GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD

Edited by Virginia Cox and Shannon McHugh

Vittoria Colonna

Poetry, Religion, Art, Impact

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Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

Series editors: James Daybell (Chair), Victoria E. Burke, Svante Norrhem, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks

This series provides a forum for studies that investigate women, gender, and/or sexuality in the late medieval and early modern world. The editors invite proposals for book-length studies of an interdisciplinary nature, including, but not exclusively, from the fields of history, literature, art and architectural history, and visual and material culture. Consideration will be given to both monographs and collections of essays. Chronologically, we welcome studies that look at the period between 1400 and 1700, with a focus on any part of the world, as well as comparative and global works. We invite proposals including, but not limited to, the following broad themes: methodologies, theories and meanings of gender; gender, power and political culture; monarchs, courts and power; constructions of femininity and masculinity; gift-giving, diplomacy and the politics of exchange; gender and the politics of early modern archives; gender and architectural spaces (courts, salons, household); consumption and material culture; objects and gendered power; women's writing; gendered patronage and power; gendered activities, behaviours, rituals and fashions.

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In memory of Giovanna Rabitti (1956–2008)

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Introduction: The Twenty-First Century Vittoria Colonna

Virginia Cox

Abstract
Although—unusually, for an early modern woman writer—Vittoria Colonna has long been considered part of the canon, several factors have inhibited a true appreciation of her importance as a literary innovator and model. The current critical moment is conducive to a re-examination of her significance, in the light of recent research on the early modern Italian tradition of women's writing, on the Catholic Reform movement and its literary expression, and on developments in Italian literature in the last four decades of the sixteenth century. Consideration of these factors reveal Colonna as a figure of wide-reaching influence in her time and a powerful shaping influence on later traditions of Italian literature, in the late Renaissance and beyond.

Keywords: Vittoria Colonna, religious verse, Petrarchism, women writers, literary canons

Vittoria Colonna is perhaps the outstanding female figure of the Italian Renaissance, celebrated as a leading Petrarchist poet and an important figure in the Italian Reform movement. Colonna was also remarkable for the quality of her relationships, as attested in her letters and epistolary verse. She corresponded with figures of the stature of Baldassare Castiglione, Pietro Bembo, Reginald Pole, Marguerite de Navarre and Charles V, and she had a famously intimate friendship with Michelangelo Buonarroti, to whom an important manuscript collection of her verse is addressed. Her connections with the world of art were many and complex, and several important commissions are associated with her name.

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Colonna's impact as poet, both immediate and retrospective, was crucially interconnected with her social and moral persona, or rather the intriguing series of personae she inhabited across her life: as devoted young Penelope, holding court in Ischia in her husband's absence; as Artemisia-like incarnation of inconsolable widowhood; as religious guru and icon, compared by Luca Contile to the Queen of Sheba in her spiritual wisdom.[1] Used with due historical sensitivity, the modern notion of celebrity can properly be used to describe her; certainly, by the time of her death, she enjoyed genuine national fame among the fairly broad cultural elite constituted by the literate in Italy (and seemingly rather beyond it, among those who accessed literary culture orally, as Abigail Brundin's essay for this volume suggests).[2] Among women writers of the period, her only true counterpart in terms of the interaction of literary and extra-literary celebrity is Marguerite de Navarre, to whom she wrote a revealing letter on gender and fame and the role of ethical exemplars in self-modelling.[3] Within Italy, Veronica Gambara offers the closest point of comparison, as a political actor and cultural patron, as well as a poet of note.[4]

Like Gambara and Navarre, Colonna is unusual among early modern women writers in that she can in no way be figured as a modern 'discovery' or 'rediscovery'. She was the object of immense admiration during her lifetime, and she has remained part of the canon ever since. The low point of her history was undoubtedly the seventeenth century (no new edition of her work appeared between 1586 and 1692), but she was hardly forgotten even during this era.[5] From the time of the eighteenth-century Arcadia movement onwards, meanwhile, she has remained a salient presence within Italian literary history, in terms of editions, biographies, anthologization,

1 On Colonna as Penelope and Artemisia, see Cox 2016a: 476, 490, 493–4, 499. For Contile's remarks, see Asso 2009: 230.

2 For discussion of the applicability of the notion of celebrity to early modern culture, see Rublack 2011; García-Reidy 2018, esp. 165–6.

3 Cox 2016a: 472–4. For a comparative discussion of Colonna and Navarre, see Rabitti 2006: 482–91.

4 On the role of Colonna and Gambara in establishing the persona of the female poet in Italy in the 1530s, see Cox 2008: 64–79. For a study and bilingual edition of Gambara, see Gambara 2014. Colonna's political agency and her public role within the Colonna clan have been studied less than other aspects of her persona, though see Robin 2007: 79–101; D'Amelia 2016; Magalhães 2019.

5 On Colonna's stable place in the canon, see Cox 2005a. On her fortunes in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Cox 2008: 170, 198–200, 218, 226, 230–1; Cox 2011: 2–3, 56–7; Cox 2016a: 471. See also the essays by Abigail Brundin, Shannon McHugh, Andrea Torre, and Anna Wainwright in this volume.

and research.[6] Nor was her fortune limited to Italy, either during her lifetime or later. She enjoyed a remarkable period of interest in Victorian England, for example, as an incarnation of the 'matchless beauty of widowhood' and as Michelangelo's great, Beatrice-like love.[7]

Despite the relative stability of her canonical status, it still seems fair to say that recent decades have seen a sharp improvement in Colonna's fortunes, after a long period in the twentieth century when she was the subject of respectful, but rather static, critical interest, running along well-established and relatively narrow lines. This is especially true of studies of Colonna as a writer, as opposed to a religious actor and thinker.[8] As a poet, Colonna suffered from the negative evaluation placed on Petrarchism for much of the twentieth century, as a tradition of verse that privileged formal correctness and polish over inspiration, imitation over originality, and artifice over 'sincerity'. As a historical personality, Colonna also suffered somewhat from the very qualities that contributed to the appeal that she held for readers of earlier centuries: her high birth, her moral uprightness, her strenuous incarnation of faithful and devoted widowhood, her nun-like, ascetic religiosity. Other sixteenth-century women writers, such as Gaspara Stampa and Veronica Franco, proved more appropriable to post-Romantic models of critical reading and biography than either Colonna or Gambara.[9] Both Stampa and Franco could be cast as fresh and original voices within the lyric tradition, and as relatively low-born, socially marginal women who used their talents to stake a place within the cultural elite of their city. Beside the passionate Stampa and the witty, outrageous Franco, Colonna and Gambara could look chilly and off-putting: prim, silver-spooned darlings of a patriarchal culture whose values they unthreateningly embraced.

Several factors in the scholarship of the past few decades have enabled a fresh look at Colonna. First, studies of Petrarchism have finally shaken off the last remnants of the legacy of post-Romantic diffidence. As scholarly

6 On Colonna's reception in the Italian eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Chemello 2000; Teotochi Albrizzi 2009; Chemello 2016: 11–3. See also Tatiana Crivelli's essay in this volume. For a comparative view of Colonna's critical history from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, relative to other early modern female poets, see Cox (ed.) 2013: 38–44.

7 See Østermark-Johansen 1998: 141–90; Østermark-Johansen 1999; Strowe 2018.

8 Key in reviving interest in Colonna's poetry in the 1980s were Carlo Dionisotti's influential 1981 essay on her poetic relationship with Bembo (Dionisotti 2002) and Alan Bullock's critical edition (Colonna 1982). Prior to this, Thérault 1968 is an important study of Colonna's literary circle in Ischia.

9 See McHugh 2013: 345–6. The same applies, for very different reasons, both to traditional Italian criticism, influenced by Benedetto Croce's notion of *letteratura femminile* (on which see Cox (ed.) 2013: 41–2), and to much Anglophone feminist criticism of the 1980s and 90s.

interests have shifted away from a prescriptive conception of lyric poetry as the pure and untrammelled expression of a supposed inner self, Petrarchism has revealed itself as a fascinating literary and sociohistorical phenomenon: a language that allowed considerable flexibility of usage, beneath an apparent uniformity, and that lent itself admirably to the crafting of social identities, by both entitled and less entitled figures. We come to the lyric poetry of the sixteenth century with a more varied set of questions than were addressed to it in the past: questions about the ways in which this highly codified language could be bent to particular poets' social and cultural and political agendas; questions about how this poetry was materially produced and circulated, and how it was read and recited and generally put to use.

This development has immensely enriched studies of Colonna, as well as that of other poets of the era. To take one example, Colonna has benefitted greatly from the current fascination with the material circulation of texts, and the relationship between print and manuscript, and between elite and popular print culture. The extreme complexity and intricacy of the history of the transmission of Colonna's verse, which makes her something of a nightmare for prospective editors, lends her absorbing interest as a case study for anyone concerned with reception and circulation.[10] At the same time, critics' increasing alertness to the sociohistorical dimension of Petrarchist lyric has helped expose the originality and historical import of the identity work carried out by Colonna in her verse, and the immense role she played in carving out a place for the female speaking subject within a tradition up to her time of writing that was almost exclusively male before her time.[11]

A further scholarly tendency in recent decades that has benefitted studies of Colonna is, of course, the vast surge of interest in women's social roles and cultural contributions that we have seen in all humanities fields from the 1980s onwards. This trend is perceptible to a limited extent within the Italian tradition of scholarship, but it is far more salient elsewhere, particularly in the English-speaking world, where studies of women, and, more broadly, of gender, have transformed literary-critical methodologies in profound and far-reaching ways.

Where studies of Italian literary history are concerned, a massive, collective work of rediscovery has taken place over recent decades, which has

10 See Brundin 2016b and Crivelli 2016 for exhaustive overviews of the circulation of Colonna's verse in manuscript and in print in the sixteenth century; see also Lalli 2015; Toscano 2017; Cajelli 2018, 106–9; Richardson 2020, 4–9, 95; and the chapters by Abigail Brundin and Humberto González Chávez in this volume.

11 See Rabitti 2000; Sapegno 2003; Cox 2005a; Cox 2005b; Cox 2008: 64–79; Stella 2019.

cumulatively transformed our understanding of the tradition of women's writing in Renaissance Italy. To summarize briefly, it has emerged that there was a far stronger tradition of writing, and especially published writing, by women in Italy than has often been thought in the past. Further, it is now clear that this tradition was far more durable over time than has often been thought; it began in the fifteenth century and lasted right through until the early seventeenth century, after which stylistic shifts and a 'misogynistic turn' within elite Italian culture effectively marginalized women writers until their emphatic return in the following century.[12] Although the tradition of women's writing has revealed itself as especially strong and precocious in Italy, scholars have documented the emergence of important traditions of women's writing in other European contexts, especially from the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[13] We now have a much richer and more comprehensive picture of the extent and shape of women's participation in literary production in the entire early modern period, across Europe and beyond.

This reframing of women's literary history in Italy has important consequences for Colonna's reputation. Throughout much of the later twentieth century, the standard historiographical position was that women emerged as published writers in Italy only during a brief, intense season in the 1540s and 50s, with no more than a few outliers outside these chronological parameters, notably Veronica Franco in the 1570s.[14] Even within this limited historical time frame, Vittoria Colonna's importance was already clear; she was the first identified woman poet whose work appeared in print, in 1538, and the success of her work encouraged publishers to seek out and publish other women writers. Now that we can see the longer vista, however, Colonna's historical importance emerges even more clearly. She was the key prototype and inspiration for later Italian women writers down to the eighteenth century, in ways that can be traced very clearly at a textual level, as the essays in this volume by Tatiana Crivelli, Andrea Torre and Anna Wainwright intriguingly illustrate. Indeed, as Crivelli's and Wainwright's essays show, later women writers not only imitated Colonna in their verse as a means of self-authorization; they sometimes also incorporated tributes to her

12 For overviews, see Cox 2008 and 2011. On the contrasting place of gender within English-language and Italian-language studies of Italian literature, see Cox and Ferrari (eds.) 2012: 7-29. See also, more generally, on women's relationship with textual culture in Italy, Richardson 2020.

13 Recent overviews, citing earlier bibliography, include Phillippy (ed.) 2018 (England); Van Elk 2017 (England and Holland); Baranda and Cruz (eds.) 2017 (Spain).

14 This position was influentially stated in Dionisotti 1999: 237–9 (first published in 1965).

auctoritas as poet and positioned themselves explicitly in her wake.[15] As Giovanna Rabitti first observed in the 1990s, this self-modelling on Colonna had an existential, as well as a poetic, component; her moral exemplarity, as faithful and devoted wife and widow, as stately public figure, and as model of piety, made her a valuable source of cultural capital for women down to the age of Arcadia and beyond.

This material is of interest beyond its contribution to the study of Colonna, important though it is in that regard. An instance as clear as this of an enduring and articulated tradition of female-female imitation and citation offers a challenge to those approaches to women's writing that tend to position female writers solely in relation to 'mainstream' (i.e. male) literary models, whether they are positioned as disciples or as rebels. While no one would deny the immense formative influence of Dante and Petrarch on the Italian lyric tradition, both male-authored and female-authored—nor, later, the influence of Bembo, and Tasso, and Marino—female poets' strategies of *imitatio* are emerging as more complex and gender-inflected than has tended to be assumed in the past. In view of this, it may be of interest to Colonna studies in future to investigate Colonna's own influences more closely, with an eye to possible maternal, as well as paternal, lines in her literary and existential DNA. A striking contribution to this task is Unn Falkeid's essay in this volume on the parallels between Colonna's religious persona and that of a previous, Rome-based, pious aristocratic widow: Saint Birgitta, or Bridget, of Sweden, who may well have served her as a model. Further productive lines of inquiry might lead back through Colonna's own literal maternal genealogy, which boasted an extraordinary line of women distinguished by learning and piety, stretching back to her great-great-great-grandmother Battista da Montefeltro (1384–1447), who ended her life a Clarissan nun and vernacular religious poet, and incorporating also, more tangentially, the nun and mystic Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524).[16]

In addition to the developments noted above, a further recent phenomenon within Italian literary historiography that has significant implications for our understanding of Colonna's historical importance is the emerging

15 For further discussion and exemplification on this point, see Rabitti 1992: 149–55; Rabitti 2000; Cox 2005a; Cox 2008: 114–5.

16 The writings of Varano, a cousin of Vittoria Colonna's great-grandmother Costanza Varano (1426–47), who was also famous for her learning, circulated widely in the early sixteenth century; see Dejure 2015; Hudon 2018. On Battista da Montefeltro's life, see Falcioni 2012; on her religious verse (still relatively under-studied), Sanzotta 2010: 73–6, citing previous bibliography. Colonna's maternal forebears also include Costanza Varano's daughter Battista Sforza, Countess of Urbino (1446–72), on whose humanistic learning see Cox 2016c.

scholarly interest in the long-neglected literature of the later sixteenth century in Italy. The religious literature of this period, in particular, was condemned to near-oblivion within the late nineteenth and twentieth-century critical traditions, as a result of ideological prejudices regarding the supposed deleterious effects of the Counter-Reformation on Italian culture. Over the past fifteen years or so, this prejudice has begun to be dispelled, and an ever-increasing flow of high-quality scholarship is now appearing in this area, mainly in Italy to date, but also, to a more limited extent, beyond. Among the contributors to this volume are the editors of a recent volume on *Innovation in the Italian Counter-Reformation*, which promises to help bring this still somewhat arcane field of study into the academic mainstream within the English-speaking world.[17]

As the literature of this later period becomes more generally known, Colonna's status as poet will inevitably grow. Rather than being seen as one of a group of highly talented mid-century Petrarchist poets, most salient for her gender, she will increasingly come to be seen as a pivotal figure, anticipating and influencing many trends of the later sixteenth century. Most strikingly, she stands at the head of an important and innovative new sub-genre of lyric poetry, the tradition of Petrarchizing religious verse known as *rime spirituali*, which flourished powerfully across the second half of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth-century Baroque. The originality and richness of the poetic language Colonna developed in her religious verse has come to be increasingly recognized in recent years, but the full extent of her influence on the subsequent tradition of religious lyric is only now beginning to become clear.[18] Poets and readers of *rime spirituali*, not only in Italy but throughout Europe, recognized Colonna's stature as originator of the genre. Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–79) alludes to her priority in this regard in the dedicatory letter to his groundbreaking 'moral' collection, *Cento sonetti* (1549), noting that Colonna 'had shown the world that sonnets do not need always to be matched to amorous subject matter, but they are apt for any other honourable subject, however holy

17 See *Innovation*. Two essays in the volume, Cox 2020 and Quondam 2020, address the historiographical issues noted in this paragraph. See also Ditchfield 2008.

18 The innovative quality of Colonna's poetic language more generally—and the inadequacy of 'Petrarchism' as a formula for fully comprehending the work of a poet who also draws powerfully on other sources, such as Dante's *Commedia*—is emphasized in Sapegno 2018. On Colonna's religious poetry, see Bardazzi 2001; Colonna 2005; Brundin 2008; Brundin 2016a; Cavallini 2016; Sapegno 2016: esp. 179–94; Copello 2020; Colonna 2020, and the chapter by Sarah Rolfe Prodan in this volume. For a full survey of the critical literature, see Cajelli 2018.

and grave it may be'.[19] The religious poet and theorist Gabriele Fiamma (1533–85), in his influential 1570 *Rime spirituali*, authoritatively defined her as 'the first to write with dignity on spiritual matters in rhyme'.[20] Outside Italy, we find a similar preeminence accorded to Colonna by the Spanish Dominican Pedro de Encinas in a universal history of Christian poetry, of 1597. Encinas places Colonna—whom he ranks as the stylistic equal of Petrarch—at the head of the vernacular tradition of religious verse, followed by Fiamma himself, and Luigi Tansillo.[21] Interesting hands-on evidence of Colonna's influence on the tradition of *rime spirituali* is offered by a working manuscript by Bernardo Tasso (1493– 1569), dating to the mid-1550s, when Tasso was composing the influential psalm translations included in his 1560 *Rime*. This contains two pages of citations drawn from Colonna's religious lyrics, presumably copied as material for reuse.[22]

It was not only with regard to the tradition of spiritual lyric that Colonna was recognized as a model and an innovator. A further thematic development in later sixteenth-century poetry that attests vividly to her impact is the new tradition of lyric verse celebrating marital love, taken up first by a number of younger male poets in Colonna's circles in Naples, including Bernardo Tasso and Berardino Rota (1508–75), and later practised by both male and female poets, notably Francesca Turina (1553–1641), Giuliano Goselini (1525–87), and Orsatto Giustinian (1538–1603).[23] Colonna's poems for her dead husband, Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos (1489–1525), often referred to as her *rime amorose* or *rime vedovili*, reconfigured marriage as a passionate, intense, spiritually defining love affair, thus making this most un-Petrarchan of experiences 'speakable' in Petrarchan language. Thematics apart, it is not uncommon to find Colonna cited as stylistically exemplary, a model to rank with the

19 'ha fatto conoscere al mondo che non è necessario, come stimano alcuni, che a sola materia amorosa s'accommodino i sonetti sempre, ma ad ogni altro onorato soggetto son atti ancora, per santo e grave che egli sia'. Piccolomini 2015: 53–4. It is possible that Colonna's influence on Piccolomini extended to his choice to publish a collection of a hundred sonnets, given that Bembo possessed a manuscript of hers around 1540 comprising 'a hundred very beautiful sonnets … all religious and holy' (*cento molto belli sonetti … tutti religiosi e santi*). See Toscano 2017: 234; and also Albonico 2006: 43.

20 'la prima … a scrivere con dignità in rima le cose spirituali'. Fiamma 1570: letter to the reader, unnumbered. For discussion, see Cox 2011: 34–6. Both Piccolomini and Fiamma dedicated their works to younger members of the Colonna family, respectively her niece and nephew, Vittoria and Marcantonio Colonna.

21 Núñez Rivera 2010: 32.

22 Morace 2015: 70. The MS is Biblioteca Oliveriana, Pesaro, 1399. On Tasso's poetic relationship with Colonna see, more generally, Magalhães 2020. Another important spiritual lyricist influenced by Colonna is Angelo Grillo (1557–1629): see McHugh 2020: 155-8.

23 See the essay by Shannon McHugh in this volume.

finest poets of the Italian lyric tradition: a singular distinction, within a culture in which it was more customary to keep canons of male and female poets distinct.[24]

It can hardly be over-emphasized how important these findings are for the study of Italian literature. Scholars of English and French literature are accustomed to thinking about the fundamental role that female authors played in the early development of the novel, but it is not easy within the Italian tradition to identify literary genres or traditions within which women have been recognized as progenitors and leaders, rather than as disciples or followers. The only exception is medieval mystical writing, where women had an important role in the shaping of the tradition, although the equivocal character of many texts within that tradition, which often reach us in the transcriptions of mystics' male confessors or associates, makes the parallel somewhat inexact.[25] Thinking of Colonna not—or not exclusively—as an imitator of Petrarch, but as a powerful model for imitation herself for male and female writers of future generations is an exercise that involves rethinking or disrupting the history of Italian literature as it has generally been told, at least within the nineteenth and twentieth-century critical traditions. An essay in this volume that eloquently exemplifies this disruptive effect is Tatiana Crivelli's revisionist account of the history of the Arcadia movement, emphasizing the central role that Colonna played within the literary ideals of the first custodian of the Arcadian Academy, Giovan Mario Crescimbeni (1663–1728).

In addition to the newer trends highlighted here, current work on Colonna is also enabled by longer-established developments, such as the tradition of studies on the Italian Reform movement, dating back to the studies of Delio Cantimori in the 1930s. This tradition has continued to flourish in recent years and has broadened in scope and sophistication; it now extends beyond the field of religious history, where it originated, into fields such as literary studies and art history.[26] Of special relevance to this volume is the vein of

24 Piccolomini names Colonna alongside Petrarch and Pietro Bembo as the three finest Italian lyric poets of the modern era: see Piccolomini 2015: 56; cfr. Refini 2007, 26–8. For examples of tributes to Colonna's stylistic excellence in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Cox 2011: 56–7.

25 The extent of Colonna's acquaintance with the medieval tradition of female mysticism is an interesting one. See Chemello 2016, 25–9 on Colonna's spiritual letters, which reprise a common mystic genre; also, Unn Falkeid's essay in this volume.

26 This literature is too copious to survey in this context. On Colonna's relationship to Italian Reform contexts, see, for example, Bardazzi 2001; Brundin 2008; Forcellino 2009; Bowd 2016; Camaioni 2016; Campi 2016; Fragnito 2016, all building on important earlier work of the 1980s and

studies that focuses on the distinctive religious culture of the Reformist circles to which Colonna and Michelangelo belonged and the ways in which it influenced their artistic and literary output.[27] Religious history similarly provides a rich context for the studies of other art works associated with Colonna or known to be commissioned on her behalf.

As this rapid survey indicates, the present moment is a highly propitious one for studies of Vittoria Colonna, whose stature as one of the pivotal figures of sixteenth-century Italian elite culture has perhaps never been clearer. The past fifteen years have seen the publication of the first English-language monograph devoted to Colonna in over a century; of a comprehensive 'companion', covering all aspects of her life and religious and cultural engagement; of an important volume of essays reporting the proceedings of an international conference held at the American Academy in Rome; and of an English-language biography, which will do a great deal to extend her reputation beyond specialist academic circles.[28] A new Italian biography has also recently appeared, focused particularly on Colonna's artistic connections and her relationship with Michelangelo.[29] Bilingual, annotated editions of substantial portions of Colonna's verse, and a selection of her letters, are now available for Anglophone readers.[30] In Italian, the first exercises in detailed annotation of Colonna's verse have appeared in the last few years, including a complete annotated edition of the important manuscript of her poetry assembled as a gift for Michelangelo (Vat. lat. 11539).[31] Work is also

90s by Massimo Firpo and Concetta Ranieri. See also Cajelli 2018, 115–18 for a full bibliographical survey.

27 See, for example, Nagel 1997; D'Elia 2006; Brundin 2008; Prodan 2014; Forcellino 2016; Moroncini 2017; also Cajelli 2018, 118–22, for further bibliography and discussion.

28 See Brundin 2008; *Companion*; Sapegno; Targoff 2018. Other recent conferences centred on Colonna are listed in Cajelli 2018, 124–5. Cajelli's article offers an invaluable survey of recent trends in the study of Colonna's life and works. See also Volta 2018 for detailed discussion of studies on Colonna published in 2016–7, and Magalhães 2019, 139, n2 for citations of works on her from 2018–9. Other recent publications of note are Mattioda 2016; Copello 2019a, b, and c; Stella 2019; and Copello 2020.

29 Donati 2019. Although useful, Donati's biography has several eccentric aspects, including a relative lack of interest in Colonna's poetry and a curious insistence on her physical unattractiveness (which the author represents as a corrective to other scholars' purported idealization of her beauty).

30 The main bilingual editions are Colonna 2005, Cox (ed.) 2013, *passim*, and Colonna 2021. For the edition of the letters, see Colonna 2022.

31 Colonna 2020. See also Chemello 2014; Bardazzi 2016; Mazzoncini 2017.

progressing on a complete edition of her correspondence.[32] This is not to deny that further work is needed to bring scholarship on Colonna up to the level one might expect for a writer of her stature and influence. To state only the most obvious gaps, a reliable critical edition of Colonna's collected verse is urgently required, to replace Alan Bullock's much-criticized edition of 1982, while no modern edition exists to date of her religious prose writings, other than an English translation of her *Pianto sulla passione di Christo*.[33]

The aim of the present volume is, on the one hand, to reflect the current, flourishing state of Italian and Anglophone studies of Colonna; and, on the other, to point to new directions for the future. A groundbreaking feature of the volume, picked out in the title, is the richness of the attention it devotes to Colonna's impact, both on her contemporaries and on future generations of readers and writers. The essays by Tatiana Crivelli, Shannon McHugh, Andrea Torre and Anna Wainwright focus on Colonna's influence on later poetic traditions; while those by Abigail Brundin and Humberto González Chávez offer perspectives on her contemporary reception, and Jessica Maratsos's contribution examines in parallel the reception of Colonna's and Michelangelo's religious art. In addition to their value in illuminating Colonna's place in literary history, the chapters by McHugh, Torre and Wainwright offer rare instances of detailed studies of later sixteenth-century literature, focused on authors such as Goselini, Giustinian, Turina, and Lucia Colao (fl. 1600), who are likely to be mere names—at most—even to specialists in early modern Italian literature.

A further aim of the volume is to explore and illuminate Colonna's social and religious personae, and her networks and patronage, in a way that can help to illuminate her complex status within Italian culture during her lifetime. Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi examines the key locus for Colonna's early formation in the 'court' of Costanza d'Avalos on Ischia, emphasizing its connections with the humanist academy of Giovanni Pontano in Naples. Ramie Targoff reconstructs Colonna's relationship with Reginald Pole, one of the most important and charged of her spiritual friendships. Anna Wainwright and Unn Falkeid locate Colonna within the important context of widowhood, so key to her public and private identity in later life: a point illustrated also by Veronica Copello's examination of a little-studied exchange of Latin epigrams between Colonna and the Ferrarese humanist Daniele

32 Interim publications relating to this important project may be found in Copello 2019a and b.

33 Colonna 2008. The critical literature generated by Bullock's edition is discussed in Cajelli 2018: 109–12.

Fini. Sarah Rolfe Prodan looks at Colonna's religious writings through the lens of her use of the Bible and of biblical figures, arguing that they enact a spiritually engaged form of reading and meditation, implicitly proposed as a model to others as well as a personal spiritual exercise. Finally, the essays by Dennis Geronimus and Christopher Nygren examine commissions of religious paintings associated with Colonna, respectively by Pontormo and Titian, in ways that illuminate both the artistic language and the social and religious contexts of these works.

Two points about Colonna come through powerfully within the essays in this volume, in addition to the volume's central argument about her profound and durable influence on Italian culture. One is the extent and richness of her social engagement: a detail that editorial choices of her verse, historical and modern, have often conspired to obscure. As Maria Serena Sapegno underlines in her chapter on the 'epistolary Vittoria', Colonna's verse was originally written and circulated within the 'thick', sociable, dialogic context characteristic of scribal publication. It attests, just as much as her letters, to the extraordinary network of religious and secular relationships which nurtured her thought and writings, and which also—as Nygren's and Geronimus's chapters emphasize—served as a vibrant context for the generation of art. The second point that comes through within the volume's chapters as a whole is the novelty, complexity, and multi-facetedness of the cultural archetype Colonna represented: a factor that accounts in great part for her utility as a figure to 'think with', both for her contemporaries and followers, and for us, as critics and readers today.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

Companion	*A Companion to Vittoria Colonna* (2016) ed. A Brundin, T. Crivelli and M. S. Sapegno. Leiden.
DBI	*Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (1960–). Rome.
GSLI	*Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*
Innovation	*Innovation in the Italian Counter-Reformation* (2020) ed. S. McHugh and A. Wainwright. Newark, DE.
Sapegno	*Al crocevia della storia. Poesia, religione e politica in Vittoria Colonna* (2016) ed. M. S. Sapegno. Rome.

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