumed a late date for the epic, given its prayers at the beginning of each canto and the paratextual emphasis upon the potentially corrupting influence of literature upon women.

It is not my aim, however, to take up the challenge of dating the epic. What does interest me, however, is the possibility that the moral exigencies of the epic in the period might account for some of the artistic choices in *Il Meschino*. With a glimpse into what her contemporaries were thinking and writing about the epic, it becomes more and more

²⁹ Marina Beer, *Romanzi di Cavalleria*, 235.

apparent why a writer like Tullia d'Aragona, talented and arrogant in her youth, but also desirous of legitimation in the eyes of a broader literary public, would adopt a prayerful and moralizing narratorial *persona* with some degree of sincerity. We do not know her mind, her soul, or even possess certainty as to whether the epic's preface was indeed written by Aragona.

I would like to propose the intriguing possibility that Tullia d'Aragona's prefatory comments about her own loss of innocence (".....vorrei haver havuta...[meno] notizia del mondo, che ora con miglior senno..." ("Now that I am older and wiser, I would wish to have had less experience of the world when young")) correspond to the *incipit* of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*:

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
in sul mio primo giovenile errore,
quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel che sono.

del vario stile in ch'io piango e ragiono,
fra le vane speranze e van dolore,
ove che sia per prove intenda amore,
spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.

Ma ben veggio or sì come popol tutto
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
di me medesmo meco mi vergogno;

et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
e 'l perdersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.

(You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of those sighs on which I nourished my heart in my first youthful error, when I was in part another man from the one I am today:

In varied styles I weep and speak, between vain hopes and vain sorrow, among those who understands love through experience, I hope to find pity, not only pardon.

But now I see well how for a long time I was the talk of the crowd, for which often I am ashamed of myself within;

and of my raving, shame is the fruit, and repentance, and the clear knowledge that whatever pleases in the world is a brief dream.)³⁰

³⁰ Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, I, 37.

Reminding ourselves of Petrarch's paradoxical assertion of the youthful error expressed in his lyric *raccolta* and his ostensible recantation of its substance, we can only conclude: God knows.

CONCLUSION: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CENTER AND MARGIN

In comparing Tullia d'Aragona with other important poets, philosophers, and literary theorists, my objective has been twofold: to re-establish a place for her among the great writers of the Italian Renaissance and the early modern period, that is to say, in the literary canon. My second aim has been to show how Aragona works in dialogue with her audience of present and future readers, with contemporary poets, and with other canonical writers—apparently aspiring to be one herself.

The further aim of this dissertation has been to introduce the sixteenth-century writer Tullia d'Aragona to potential members of that audience: readers of poetry, philosophy, gender studies, and cultural studies. As I understand it, Aragona's vision of her audience is heterogeneous. Therefore, instead of pursuing only one line of reasoning I have endeavored to give my readers a sense of the breadth and depth of this author's *oeuvre*, letting the work determine the best theoretical lens through which to analyze it.

Intertextuality and influence theory have proved to be the most useful methodologies for this study. All Renaissance *trattati d'amore*, or dialogues on love, are indebted to Plato's *Symposium*. Few of these Renaissance treatises, however, actually propose rereading Plato in the way that Aragona has done: recuperating positive elements of the classical legacy while questioning received notions of gender.¹ By the same token, it would be difficult to write about a poet who foregrounds Petrarchan imitative strategies without acknowledging her debt to Petrarch. Situating Petrarchan women poets within Thomas Greene's theory of Renaissance imitation still allows for their originality, accepting a certain *a priori* adherence to literary forms and discursive conventions.

¹ The construction of gender is based on the outdated authority of Aristotle and Galen. While I do not focus specifically upon the medical discourse of the period, I touch upon such questions in chapter two.

Yet Greene's theory must be stretched to imagine the specific ways in which women responded to Petrarchism. Variations of this phenomenon are discussed in the central chapters three, four, and five. To reiterate, in chapter three Aragona's originality emerges within intertextually mediated and gendered mythic narratives (in this case, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). In the brief close reading which constitutes chapter four, I demonstrate Aragona's enactment of what I would call sacramental imitation: responding to a beloved (I would imagine) author's oeuvre, incorporating texts from various genres into the high artifice of the sestina to create a new register of sublime in a female voice. In chapter five, I take what I see to be main ideas in Plato's *Symposium*—creations of the soul and creations of the body—and use them to map Tullia d'Aragona's and William Shakespeare's daring responses to Diotima's "Platonism," a voice that stands out among the others in the *Symposium*, not only because of the gender of its "speaker" but also for the positive role that Diotima attributes to the body.

A positive view of the body also can be found—*ante litteram*—in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore*. The dialogue was first work of Aragona's I had encountered, and its wit and erudition made me wonder why I had not heard of this author earlier. Reading the work in Italian after reviewing the English version for the journal *Differentia: A Review of Italian Thought*, I realized that this author was well ahead of her time as a protofeminist and a philosopher.

Because of literary conventions and other social constraints, Tullia d'Aragona's method of dissent from Neoplatonic conventions necessarily had to be subversive. Fortunately, Lucianic satire was in vogue: and conveniently, Lucian himself had chosen for a target the archetypal Platonic Lover, potential seducer of boys. While we might not

find such a subject humorous, Aragona places known *roué* Benedetto Varchi in this role in playful imitation of Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale*. Sparing no one, the two main interlocutors "Tullia" and "Varchi" play caricatures of themselves in the *Dialogo*. Yet many readers have missed the fact that the humorousness of the work may obscure the fact that at least three important philosophical notions are being interrogated: Renaissance notions of gender inequality; external beauty versus beauty of the soul; and the definition of love, divided in the period into vulgar versus honest, bodily versus spiritual, or if you prefer, Madonna versus whore.

Without knowing exactly how Tullia d'Aragona felt about her profession, we do know that she struggled with its external signifiers: incurring repeated fines for not wearing the yellow veil, the sign of the fallen woman and—more importantly—in her self-fashioning as an artist and a *cortigiano* (courtier) rather than a *cortigiana* (courtesan). Many critics of another generation are judgmental about the role of courtesan, but given the social and economic realities of the time, this "choice" may be understandable, to some degree: Tullia d'Aragona, a talented woman poet, may have been forced, by her illegitimate birth and life circumstances, into the role of a courtesan.

While one would not want to take lightly the social conditions of such an existence, it did give Tullia d'Aragona some literary advantages. For one, she could publish a work in which she (as "Tullia") asserts her experience in (presumably) various kinds of love in order to prove her unique theory. Secondly, she could publish Petrarchan lyric poems, explicit expressions of desire. Thirdly, by the time her epic was published, she could go on record as deploring rather than internalizing the conditions over which she had no control—conditions which led to her early loss of innocence.

Not only, therefore, is Tullia d'Aragona a strong poet but also a clear voice, speaking to the social and ontological conditions of women. Throughout Aragona's work, I find an insistence upon the woman artist as speaking subject, articulating desire, loss, and memory. As such, she belongs to the category of *femminismo teoretico*, the necessary precursor to *femminismo moderno*: the *vita contemplativa* in contrast to the *vita activa* of later feminism. Even though the voice of the lyric poet, as Helen Vendler points out, is a solitary rather than a collective voice, Tullia d'Aragona speaks for all women when she questions the monologic dynamic of a loquacious Petrarch and a silent Laura. As such, Tullia d'Aragona provides her own antidote to the dilemma of mute Laura: speaking through a passionate lyric *persona*. To re-(en)gender an Italian term, a *Petrarchista*, or as one of my students put it, she is a Petrarchist with a twist. In the *Rime*, Aragona adopts the forms and conventions of Ovid-inflected Petrarchism, with dramatic results.

The narratorial persona of the epic, too, is irrepressible: a woman (figuratively) dressed in armor, singing of arms and love and virtue. She also is a woman aware of her mortality, and the epic's humor is punctuated by the same narratorial voice begging the Virgin Mary to intercede with the Parcae to spare her an early death. As it happened, she died early—at age forty-six. Aragona's stated desire, however, like Ovid's, was to live on through her art. Toward that end, I have tried to do what I could: to make an English language audience aware of Aragona's poetry and prose.

Working on Tullia d'Aragona also has led me to ask larger theoretical questions about literature as art. Is art political, and if so, how? Does subversion imply self-betrayal, or is it a form of dialogue? Dialogue, whether a dialogue with an opposing position, or a dialogue with a text (or with an author from antiquity, as Petrarch

imagined) or with readers—present, future, real, ideal—is an extremely effective strategy. A dialogic mode, in which an author imagines not only dead authors of classical antiquity but also the subjectivities of living readers, is the paradigm that Tullia d'Aragona proposes—and develops—in her *Dialogo*, in her *Rime*, and in the metaliterary statement that prefaces her epic.

Tullia d'Aragona's adherence to some of the forms of Petrarchism highlights her originality. Like all great poets, Aragona both engages with tradition and (as in Ezra Pound's dictum, "makes it new.") No doubt the now-canonical Shakespeare also saw himself as a satirist of the reigning definition of "canonical" in the period, reacting vehemently *against* Petrarchan conventions. When we speak of the literary canon, we should keep in mind that "canonical" authors were anything but canonical in their time.

I would like to suggest that the preceding paradox opens up questions for the future of literary studies. Debates about the literary canon tend to get polarized and politicized due not so much due to bad faith as to bad hermeneutics, if you will. To use bell hooks's terminology of center and margin: what is the center and what is the margin? In finding language for this problem, Thomas Greene's term "creative imitation" is a good start, but I wish to suggest something further. Perhaps instead of a dynamic of dichotomy between center and margin the metaphor of a dialogue between the two positions could be useful to contemporary literary studies: to use classical terms, this would engender love (*eros* in the broadest political sense—or at least communication) as opposed to strife. Dialogic approaches literary texts might lead to asking good questions instead of the creation of more neo-Aristotelian categories. In a dialogue between center and margin, the roles could even shift, they way they do in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo*.

APPENDIX I

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE
RIME DELLA SIGNORA TULLIA D'ARAGONA
ET DI DIVERSI A LEI

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ALLA ILLUSTR[ISSIMA]
 ET ECCELLENTISS[IMA] SIGNORA
 LA S. DONNA LEONORA DI TOLEDO, DUCHESSA DI FIRENZE
 PADRONA SUA OSSERVANDISSIMA.
 TULLIA D'ARAGONA

Io so bene nobilissima et virtuosissima Signora Duchessa, che quanto la bassezza della condition mia è men degna della altezza di quella di V. Eccellentia tanto la rozezza de componimenti miei è minore dello ingegno, et giudicio suo: et per questa cagione sono stata in dubbio gran tempo se io dovessi indirizzare a così grande, et così honorato nome quanto è quello di V. Eccellentia così picciola et così ignobile fatica, come è quella de Sonetti composti da me più tosto per fuggir l'otio molte volte, o per non parere scortese a quelli, che i loro mi haveano indirizzati, che er credenza di doverne acquistar fama o pregio alcuno appresso le genti: Ma desiderando io di mostrare in qualche modo qualche parte della devotissima servitù mia verso V. Eccellentia per gli oblihi che le ho molti, et grandissimi sì a lei, et sì a quella dello invito et gloriosissimo Consorte suo, presi ardimento, et mi risolsi finalmente di non mancare a me medesima, ricorda[n]domi che i componimenti di tutti gli scrittori hanno in tutte le lingue, et massimamente quegli de Poeti havuto sempre cotal gratia, et preminenza, che niuno quantunque grande, non solo non gli ha rifiutati mai, ma sempre tenuti carissimi. Perche io anchor che (come ho detto) conosca benissimo così l'altezza della stato suo, come la bassezza della condition mia, presento humilmente con divotissimo cuore queste mie poche basse et picciole fatiche alle moltissime, grandissime et altissime virtù di lei, pregando la con tutto l'animo non al dono voglia ne a chi dona, ma a se medesima riguardare.

TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND EXCELLENT LADY
 THE NOBLE [LADY] ELEONORA DI TOLEDO
 DUCHESS OF FLORENCE, HER MOST RESPECTED PATRON
 [FROM] TULLIA D'ARAGONA

I know very well, most noble and virtuous Lady Duchess, how humble is my condition, so unworthy of the highness of Your Excellency, how much the unpolished roughness of my poetic compositions are beneath her in wit and in judgment: for this reason I was long in doubt as to whether I should undertake something so ambitious in the honored name of your Excellency, especially such a relatively trifling and ignoble labor as these Sonnets, often composed by me in order to escape otium, or to refrain from seeming discourteous to those who had guided me--not only because I thought that I should acquire fame or value among people, but also I desired to show, in some way or at least in part, my devoted servitude toward Your Excellency because of the many, and great debts that I owe to her, and to her most glorious Consort--so finally, taking these ardent tasks to heart, I resolved not to be delinquent to myself, remembering that the compositions of all writers, in every language, especially those of Poets, have always had such grace and preeminence, that not only has no one, however great, ever refused them, but all have always held them most dear. Because, again, I know very well the height of her state, and the humble stature of my condition, I present humbly and with most devoted heart these my few, small, base, humble labors [as a tribute to] her many, great, most grand qualities, and her most high virtue, beseeching her with all my soul to look not to the gift or to the giver, but to look to herself, with the highest regard.

I

Al Duca di Firenze

Se gli antichi pastor di rose, & fiori
 Sparsero i tempïi, & vaporar gli altari
 D'incenso a Pan, sol perché dolci e cari
 Havea fatto a le Ninfe i loro amori,

Quai fior degg'io Signor, quai deggio odori,
 Sparger al nome vostro, che sian pari
 A i meriti vostri, & tante, & così rari,
 Ch'ogn'hor spargete in me gratie, et favori?

Nessun per certo tempio, altare, o dono
 Trovar si può di così gran valore,
 Ch'a vostra alta bontà sia pregio eguale.

Sia dunque il petto vostro, u tutte sono
 Le virtù, tempio; altare il saggio core,
 Vittima, l'alma mia, se tanto vale.

I

To the Duke of Florence

If the shepherds of old, with roses and flowers,
scattered the temples and perfumed the altars
with incense to Pan, it was because he made
the sweet and dear nymphs their loving maids.

What buds should I offer, what incense diffuse,
what roses scatter in your name, that might compare
with your merits, so many and so rare,
granting favors and graces beyond customary use?

Where can the temple, altar, or gift be found
of such valourous worth as to be on par
with the high bounty of your noble crown?

Let then the temple be your breast, the living
seat of all virtue; an altar, the wise heart,
an offering, my soul—if it's worthy of giving.

VIII

Allo stesso

Dive che dal bei monte d'Elicona
 discendete sovente a far soggiorno
 fra queste rive, ond'è che d'ogni'intorno
 il gran nome Toscan più altero sona:¹

d'eterni fior tessete una corona
 a lui, che di virtù fa 'l mondo adorno,
 sceso col fortunato Capricorno,
 per cui l'antico vizio n'abbandona.

E per me lodi, e per me grazia a lui
 rendete, o Dive, che lingua mortale,
 verso immortal virtù s'affanna indarno.

Quest' è valor, quest' è soggetto tale,
 che solo è da voi sole, e non d'altrui:
 così dicea la Tullia in riva d'Arno.

¹ suona

VIII

Goddesses from beautiful Mt. Helicon
that descend often to make sojourn
on these shores, where above all others
clearer sounds the great Tuscan name:

of ageless flowers weave for him a crown
he who with virtue the world adorns
born under the fortunate sign of Capricorn
by whom the ancient vice is disallowed.

Through me praise, and gracious thanks
render to him, o Goddesses, that I not labor,
my mortal tongue singing in vain immortal virtue.

This is the valor, this a subject worthy of you
and comes from you alone and not from other:
Thus declared Tullia on the Arno's banks.

XVIII

A Pietro Bembo

Bembo, io che fino a qui da grave sonno
 oppressa vissi, anzi dormii la vita,²
 [H]or da la luce vostra alma infinita,³
 O sol d'ogni saper maestro e donno,

Desta apro gli occhi, si ch'aperti ponno
 scorger la strada di virtù smarrita;
 ond'io lasciato ove l'pensier m'invita
 de la parte miglior per voi m'indonno:

E[t] quanto posso il più mi sforzo anch'io,
 scaldarmi al lume di sì chiaro foco,
 per lasciar del mio nome eterno segno.

E[t] o non pur da voi si prenda a sdegno⁴
 mio folle ardir, che se l'sapere è poco,
 non è poco, Signor, l'alto disio.

² B. dormi; C., D. dormii

³ E. dalla

⁴ Ed oh!

XVIII

To Pietro Bembo

Bembo, oppressed by a slumber so deep
I lived until now, as one in waking sleep;
now let your soul shine its infinite light to uplift,
sun of all knowledge, master of every gift:

awake, with eyes open wide I look straight ahead
so I can discern the path from which I strayed—
the straight road, where thought still invites me—
to cultivate the better part, to gain self-mastery:

and even I, how much more able to aspire,
warming myself in the light of so bright a flame
to leave eternal record of my name.

And yet I hope to meet with no disdain
by you: though my knowledge is limited, my ardor vain
there is no limit, Lord, to my high desire.

XXXIX

A Manelli

Amore un tempo in così lento foco
Arse mia vita; & si colmo di doglia
Struggeasi 'l cor, che quale altro si voglia
Martir fora ver lei dolcezza, & gioco.

Poscia sdegno, e pietate a poco a poco
Spenser la fiamma, ond'io più ch'altra soglia,
Libera da sì lunga, & fera voglia,
Giva lieta contando in ciascun loco.

Ma'l Ciel né satio ancor (lassa) né stanco
De danni miei, perche sempre sospiri
Mi riconduce a la mia antica sorte.

Et con sì acuto spron mi punge il fianco,
Ch'io temo soto i primi empîi martiri
Cader, & per men mal bramar la morte.

XXXIX

Love, for a time, with a slow fierce flame,
burned my life. And my heart, laden so
fed on itself, so that all other sorrow
seemed but sweetness and a game.

Then, by degrees, piety and disdain,
spending that flame, freed me from the fire
of such a long and fierce desire
that I went everywhere singing again.

My heaven, not weary (alas) nor satisfied
with my torments and continual sighs
led me back to my ancient fate,

and with such a sharp spur pierced my side
I feared I'd fall from the blows' first spate,
and from lesser ills, I would want to die.

XXXVIII

A Piero Manelli

Poi che mi diè natura a voi simile
Forma, e materia; o fosse il gran Fattore;
Non pensate ch'ancor disio d'honore
Mi desse, & bei pensier MANEL gentile?

Dunque credete me cotanto vile,
Ch'io non osi mostrar cantando fore,
Quel che dentro n'ancide altero ardore,
Se bene a voi non ho pari lo stile?

Non lo crediate, no PIERO, ch'anch'io
Fatico ogn'hor per appressarmi al Cielo,
E lasciar del mio nome in terra fama.

Non contenda rea sorte il bel desio,
Che pria che l'alma dal corporeo velo
Si scioglia, satierò forse mia brama.

XXXVIII

For Piero Manelli

Since (like you) by Nature I was wrought--
or by the great Creator—in form and matter,
Manelli dear, do you think the desire for honor
was not given me—and capacity for lofty thought?

Do you think me so spiritually poor
that I dare not show forth, singing,
what in me would kill all other longing
though my style is not on par with yours?

I do not think you can conceive, Peter,
that like you I labor, aspire to the firmament,
and to leave my name renowned on earth.

If evil fate does not triumph over high desire,
then perhaps before my soul is rent
from its corporeal veil, I will satisfy my thirst.

XL

Qual vaga Filomena, che fuggita
È da la odiata gabbia, & in superba
Vista sen'va tra gli arboscelli, e l'herba
Tornata in libertate, e in lieta vita;

Er'io da gli amorosi lacci uscita
Schernendo ogni martire, & pena acerba
De l'incredibil duol, ch'in sé riserba
Qual ha per troppo amar l'alma smarrita.

Ben havev'io ritolte (ahi Stella fera)
Dal tempio di Ciprigna le mie spoglie,
E di lor pregio me n'andava altera;

Quand'a me Amor, le tue ritrose voglie
Muterò disse, & femmi prigionera
Di tua virtù, per rinovar mie doglie.

XL

Like flitting Philomel, who flies so proudly free
having escaped the prison of her hated cage,
who goes among the wooded groves and greens,
returning to her former happy life in liberty,

so had I escaped from love's handcuffs,
scorning all suffering and the special bitter pain
of sorrow beyond belief, reserved for the one
who's lost her soul through excess, loving love.

As the Cyprian knows well (oh, merciless star!)
I had gathered my spoils from her temple
and for their proud price I had gone elsewhere,

when to me Love said, *I will alter*
(to renew my pangs) *your perverse will.*
And made me your virtue's prisoner.

XLII

Si'io'l feci unqua,⁵ che mai non giunga a riva
 Si'io'l feci, che perduta ogni mia speme
 L'interno duol, che'l cuor lasso sostiene
 In guerra eterna de vostr'occhi viva;

Si'io'l feci; ch'ogni di resti piu priva
 De la gratia onde nasce ogni mio bene;
 Si'io'l feci, che di tante, & cotai pene
 Non m'apporti alcun mai tranquilla oliva;

Si'io'l feci, ch'in voi manchi ogni pietade;
 Et cresca doglia in me, pianto, e martire
 Distruggendomi pur come far soglio.

Ma s'io no'l feci, il duro vostro orgoglio
 In amor si converta; & lunga etade
 Sia dolce il frutto del mio bel disire.

⁵ [voce arcaico]

XLII

If I ever did it, the sorrow is never-ending,
and my weary heart sustains its inner strife
If I did it, then all my hope is lost, rending
you from me who am always at war with your eyes

If I did it, then every day you remain
more deprived of grace-bearing good;
If I did it, the sorrow is too much to be withstood
and won't bring me still that tranquil olive branch;

If I did it, then in you, all piety is denied,
and in me grow pangs and tears and suffering,
consuming me as they did before.

But if I didn't do it, then your harsh pride
will change to love, a season long in ripening—
so may it be sweet, the fruit of my high desire.

XLIII

Se ben pietosa madre unico figlio
Perde talhora, e nuovo alto dolore
Le preme il tristo & suspiroso core;
Spera conforto almen, spera consiglio;

Se scaltro Capitano in gran periglio
Mostrando alteramente il suo valore
Resta vinto, & prigion, spera uscir fore
Quando che sia con baldanzoso ciglio;

S'in tempestoso mar giunto si duole
Spaventato Nocchier già presso a morte,
Ha speme ancor di riverdersi in porto.

Ma io, s'avvien che perda il mio bel Sole,
O per mia colpa, o per malvagia sorte,
Non spero haver, ne voglio alcun conforto.

XLIII

If a loving mother, her only child lost,
feeling the press of grief's weight
against her sad and sighing heart,
hopes for counsel; for comfort, at least;

If a cunning Captain finds himself in danger,
having shown, with pride, his high valor in vain
even if vanquished, languishing in prison,
he hopes with brave brow his escape to arrange.

If a sailor braves a tempestuous ocean,
though death is near and land is far,
he still hopes to see himself in port;

But if I should ever lose my lovely Sun,
by my own fault or fate's treacherous star,
I do not hope to have, nor desire comfort.

LIV

Se materna pietate afflige il core,
Onde cercando in questa parte, e in quella
Il caro figlio tuo LILLA mia bella
Piangi, & cresci piangendo il tuo dolore;

A te, ch'animal sei di ragion fore,
Et non intendi (ohime) quanto rubella
Sia stata ad ambe noi sorte empia, & fella,
Togliendo a te'l tuo figlio, a me'l mio Amore;

Che far (lassa) degg'io? qual degno pianto
Verseran gli occhi miei dal cor mai sempre?
Che conosco il tuo male, e'l mio gran danno.

Chi di Psichi potrà con alto canto
Cantar l'altere lodi? o con quai tempre
Temprar quel, che mi da sua morte, affanno?

LIV

If you by maternal love afflicted, undone
as you run here and there, from place to place
seeking your pup, lovely Lilla, dear one,
if you weep, and grief grows in your face

even you drown in tears, an animal bereft of reason
without full understanding of how it can be
that we are dealt one hand by fate's treason
taking from you your cub; my love from me—

then what should I do, when my heart's stream,
pours from my eyes in a plaint of deep grief?
though I know your pain, to my great shame;

who will be able to sing in high song the praises
of proud Psyche? and in what timbre labor for breath
singing of the one, who gives me his death?

LV

Ben mi credea fuggendo il mio bel Sole
Scemar (misera me) l'ardente foco
Con cercar chiari rivi, & starne a l'ombra
Ne i più fronzuti, & solitarii boschi;
Ma quanto più lontan lace il suo raggio
Tanto più, d'hor in hor cresce'l mio vampo.

Chi crederebbe mai che questo vampo
Crescesse quanto è più lontan dal Sole;
E pur il provo, che quel divin raggio
Quant' è più lunge più raddoppia il foco.
Né mi giova habitar fontane, o boschi,
Ch'al mio mal nulla val fresco, onda, od ombra.

Ma non cercherò più fresco, onda, od ombra,
Che'l mio così cocente, & fero vampo
Non ponno ammorzar punto fonti, o boschi:
Ma ben seguirò sempre il mio bel sole,
Poscia che nuova Salamandra in foco
Vivo lieta, mercé del divo raggio.

Deh perché non m'alluma il vivo raggio
Ovunqu'io vado, o per sole, o per ombra?
Che lieta soffrirei sì dolce il foco,
Et contenta morrei del suo gran vampo.
Ma non spero giamai (lassa) che'l Sole
Scopra giorno sì chiaro in questi boschi.

Ond'havrò sempre in odio i monti, e i boschi
Che m'ascondon la luce di quel raggio,
Che splende, & scalda più de l'altro Sole.
Biasmi chi vuole, & fugga i raggi a l'ombra,
Ch'io per me cerco sempre, & lodo il vampo,
Che m'arde, & strugge in sì possente foco.

Quanto dunque mi fora grato il foco,
Ingrati i monti, & le fontane, & i boschi,
U non veggo il mio Sole, & sento il vampo
S'io potessi appressar l'amato raggio,
Et del mio stesso corpo a lui far ombra,
Et quando parte, & quando torna il Sole.

Prima fia oscuro il Sole, & freddo il foco,
Né faranno ombra in nessun tempo i boschi,
Che del bel raggio in me non arda il vampo.

LV

I thought, fleeing my beloved Sun,
(oh, misery!) to diminish this constant fire
by seeking clear rivers, and staying in the shadows,
in the most leafy, the most lonely woods;
but the further extend his shining rays
hour by hour, the stronger grows my flame.

Who would ever believe that this flame
would increase with distance from the sun?
And yet the proof, that this divine ray,
the longer it is, the more it redoubles its fire.
Nor is it any good to inhabit fountain or wood;
no salve to my pain are breezes, waves, or shade.

I no longer seek fresh breezes, waves, or shade
for this, my blazing and fierce flame
cannot be extinguished in stream or wood:
but I will follow always my beloved Sun
so as a salamander lives anew in fire,
I live in joy, thanks to his divine ray.

Then why does it not illumine me, this living ray
wherever I go, in sunlight or in shadow?

With pleasure would I suffer such a sweet fire
and die content from its great flame.

But I do not hope (alas!) to see the sun
unveil so bright a day in this wood.

I will hold in hatred the mountains and the woods
which hide from me the light of this bright ray
that shines, and burns more than the other sun.
Blame me if you wish, flee these rays for the shade,
but I myself will always seek and praise the flame
that burns me, and be consumed in such a potent fire.

Therefore so gracious to me is this fire,
that unkind are the mountains, streams and woods
where I cannot see my Sun, but feel the flame;
if only I could come nearer the beloved ray
and of my own body make for him a shade
both at the setting, and the rising of the sun.

But the sun would become dark, and cold, the fire,
and there would be no shadow in the woods,
before this lovely ray no longer burns in me, this flame.

APPENDIX II

“A I LETTORI”

(THE PREFACE TO *IL MESCHINO ALTRAMENTE DETTO IL GUERRINO*

IN ITALIAN AND IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

FATTO IN OTTAVA RIMA DALLA TULLIA D'ARAGONA

OPERA, NELLA QUALE SI VEGGONO & INTENDONO

LE PARTE PRINCIPALI DI TUTTO IL MONDO,

& MOLTE ALTRE DILETTEVOLISSIME COSE,

DA ESSER SOMMAMENTE CARE

AD OGNI SORTE DI PERSONA

DI BELLO INGEGNO.

(c)2002 Elizabeth A. Pallitto

Di quanti onesti & dilettevoli spassi possono haver le persone umane, si vede per chiarissima esperienza, che niuno è tanto comodo, & tanto caro quanto quello, che si ha dal legger cose liete & piacevoli. Perciòché tutti gli altri spassi convien quasi che si prendano, ò con l'intervenimento d'altri, & questi noi non possiamo haver continui, né quando o come vogliamo, o con modi che tosto stancano, & fastidiscono, sì come è il mangiare, il bere, & l'altre sì fatti cose, o con pericoli, travagli di mente, spese, & molte volte con fine dannoso o spiacevole, sì come sono l'andar'attorno, i giuochi, gli amori, & molt'altre cose tali, che qui non è mestiere di spiegar più distesamente. Là ove nel leggere, noi possiamo da noi stessi governarci à tutto voler nostro, soli, accompagnati, poco, molto, senza spesa, senza pericolo, senza danno, senza travaglio, ma con piena satisfattione, & contentezza di noi medesimi. Et se questo sì perfetto solazzo, & questo sì gran sollevamento dello animo è commune universalmente ad ogni huomo, & ad ogni donna di non in tutto basso & vil'animo, alle donne è poi tanto più utile & necessario, quanto Giovan Boccaccio seppe molto ben con ragioni mostrare al mondo nel primo proemio delle sue giornate, ove distesamente mostra, che quasi à tal sollevamento delle donne sole, egli s'era posto à scriver quel libro. Nel quale se egli havesse poi così ben saputo eleggere una cosa importantissima, & fuggirne un'altra, non è alcun dubbio, che egli sarebbe stato degno di som[m]a lode, & havria pienamente asseguito l'intento suo di far cosa gratissima alle vere donne, & per rispetto loro, & per quello di se medesimi, anco a gli huomini di gentil'animo. Quella cosa, ch'ei non seppe eleggere, è il verso, il quale non è alcun dubbio che molto più diletta, molto più vagamente si legge, molto più efficacemente fa impressione ne gli animi nostri, & molto più lietamente ci lascia la forma sua nella memoria, che le prose non fanno. Quell'altra, che egli non seppe, o per

grande imperfettion di giudicio in questa parte, & [o] di natura, non volse fuggire, fu il metter tante cose lascivissime, disonestissime, & veramente scel[l]erate, quante se ne veggono dall'un capo all'altro di tutto quel libro, non perdonando ad onor di donne maritate, non di vedove, non di monache, non di vergini secolari, non di commari, non di compari, non d'amici fra loro, non di preti, non di frati, & finalmente non di Prelati, né di Cristo, & di Dio stesso, come si può chiarir da tante scelerate novelle, & da tante scelerate parole sue, come è quella[.] Et così tratta Cristo, che gli mette, le corna in capo, & altre moltissime, che per certo è cosa da stupire, come non solamente i principi, & superiori, ma né anco i ladri, & i traditori, che si facciano pur chiamar Cristiani, habbiano mai comportato d'udir quell nome, senza segnarsi della santa croce, & senza serrarsi l'orecchie, come alla più orrenda, & scelerata cosa, che possano udire l'orecchie umane. Ma la natura nostra è tanto corrotta, che non solamente non si è fuggito come cosa abominevole, ma si è desiderato da ciascheduno, et è salito in tanta stima, che l'han chiamato il padre della Lingua, il Cicerone toscano, & per fino à muoversi il Dolce, il Ruscelli, il mio Bembo, & tant'altri rarissimi ingegni à far da esso le regole, ad esporlo, à dichiararlo, & à metterlo sopra i sette cieli. Onde non è poi stato maraviglia se ambiziosi di questa sua gloria, si sien posti de gli altri à far le Nanne, & le Pippe, le Puttane erranti, & per fino à quel libro, che ha per certo offesa troppo altamente la maestà della gentilissima Città di Siena, il sapersi che egli fosse fatto da persone nate & nodrite in essa. Io adunque, la quale ho ne' primi anni miei havuta più notitia del mondo, che ora con miglior senno non vor[r]ei haver'havuta, & la quale in me stessa, & in altre molte ho veduto di quanto gran danno sia ne i giovenili animi il ragionamento, ma molto più la lettione delle cose lascive, & brutte; & d'altra parte conoscendo quanto le donne, et gli

huomini sien vaghi di leggere o d'ascoltar cose piacevoli, andai per qualche tempo ricercando, quasi tutti i libri d'istorie, o di poesie, che havesse la lingua nostra. Ove risolutami, come ho detto, che per certo la poesia per molti rispetti, ma principalmente per quella del verso, è molto più grata ad ogni persona, che tutte l'altre, trovai finalmente, che Morganti, Ancroie, Inamoramenti d'Orlando, Bovi d'Antona, Leandre, Mambriani, & finalmente l'Ariosto stesso non mancavano di questo gran vizio di contenere in essi cose lascive, & disoneste, & indegne, che non solamente monache, donzelle, o vedove, né maritate, ma ancora le donne pubbliche se gli lascino veder per casa,¹ non essendo però cosa nuova, che ad una donna per necessità, o per altra mala ventura sua, sia avvenuta di cader in errore del corpo suo, & tuttavia si disconvenga, non men forse à lei, che all'altre, l'esser disonesta, & sconcia nel parlare, & nell'altre cose. Dico adunque, che con questa mia saldisima intentione di trovar qualche libro di vaga & dilettevole lettione, ove non fosser cose disoneste & brutte, io doppo l'haverne rivoltati quanti me ne poterono capitar'in mano, trovai finalmente questo bellissimo libro in lingua Spagnuola, nel quale si trattano tante, & così varie cose, che per certo non so se altro più giocondo nell'esser suo ne sia in alcuna lingua. Et è poi tutto castissimo, tutto puro, tutto Cristiano, ove né in essemi, né in parole, né in alcuna altra guisa, è cosa, laquale da ogni onorato & santo huomo, da ogni donna maritata, vergine, vedova, & monaca non possa leggersi à tutte l'hore. Anzi sempre dall'un capo all'altro si vede, che l'Autore di esso libro ha havuto pensiero di tirar con vaghezza, con dolcezza, & con piacere, & diletto grandissimo gli animi così delle donne, come de gli huomini alla vita onesta, giusta, & santa. Ma vedendo io, che à questo libro mancava quella importa[n]tissima perfettione, ch'io dissi avanti, cioè la vaghezza del verso, per esser dall'Autore suo stato fatto in prosa, io, per mio

¹ "Per casa" is possibly a printer's error. The sentence would be clearer if the phrase were "per caso."

essercitio, & piacere, & far'anco, se fosse possibile, cosa grata & utile al mondo, mi disposi di farlo in verso. Et havendo considerato & inteso da molti giudiciosi la diversità de gli stili in quei libri d'ottava rima, che fin qui si son visti, trovai, che alcuni vanno tanto serpendo à terra, che ogni animo non del tutto basso si sdegna pur di vederli, non che possa dilettersi à leggerli. Altri all'incontro havendo aspirato à quasi piacer solo à i dotti, si sono alzati tanto, che non solamente, à i mez[z]ani, & principalmente alle donne, ma anco à i dotti stessi danno in molti luoghi da fare per farsi intendere, & si veggono ad ogn'ora com[m]entatori, & espositori sopra di loro, come nelle leggi, & nella filosofia. La onde io ho procurato di tenermi con quei che han seguita la via di mez[z]o, si come è stato il Pulci principalmente, e'l Boiardo, & il Mambriano. I quali ancora non son restata di far pruova d'avanzare in quelle cose, che in quanto allo stile, per haver la facilità, & la vaghezza insieme, mi son parute opportune. Nella lingua poi, ho voluto seguir non quella d'una sola Provincia, ma quella di tutta la nostra Italia, & che communemente è in bocca delle persone chiare, & giudiciose. Nel che tutto io mi son sempre valuta del parere, del consiglio, & dell'aiuto di quante persone dotte, & giudiciose ho potute havere. Col sincero & libero parer de' quali, io mi confido d'haver procurato al mondo un libro, da essergli gratissimo per ogni parte, & da potersi leggere con piena diletteatione & utile di ogni sorte di persona onesta & buona. Il che quando così sia, com'io desidero & spero, sarà ufficio Vostro, gentilissimi spiriti, d'aggradirne solamente la buona intentione mia, & di tutto dar lode à Dio solo, dal qual solo viene ogni bene & da chi solo io riconosco questa gran gratia d'havermi in questa mia età non ancor soverchiamente matura, ma giovanile & fresca, dato lume di ridurmi col cuore à lui, & di desiderare, & operar quanto posso, che il medesimo facciano tutti gli altri, così huomini come donne.

IL MESCHINO ALTRAMENTE DETTO IL GUERRINO
 WRITTEN IN OTTAVA RIMA BY TULLIA D'ARAGONA

A WORK, IN WHICH THE PRINCIPAL PARTS
 OF ALL THE WORLD ARE SEEN & COMPRISED,
 & MANY OTHER DELIGHTFUL THINGS,
 GREATLY VALUED AND HELD DEAR
 BY EVERY SORT OF PERSON
 OF GOOD AND PRUDENT JUDGMENT.

TO THE READERS

Of all the honorable and delightful pastimes² available to human beings, nothing is so useful and so dear as having something uplifting and pleasing to read, as experience clearly demonstrates. For almost all the other pastimes require that one takes them up with the assistance of others—and we are not able to have [access to] them continuously, neither when nor how we wish—furthermore, [these entertainments] may soon become tiresome and boring, as with eating and drinking, for example, and other such things: sometimes they are dangerous, or mentally laborious, or expensive; and often with harmful or displeasing results. Such is the case with gadding about, with gaming, with love affairs—as with many other such things, which are not fitting to discuss here at length. With reading, it is otherwise: each of us can manage it herself according to her

² Since the definitions of Italian words have changed since the sixteenth century, I have consulted the dictionary of the Accademia della Crusca for denotations and connotations of words in the period. Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario Della Lingua Italiana* / già compilato dagli Accademici della Crusca ed ora novamente corretto ed accresciuto dal cavaliere abate Giuseppe Manuzzi. For *spassi*, the dictionary gives the following: *passatempo*, *trastullo*, Latin: *voluptas*, *ambulatium ire*; Greek, $\pi \epsilon \pi \iota \alpha \tau \epsilon \iota \upsilon$.

own will: we can do so whether alone or accompanied by others; whether we read a lot or a little; without expense, without perils, without the risk [of harm] or [the afflictions of] anxiety,³ in sum, [the end result of reading is] full contentment and satisfaction with ourselves. And if this singularly perfect solace, this great elevation of the spirit, is universally accessible, shared by every man and every woman not completely base and vile in spirit, then it is much more useful and necessary to women: Giovanni Boccaccio knew this very well, and demonstrated as much in the preface to his *Decameron*, where he declares at length that he applied himself to the task of writing this book almost entirely for the uplifting of women alone. However, he can be faulted on one count: would that he had only known well enough to elect to do one very important thing, and equally important, to avoid another—he would have been worthy of the highest praise if only he had taken his own advice and followed fully his intention to create something truly appreciated by true ladies, with respect to them, and to himself, as well as to other men who are honest and noble in spirit. That one thing he neglected to do was to write in verse: for one reads verse with much more pleasure than one does prose—so much more effectively does it make an impression upon our souls, and with such pleasing affect does it leave its form upon our memories.⁴ The other thing that he did not know to do, or elect to do, either by a great imperfection of judgment or due to an imperfection in his nature in not wanting to avoid them, was to put so many truly filthy, unchaste, and wicked things

³ Synonyms given include *perturbazione*, *molestia*; Latin, *afflictio*, *anxietas*; Greek, $\alpha \nu \iota \alpha$. (Accademia della Crusca, *op cit*). The author seems to be comparing reading to other fleeting, anxiety-producing pleasures.

⁴ Aragona's metaphor for memory as a (literal) impression is similar to Dante's image of "recollecting" Paradiso in the act of writing poetry: "Qual è colui che sognando vede./che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa/rimane, e altro a la mente non riede, cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa/mia visione. e ancor mi distilla nel core il dolce che nacque da essa." (Like one who dreaming, sees, and after the dream the passion remains imprinted [on the memory] and nothing else comes to mind, such a one was I, my vision

that one can see them from one end to the other, throughout this book, unapologetically, without regard for the honor of married women, nor widows, nor nuns, nor those who are secular virgins by choice, nor godmothers, nor godfathers, nor friends among themselves, nor priests, nor monks, nor finally even prelates, nor Christ, nor God himself, as one can gain fame and glory from such filthy *novelle*, and from so many wicked words such as his. And thus do they treat Christ, so as to put horns on his head, and that of many others besides, so that it is truly astonishing, how not only princes and nobility but also thieves and traitors that nevertheless call themselves Christians, have never permitted themselves to hear that name without making the sign of the cross, and without covering their ears, as at the most atrocious, horrendous, and wicked thing, that can be heard by human ears. But our nature is so corrupt, that not only do we not flee from such a thing as from an abomination, but it [the book] is so much in demand, so desired by everyone, that it has risen in such esteem, that they have called him the father of the [Tuscan] language, the Tuscan Cicero, and finally to move [Ludovico] Dolce, Ruscelli, and my own [Pietro] Bembo, and many other rare intellects to make him the rule, to explicate him, to declare him famous, and to exalt him above the seven heavens. Therefore it has not been a marvel if, ambitious to attain that kind of glory, others apply themselves to create Nannas and Pippas and Errant Prostitutes, and finally that book which has most certainly offended the majesty of the most noble city of Siena, knowing that it was made from persons born and raised there. Therefore, I—having had in my early years more knowledge of the world than now, with more wisdom, I would wish to have had—have seen in myself and in

ceased almost entirely, and yet in my heart is distilled the sweetness born from it.") *Paradiso* XXXIII 58-63.

many others how much harm there is in the discussion (*ragionamento*)⁵ and in the reading of ugly and lascivious things. On the other hand knowing how much women—and men—are ardently desirous to read and hear pleasing things, I spent some time researching almost all the books of history and poetry that our language has to offer. Therefore, as I have said, I resolved that poetry, in many respects and principally in its formal aspect, is more appreciated by everyone than all the other forms. I found, in the end, that the Morgantes, the Ancroias, the Bovi d'Antonas, the Leandras, the Mambrianos, and finally Ariosto himself do not lack the great vice of containing lascivious, shameful, and unworthy things, that not only nuns, young women, or widows, nor married women, nor even public women if it should happen that they are allowed to see them by chance, for after all it is not a new thing that a woman, by necessity or through some other bad fortune that might befall her, should happen to fall into corporeal error and nevertheless appear to be unfitting, shameful, and indecorous in her speech and in other things, perhaps appearing so to others more than to herself. I say therefore, with this my most constant and fervent desire, to find some delightful and pleasing book to read, in which shameful and ugly things are not to be found, I after having pored through over all the books I could get my hands on, finally found this very lovely book in the Spanish language, in which are found so many, and such varied things, that I know of no other book more pleasing, joyful in its essence that exists in any language. And then it was so completely chaste, so pure, and so Christian that neither in word, nor example, nor in any other manner, could it be considered a work that any honorable and holy man, any married woman, any virgin, widow, or nun could not read at any time. Thus always from

⁵ Given the references to the characters Nanna and Pippa in Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* in the previous sentence, the word *ragionamento* is meant to evoke not only the "discussion" of lascivious things but also

beginning to end it is obvious that the author of this book had had thought to draw out the souls of women as well as men of honest, just, and holy lives with elegance, with sweetness, with aesthetic pleasure, and with the greatest delight. But I, seeing that in this book was missing that most important quality in order to achieve perfection (as I mentioned earlier, that is the pleasing elegance of verse) being that its author had written in prose, I, through my efforts, with pleasure, and furthermore, if possible, to do something useful and gracious in the world, prepared myself to render it into verse. And having considered and understood from many people of prudent judgment the diversity of styles in these books written in *ottava rima*, that as long as these books are to be found, it seems that some go slithering on the earth on their bellies, so that every soul who is not base and vile disdains to even see them, let alone delight in reading them. One encounters others, who--having aspired to please almost exclusively the learned--have lifted themselves up so much, that not only the average reader, principally women, but also the learned themselves have much difficulty understanding them in many places; and they have trouble making themselves understood, and the result is an endless stream of commentaries, and textual explications, as [one sees] in books of law or philosophy. Therefore I have sought to remain among those who have followed the middle way, like Pulci principally, and Boiardo, and Mambriano. These have not yet remained to pass the test of time according to these criteria, that insofar as style is concerned, having both accessible utility and the added charm of delight, seemed to me to be appropriate. In language, then, I have chosen to follow the dialect not of one sole province but of all of our Italy, and that which is spoken by illustrious and judicious persons. In this respect I have always valued the opinion, the counsel, and the aid of as many prudent and learned

the pornographic text itself, the "dialogues" of an unrepentant, opportunistic prostitute and her daughter.

people as I could possibly have. With sincere and free advice of those, I confide in having sought to give the world a book, of being most gracious in every part, and able to be read with full delight and utility by every sort of person of honest and good will. That this will be, as I desire and hope, your office, most noble spirits, to accept only my good intentions, and to give all praise to God alone, from whom comes every good thing and to whom alone I recognize this great grace to have, in my age not yet overly mature, but youthful and fresh, been given light to commend myself with my whole heart to him, and to desire and exhort others, as much as I can, to do the same, thus, equally, men as well as women.

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