

GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD



Shannon McHugh

Petrarch and the Making of Gender in Renaissance Italy

Amsterdam
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Press

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Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

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For Séamus

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words sufficient for Anna Wainwright, but if I did, they would probably look something like the poetry between Orsatto Giustinian and Celio Magno.

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And to Séamus, to whom this book is dedicated, and whose arrival in the middle of my Petrarchan research was unexpected capstone to my training in love. *Benedetto sia 'l giorno.*

Introduction

*Nor did the ancients portray Venus only with beautiful hair, but also with a beard ...
so that the goddess bore the signs of both male and female.*

– Vincenzo Cartari¹

In the twenty-first century, it is increasingly common to understand gender and sexuality as fluid. Ours is not, however, the first generation in history to arrive at this insight. The popular Renaissance mythography by Vincenzo Cartari (c. 1531–after 1571), *Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi* (Images of the Gods of the Ancients, 1556), is an example of the extent to which early modern readers felt at ease in the unsettled expanse between traditional markers of gender. In his catalogue of the iconographic tradition of Venus, beside the helpful marginal marker *Venere con la barba* (Bearded Venus), Cartari describes how sometimes the ancients represented the goddess with facial hair, as in a sacred statue found on Cyprus “whose face and mien appeared to be that of a man, but who was dressed as a woman.”² In the 1571 edition, a woodcut was added, which provided a double portrait of Venus, side by side in two guises: on the left, shrouded in traditional women’s mourning garments for Adonis, her fallen lover; on the right, the bigendered, bearded Venus, with male face and feminine attire (fig. 0.1).³

An early modern, gender-fluid portrayal of the goddess of love is a fitting opening for this book, which reveals how Italian men and women

1 Cartari 1556, 117r: “Ne solamente con le chiome la fecero gli antichi, ma con la barba anchora ... accioche questa Dea havesse l’insegna e di maschio, e di femina.” The modifier “beautiful” does not appear explicitly in the excerpt quoted here but is implied from the prior line of Italian prose (*bellissimi capelli*, “beautiful hair,” 116v), and so I have included it in my translation for clarity. I thank Justine DeCamillis of the Folger Shakespeare Library for bringing this fabulous figure to my attention. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Early modern Italian spelling and punctuation have been modernized minimally throughout.

2 Cartari 1556, 117r: “laquale di faccia, e di aspetto pareva huomo, ma poi haveva intorno vesti di donna.” On the bearded Venus in Cartari, see Johnston 2007, 15–17. On beards and gender in the Renaissance, see Johnston 2007; Biow 2015, 181–224.

3 Cartari 1571, 550. The text on the bearded Venus is unchanged from the 1556 printing.



Figure 0.1: Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi con figure nuovamente stampate*. Venice: Ziletti, 1571. Illustration of “bearded Venus” (*Venere con la barba*), 552. RB 375693, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

used Petrarchism as a vehicle with which to move fluidly between the poles of conventionally constructed masculinity and femininity.⁴ What is surprising is not so much that these poets worked in the space between

4 Petrarch and Cartari are further linked in that the structure for *Le imagini* was apparently inspired by Petrarch's *Trionfi* (Triumphs); see Pastore Stocchi 1996, xlii. Cartari intended his book not only to entertain, but to be of use to creatives, including poets (Cartari 1556, Aiiiir, page unnumbered).

prescriptive gender norms. The presence of the bearded Venus in a text as widely circulated as Cartari's, without commentary or caveat, is evidence enough of comfort with that ambiguity.⁵ Rather, it is the willfulness with which they challenged traditional models, exploring radically alternative concepts of what it meant to be a man or woman in early modern Italy.

In the history of Western gender, the Italian Renaissance was a watershed moment, when a confluence of cultural developments disrupted the patriarchal attachment to hierarchical, binary thinking. A more conservative, punitive approach to gender roles is evident in any number of elite, patriarchal texts from this period, including legal documents and conduct literature.⁶ Aristotle's gender-essentialist taxonomy, which held particular sway in the republics of Florence and Venice, dictated a clear divide between models of male and female comportment: men belonged in positions of command, women in those of obedience.⁷ Even in court cities, where elite women enjoyed more liberal, public roles, we find Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), in his influential *Libro del Cortegiano* (Book of the Courtier, 1528), advising that the courtier and court lady ought to be “highly dissimilar” (*molto dissimile*) in their speech and comportment.⁸

Yet the gendered world was beginning to shift, in Italy faster than anywhere in Europe. From the fifteenth century on, Italy's unruly political landscape, fractured into a multitude of warring city-states, meant that the peninsula knew not just one ruling female figurehead, but many. These women, often called to lead in their husbands' stead, threw Aristotelian tradition into question by their very existence.⁹ Moreover, these consorts and their coterie of attending women were highly educated by necessity, a practice that then began to trickle down to non-ruling elite families.¹⁰ When the increasing number of literate women serendipitously came to intersect with Italy's preeminence in the world of printing, the phenomenon of the Italian woman writer was born.¹¹ For reasons both sociopolitical and cultural, early modern Italian men and women of a certain class found

5 The bearded Venus was excluded from Richard Linche's contemporary translation, indicating it may have been “too subversively suggestive” for the English (Johnston 2007, 15–17).

6 For a summary, see Cohen 2014, 43–44.

7 For misogyny in Aristotle's corpus, see Freeland 1998; for Aristotle in the Renaissance, Maclean 1980.

8 Castiglione 2007, 265 (3.4). On protofeminism in the courts, see Cox 2008, 19–23, 26–28.

9 Cox 2008, 19–23, 31–32.

10 Ross 2009.

11 Early modern Italy published more than twice as many women writers as the rest of Europe combined; see Erdmann 1999, 199–225; Cox 2008, xiv. On the success of the printing press in Italy, see Richardson 1999, 4–5, and for an overview of Italian women and print, Richardson 2020.

themselves living through a moment of unprecedented upheaval, making their society the epicenter for the debate that has come to be known as the *querelle des femmes*.

Over the past few decades, feminist scholarship has done much to map the contours of women's experiences in this period, and a primary source has been Italian women's own writing: the appearance of an elite cadre of Latinate women writers in the late fifteenth century; the rise of female lyricists in the middle of the century; and the relative flood of publishing women from the middle of the sixteenth century through the early seventeenth.¹² From the noblewoman Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547) to the courtesan Veronica Franco (1546–1591), from the actress Isabella Andreini (1562–1604) to the nun Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–1652), the literature has been mined for what it can tell us about women's intellectual and emotional lives, both the good and the bad, in the sixteenth century. Italian Studies has been particularly prosperous in recovering its Renaissance women writers, with one useful measure being the *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* series, where the number of Italian translations in the catalogue has always exceeded all other languages.¹³

And yet what early modern Italian men's writing can tell us about the experience of being a man remains, as Jane Tylus has recently have observed, a subject that has not received enough consideration.¹⁴ The lag in Italian Studies is especially conspicuous in comparison with English, leading Virginia Cox and Chiara Ferrari to ask when we will have gendered readings of Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), Torquato Tasso (1544–1595), and Giambattista Marino (1569–1625) to match those so readily found of Shakespeare, Sidney, and Raleigh.¹⁵ The one-sided nature of these gendered analyses—all women, no men—is detrimental all around. The male experience comes to stand as the default against which the female experience is “othered,” while it is implied that Italian Studies views men as somehow genderless, their lived experience unworthy of study. The disparity is apparent in the terminology:

12 Important early interventions include Zancan 1983; Jones 1990; Jordan 1990; and Benson 1992. See also Kelly 1984 (first published 1977), which posed the influential question of whether early modern women had a renaissance. Zarri 1996; Cox 2008; and Cox 2011 are indispensable overviews of early modern women's writing.

13 The series began in 1996. Eleven of the first dozen translations were of Italians. At the end of 2021, the series had published 207 vernacular and Latin texts, of which one-third (73) were by Italian women. French women were next at 63. Statistics drawn from <https://othervoicinemem.com>.

14 Tylus 2015, 680; see also Milligan and Tylus 2010, 13–15, comparing literary studies with other fields. Earlier, see Tylus 1993, approaching masculinity from the angle of vulnerability.

15 Cox and Ferrari 2012, 9.

“women writers” is standard language in literary studies, while “men writers” jangles.

The field is changing. For years, there was but a single book-length study on masculinity and early modern Italian literature, Valeria Finucci's *The Manly Masquerade*.¹⁶ But the last decade has seen a small but impactful body of essay collections and special journal editions in early modern Italian literature and history dedicated to masculinity, or to considering it alongside femininity.¹⁷ The first monographs undertaking side-by-side gendered readings of male and female writers have emerged.¹⁸ Now, working at the intersection of literature, book history, gender studies, and social history, the present book furthers this conversation, rethinking current paradigms of both gender and genre. *Petrarch and the Making of Gender in Renaissance Italy* brings to light the novel experiments of men and women living through this auspicious historical moment, showing how they exploited Petrarchism's capacity for subjective expression and experimentation—as well as its status as the most accessible of genres—to imagine new gendered possibilities for themselves and their society. How did men and women understand gender? How did they work together to shape the evolution of gender roles? What traces of their thinking did they leave in Petrarchan lyric? In addressing these questions, this book provides a lyric history of gender in Italy between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

My objectives with this study are threefold. First, by attending to writing on femininity and masculinity together, this book explores how writers of both genders used the fluid, experimental space of poetry to make gender anew. Second, it highlights how Petrarchism—as we refer to the pervasive tradition of Renaissance lyric written in imitation of Francesco Petrarca's fourteenth-century *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (Fragments of Vernacular Things)¹⁹—functioned as a dialogic medium. Usually perceived by scholars to be a solitary mode of writing, Petrarchism facilitated an active conversation between the genders in Italy, especially in the less-studied decades of the

16 Finucci 2003. Important articles on early modern masculinity include Pitkin 1999; Hairston 2000; Milligan 2007; and Spackman 2010 (all on Machiavelli); and Richards 2000; Milligan 2006; and Moulton 2010 (all on Castiglione). Saslow 1986 and Gallucci 2003 study, respectively, the artist-writers Michelangelo and Benvenuto Cellini. Examples of masculinity studies in medieval Italian literature include Barolini 2009b; Díaz 2013; and Díaz 2019.

17 Hairston and Stephens 2010; Milligan and Tylus 2010; Hairston 2014; Gouwens, Kane, and Nussdorfer 2015; Murray and Terpstra 2019.

18 Quaintance 2015; Feng 2017.

19 *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* was the title that Petrarch gave to his collection. It is alternatively referred to as the *Rime sparse* (“Scattered rhymes”) or *Canzoniere* (“Songbook”). On the various names, see Warkentin 2007, 45n2.

late sixteenth century. Third, this study of gender and genre is a testament to lyric's revolutionary work in the world, demonstrating why poems should be read as documents capable of recording social history, and of shaping it. These points come to light when we look at the poetry of women and men together, and if we expand the traditional time period of the Italian Renaissance to include the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The remainder of this Introduction will be dedicated to clarifying the terms and timelines that underpin the book's arguments.

Early Modern Gender: Ideals and Actualities

Today, sex and gender are understood to be different markers: one biological, one social. For the most part, I will refrain from using the former in this book. Early modern thinkers were certainly interested in trying to define biological, essentialist differences between men and women.²⁰ However, I focus on how poets presented themselves as gendered beings, both unconsciously and strategically, in ways reflective of cultural, historically contingent values. This approach relies on Judith Butler's now-pervasive framework of gendered performances and performativity—the constant, ever-changing give-and-take between a gendered subject and society.²¹ In examining the social constructs framing individual gender presentation in early modern Italy, I use as a baseline Castiglione's massively influential handbook to courtly life, the *Cortegiano*. The text circulated in manuscript until it was eventually published in 1528, making it contemporaneous—both in its manuscript and print circulations—with the book regarded as the manual for Italian Petrarchism: Pietro Bembo's 1525 *Prose della volgar lingua* (On the Vernacular Language), where Petrarch's lyric was proposed as the model for all Italian poetic literary language. Castiglione even inserted Bembo as a speaker in the *Cortegiano*, placing in his mouth the climactic speech on Neoplatonism. On the third day of the dialogue, the discussants imagine the model court lady, having fashioned their perfect courtier the day prior. The ideal man is defined by Castiglione's Giuliano de' Medici as possessing "solid and strong virility," while the exemplary woman is described as exhibiting "soft and delicate tenderness."²² Other modes of

20 Finucci 2003, 5–6; 10–29.

21 See, as a starting point, Butler 1990.

22 Castiglione 2007, 265 (3.4): "Come ad esso conviene mostrar una certa *virilità soda e ferma*, così alla donna sta ben aver una *tenerezza molle e delicata*" (emphasis mine).

cultural production of the era, including painting and dance, communicate similar gendered values.²³ In terms that harmonize with Butler's, Castiglione emphasizes the great importance of seeming rather than being: Giuliano's aforementioned description concludes with the phrase *parer donna*—"to appear the lady."²⁴ Gendered behavior, like all good courtly conduct, must accord with the Castiglionian ideal of *sprezzatura*, that nuanced ability to make a difficult thing appear natural.

Gendered ideals, however, are not the same as gendered actualities. The burgeoning field of early modern trans studies has brought to light numerous cases of gender-variant practices of the period, especially in English literature.²⁵ Even working within the dominant two-gender framework of the premodern world, gender was in practice, then as now, more of a spectrum than a dichotomy. Catherine Bates uses the term "alternative masculinities" to describe this concept as it applies to English Renaissance poets.²⁶ In Italian Studies, when scholars have examined masculinity in this period, it has generally been discussed as *virility* that had to be shored up and performed in a masterful or domineering way, guarding against accusations of *effeminacy*.²⁷ A model of alternative masculinities allows us to sidestep this zero-sum binary. Bates urges against this critical tradition of reading manly self-fashioning into the texts of canonical poets, attending to the many moments when these authors present themselves as anything but heroic, whole, or authoritative.²⁸

A famous pair of portraits of Cosimo de' Medici (1519–1574) by Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) is useful for illustrating the difference between traditional or "virile" masculinity and alternative masculinities. Let us begin with the portrait that is emblematic of the former (fig. 0.2). In this portrait, created around 1545, Cosimo is bellicose and stoic, the very model of a male specimen.²⁹ He sports warrior's armor, the menacing pectoral ornamentation suggestive of weaponry. The breadth of his ironclad body is emphasized by his directly facing the viewer, while his sideways glance communicates an

23 Fermor 1993; Jacobs 2000.

24 Castiglione 2007, 265 (3.4).

25 See Chess, Gordon, and Fisher 2019, an introduction to a special journal issue on early modern trans studies.

26 Bates 2007.

27 Milligan 2006 provides a summary as relates to Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, as well as a nuanced reading of the rhetoric of effeminacy.

28 Bates 2007, 9–14.

29 On the portrait as a carefully controlled message of masculinity, see Springer 2010, 132–59.



Figure 0.2: Agnolo Bronzino, *Cosimo de' Medici in Armor*, c. 1545. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. © Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

air of haughty stoicism. Such armored portraits represent a performance of masculinity, a reflection of societal ideals of manliness. Patricia Simons, examining some examples of the medium, argues that what is captured is not “natural” virility; rather, “masculinity is being *constructed* as a natural and forceful presence.”³⁰ Cosimo chose the portrait as his official state

30 Simons 1997, 172.



Figure 0.3: Agnolo Bronzino, *Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus*, c. 1537–1539. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen, 1950, 1950-86-1.

image, reproducing and distributing it in various formats, as evidenced by the great number that still exist today.

Another portrait of the same man, by the same painter, presents a more private and alternative kind of masculinity (fig. 0.3). In this portrait, painted earlier, in the period before his rise to the dukedom, Cosimo presents himself in the guise of Orpheus, the mythological poet who could animate stones

and trees with the power of his song. He is shown charming the three-headed dog Cerberus during his descent to Hades to retrieve his wife Eurydice. In contrast with the first image, the prince's male body, though muscular, is here naked and exposed to scrutiny. This face presents none of the heavy-browed, muscular solemnity of the other portrait, but rather bears an expression of openness, perhaps vulnerability or naiveté, as the sitter gazes candidly at the viewer, in an "erotic, if not lewd, pose."³¹ Like many beautiful male faces depicted in the period, this one boasts rosy lips and cheeks against pale skin, recalling the descriptions of women featured in so many Petrarchan love sonnets. These colors potentially mark Cosimo's features as boyish or even feminine. Yet he also sports a beard, and his body is powerful, modeled after an antique fragmentary marble Hercules known as the *Belvedere Torso*. The sitter's virility is further suggested in the heated gaze and the phallic extension of the bow.³² The painting may have been a wedding gift for his wife-to-be, Eleonora di Toledo, and thus might be interpreted as a message of "connubial fidelity," from a young husband "who will do everything in his power to protect his beloved wife."³³ The exchange of desire between subject and viewer complicates the piece further. Heterosexual love is evoked through reference to marriage and the Eurydice quest, but Orpheus ultimately shunned female company for male-male love. And though the intended recipient of the painting is thought to have been Eleonora, it was likely hung such that it was on display for a wider audience, presenting Cosimo-as-Orpheus "[seducing] his courtiers and Florence itself."³⁴ Together, the two paintings of Cosimo, official state image and domestic wedding portrait, illustrate the potential range of gendered self-presentations on display for the sensitive viewer or reader, from warrior-prince to poet-lover.

Early Modern Genre: Lyric as Laboratory and Collaboration

Simultaneously feminine and masculine, Bronzino's Orphean Cosimo chimes with Cartari's Venus: both are emblematic of early modern Italian culture's ability to understand gender in the space between absolutes. Yet modern critics have tended to see Petrarchism as promoting a different relationship

³¹ Strehlke 2004, 130.

³² Ghadessi 2013, 515–16.

³³ Fenech Kroke 2021, 228.

³⁴ Simons 1997, 32.

between the genders, of reinforcing an entrenched and oppositional male-female binary. Purportedly, Petrarchan lyric's standard narrative presents a male poet lusting after a silenced female love object whose body he cuts into pieces—blazoned apart as hair, eyes, lips, hands—and whose agency he implicitly repudiates. In reality, though, we frequently find Italian poets, both men and women, opting out of this polarity: women seeking out a virile subject position; men adopting postures of abjection, figuratively scattering *themselves* rather than the beloved.³⁵ When Cosimo represents himself in the guise of a famous poet, after all, it is not as some mythically “heroic” or “whole” figure, but as Orpheus, a man whose abjection over lost love led to *his* body being famously dispersed, and at the hands of women.

As I show, Petrarchism was, in reality, an especially welcoming genre to gender experimentation. That is not to say that there were no misogynist poets in Italy using lyric as a weapon against women. But that was not the dominant mode. Lyric's debt to the tradition of courtly love inherently places the man in a position of servitude to the lady. With this inverse ordering of the traditional gender hierarchy at its core, lyric permitted writers to chart the grey areas between masculinity and femininity. Here I am drawing on Roland Greene's reading of Petrarchism in which, responding to David Quint's “two rival traditions of epic”—that of the victors and that of the conquered—Greene asserts lyric “as the voice of those standpoints that go uncharted in the perhaps overly simple division of ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’”³⁶ Petrarchism is most frequently studied as a medium about men's passion for women, but the poets studied in this book are constantly subverting this formula, breaking down taxonomies of amorous and spiritual love, of opposite- and same-sex desire.³⁷ Poets used Petrarchism to dissolve barriers between all sorts of purported binaries in the early modern world: between husbands and wives, princes and courtiers, invading foreigners and conquered Italians, God and man.

To be clear, a fluid approach to gender norms did not suddenly emerge in the early modern period. An appreciation of its potential is already apparent at the very origins of the Italian poetic tradition.³⁸ One of the earliest

35 Bates 2007, 2. “Scatter” refers to one of the alternative titles for Petrarch's collection, *Rime sparse*, or “scattered rhymes.” On male poets scattering female beloveds in the much-referenced Vickers 1999, see Bates 2007, 95.

36 Greene 1999, 3–5; drawing on Quint 1993.

37 As with gender, binary language about early modern sexuality fails to capture lived reality. For an overview, see Murray and Terpstra 2019. See also Ruggiero 1985; Brown 1986; Rocke 1996; Murray and Eisenbichler 1996; Finucci 2003; and Talvacchia 2011.

38 For even earlier gender experimentation, see Holmes 2012.

known Italian vernacular lyricists was Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), a saint remembered for his life of humble poverty, his openness to Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) and other religious women, and his ecstatic experience of the penetrating stigmata. As Armando Maggi has noted, Francis is a figure marked by contradictions.³⁹ He evades hegemonic modes of masculinity, fitting neither Castiglione's model of the man who is virile, solid, and strong, nor the modern scholar's image of the male poet who is heroic, whole, and authoritative. Another major poet of the Duecento, the Franciscan Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230–1306), composed fervent *laude* centering Mary's experience, as in his celebrated *Stabat Mater*.⁴⁰ Looking at the Middle Ages broadly, scholarship has argued that medieval male and female behavioral codes were generally more homogenous—unified by a somewhat gender-blind adherence to Christian values—than they would become in the early modern period.⁴¹

Nor was the territory between gender ideals inhabited by Renaissance Italy's lyricists alone. Scholars have recorded such cultural understanding in a variety of early modern genres and media. Jennifer Richards has argued that what modern readers have tended to read as an effeminacy in Castiglione's court handbook is instead a temperance marked by accommodating manners and rhetoric intended to moderate the extreme of manly hubris.⁴² Valeria Finucci has demonstrated how experimental new understandings of masculinity emerged in early modern Italian romance and comedy—in writings by Machiavelli, Ariosto, and Bibbiena—and eventually on the operatic stage, with the presence of the *castrato*.⁴³ Laura Giannetti has used Renaissance Italian comedies to demonstrate a fluid conception of maleness, from a passive and womanlike state in youth through a more traditional sexual and social manliness in adulthood.⁴⁴ Gerry Milligan has explored the contemporary connections between women and war, epitomized in the complex gendering of the maiden knights so popular in romance.⁴⁵ Fredrika H. Jacobs has described how a depiction of Venus by Michelangelo was praised—like Cartari's bearded Venus—for being masculine in its femininity, while a painted Adonis by Titian was lauded by Lodovico Dolce for being feminine in its masculinity.⁴⁶ These examples illustrate that in

39 Maggi 2008.

40 Canettieri 1992, 121–52; Dulles 2000; Quondam 2005, 188.

41 Kelso 1978, 25; Cox 2011, 30.

42 Richards 2000.

43 Finucci 2003.

44 Giannetti 2009, 113–52.

45 Milligan 2018.

46 Jacobs 2000.

Renaissance Italy, difference between the genders was acknowledged; gender ideals existed; but there were arenas in which movement into the neverland between the poles could be tolerated, even admired.

Even though sixteenth-century lyric was not *sui generis* as literary laboratory for gender experimentation, the period's verse is still particularly illuminating, given that it was the genre in which premodern women writers participated earliest and most often. Petrarchism as a way of writing had barely been formally endorsed by Bembo's 1525 *Prose* when Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara became prominent poets. In the *Prose*, Bembo promoted Petrarch as the ideal poetic model precisely because of his balance between the "gravity" (*gravità*) and "pleasure" (*piacevolezza*).⁴⁷ Though Bembo does not frame it in these terms, his classification is ultimately reducible to a gendered division of poetry, as Virginia Cox has highlighted—grave and masculine, pleasing and feminine.⁴⁸ This regard for a gendered balance was borne out serendipitously in Bembo's own adulation for Colonna, in whose verse he found a "gravity" that he would not have expected from a writer of her sex.⁴⁹ Indeed, Bembo's formulation, open to gender slippage, stands in sharp contrast with Castiglione's strict opposition: "the fact that Petrarch can embody this ideal," Cox argues, "is already indicative that an admixture of the feminine is not regarded as compromising in a male poet, while, correspondingly, the example of Colonna suggests that an admixture of the masculine did not detract from a female poet's appeal."⁵⁰

The next generation saw prominent male intellectuals like Lodovico Dolce, Lodovico Domenichi, Girolamo Ruscelli, and Benedetto Varchi seeking out women poets like Laura Battiferri, Tullia d'Aragona, Chiara Matraini, and Laura Terracina, corresponding with them in verse exchanges, including their works in anthologies, and supporting them in the publication of their single-authored collections. Following this generation, Italian women would be a near-constant publishing presence through the early decades of the seventeenth century. As scholars including Julie Campbell, Virginia Cox, Diana Robin, and Sarah Gwyneth Ross have emphasized, early modern Italian women writers were well regarded and well connected, receiving support in the home, in intellectual circles, and in print.⁵¹ With lyric's high participation of women writers alongside male ones, it was the primary

47 Bembo 1966, 146 (2.9).

48 Cox 2008, 63.

49 Letter to Vettore Soranzo on 9 April 1530 (no. 1078), in Bembo 1987–93, 3:126.

50 Cox 2008, 63.

51 Campbell 2006; Robin 2007; Cox 2008; Ross 2009; Cox 2011.

genre in which one might speak of a literary dialogue between the genders. *Petrarch and the Making of Gender* assesses men's writing alongside these women's output. Putting male and female voices in conversation, I ask how writers of both genders were engaged, consciously and unconsciously, with shaping gender norms.⁵²

It is this emphasis on collaboration—on widening our critical lens beyond the solipsistic, erotic lyric quest—that enables this book to revise our understanding of the legacy of two canonical poets. One is Petrarch himself. Engaging with early modern book history, I document collaborative efforts among editors, publishers, and readers in sixteenth-century print editions of his lyric. Such an approach sheds light on what I term in Chapter 1 “the people's Petrarch”: a Renaissance perception of a poet who was neither misogynist nor effeminate, but rather more open and accessible to women, whether in the figure of Laura, or in the women readers and writers who would come to interact with this version of the great *auctor*. The impact of this sociable, regendered Petrarch is further elucidated in the book chapters on Petrarchan imitators. The second figure is Vittoria Colonna, a publishing phenomenon acclaimed in her day as equal or superior to her male peers. Despite her enduring place in the Italian literary canon, she was underappreciated for much of the twentieth century, described as a talented but ultimately lesser emulator of male geniuses: Petrarch, Bembo, Michelangelo.⁵³ In the twenty-first century, Colonna has been regaining lost territory, the subject of several comprehensive studies recuperating her authority and impact in literary and religious spheres.⁵⁴ A recent edited volume has focused on her impact not only in the mid-sixteenth century, but in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, through the Counter-Reformation and the Arcadian movement.⁵⁵ Through a sustained focus on Colonna's innovation in the lyric subgenres of ventriloquized, correspondence, religious, and conjugal verse, the present study builds the case for Colonna as the progenitor of Italian Petrarchism alongside (rather than subservient to) Bembo, and the forger of a unique *colonnese* style with powerful influence on imitators of both genders. Reorienting the field of vision to include men and women side by side, including Petrarch and Colonna, reveals a previously unrecognized

52 I am reorienting a formula by Diana Robin, who insists that women writers be read with their male counterparts: Robin 2007, xix (working with Ann Rosalind Jones's theory of gender “negotiation” for women writers; Jones 1990, 4).

53 On Colonna's critical fortunes, see Cox 2021.

54 Brundin 2008; Brundin, Crivelli, and Sapegno 2016; Sapegno 2016b; Targoff 2018. See also the translations Colonna 2005; Colonna 2020; Colonna 2021; and Colonna 2022.

55 Cox and McHugh 2021.

level of reciprocal influence. In subsequent generations of Petrarchists, men and women took part together in the construction of a lyric world fit for their time, for their own metamorphosing gender norms and social values.

Lyric as Social History

This book is more than an account of a literary genre; it is also a chronicle of social history. William J. Kennedy has already demonstrated Petrarchism's usefulness in recording instances of early modern nationalism. My book excavates sociohistorical information from lyric about aspects of early modern life ranging from daily domestic experience to sweeping religious change.⁵⁶ Renaissance Italian lyric's aptness for social documentation stems from a crucial divergence from Petrarch's original model: an insistence on naming. Idolized ladies and fictive landscapes increasingly gave way to specific addressees, locations, and dates, a transformation that materialized both in the standard subgenres of amorous and spiritual lyric, as well as in the rise in popularity of correspondence and occasional verse (lyric exchanged between writers and composed to commemorate events, respectively). The lyric lexicon of these poems continued to be clearly Petrarchist, but the content changed, describing everything from battles to domestic life. This book's findings challenge the traditional boundaries drawn around lyric's utility, demonstrating how poems could be sites of resistance against the pervading social order.

This body of verse has remained mostly hidden from view until recently. A widespread penchant for documentary lyric emerged most strongly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But literature from this period has remained mostly understudied. This disinterest can be traced to enduring prejudice among Italian literary scholars against the Catholic Counter-Reformation—the period following the Council of Trent (1545–1563), convened in response to the shattering effects of the Protestant Reformation—an era that continues to be best known for the Inquisition and the Index of Prohibited Books.⁵⁷ Only in 2007 did scholarship produce the first overview of lyric from the last third of the sixteenth century, with Riccardo Brusciagli's contribution to the Vallardi Italian literary histories; a few years later, Virginia

⁵⁶ Kennedy 1994; Kennedy 2003. Other politically or socially interested studies of Petrarchism include Rosenthal 1992, 58–65; Greene 1999; Robin 2007; Brundin 2012a; Eisenbichler 2012; and Cox 2015.

⁵⁷ For an overview of the historiographical tradition, see Quondam 2020 and Cox 2020, 15–25.

Cox recovered significant quantities of forgotten secular and religious verse by women.⁵⁸ The present book, one of the first English-language studies of Italian poetry from these lost decades, advances a critical reorientation, bringing to light Petrarchism's potential for representing and critiquing social structures.

Increased attention to lyric from these decades will show that, though the sonnet is not normally among the historian's go-to objects of study, these texts are a rich source of information about contemporary gender dynamics in a period that saw dramatic changes in women's education and publishing, the cultural and political roles of ruling female consorts, and, under the influence of the Counter-Reformation, ideals of masculinity and of marriage. This book's last chapter, on conjugal verse—that is, poetry written for or about one's spouse—illustrates the point well. This body of poetry suggests the need to revise conventional understandings of early modern marriage. Vernacular conjugal verse flourished as an alternative but persistent vein of love lyric, one that saw the participation of several Italy's best-known intellectuals, from individual poems by Castiglione and Ariosto (1474–1533), to entire collections, first by Vittoria Colonna, and then by generations of imitators. Tracking the evolution of conjugal verse sheds new light on ideas about marriage in this period, an institution generally portrayed in historical studies as societally necessary but emotionally unfulfilling. Poetry has not typically been considered in such examinations, which have focused on elite humanist marriage treatises and official legal sources.⁵⁹ But as a genre that spoke from within marriages, Petrarchism has a different historical narrative to tell, and ought to be read alongside those documents.

Importantly, vernacular lyric was among the most democratic of literary genres, composed by women as well as men of various social stripes. Greene highlights poetry's accessibility when he compares lyric with epic, which was “practiced by very few people in any given culture.” Lyric, more than other genres, also saw participation across gender and class lines.⁶⁰ If few authors of either gender undertook the elite and laborious genre of epic, almost anyone could imitate a Petrarchan poem (if not always well). It was possible to write a sonnet, if the situation demanded, within a fairly short period of time. In practical terms, we simply have a great quantity of lyric, from both men and women. Like letters, poems were one of the

58 Brusciagli 2007; Cox 2011, 52–86; and Cox 2013a, both the relevant lyric and the section on the documentary features of late Petrarchism, at 33–34. See also Cox's forthcoming, full-length study, provisionally titled *The Social World of Italian Renaissance Lyric*.

59 On Renaissance Italian marriage in other literary genres, see D'Elia 2004; Giannetti 2009; Cockram 2013.

60 Greene 1999, 4.

most common literary practices: more often than not, any man who wrote anything at all penned at least a handful of sonnets. We have them from princes and clergymen alike, and readers might be surprised to read the very un-Machiavellian love poems by the author of *The Prince*.

It is not my contention that poetry can be read as documentary evidence of actual emotion. Like treatises and legal documents, or letters between well-known figures, sonnets had a public audience as well as a purported private one. Taking into account this larger audience, and its effect on the author's rhetoric, will not diminish the import of these documents, however, in a consideration of historical realities. My view is shaped by the concept of *emotives*, defined by William Reddy as dynamic speech acts, or attempts to put words to a preverbal emotion that, with their utterance, "do things to the world," and "change the speaker" as well.⁶¹ These performative expressions of private emotions are not to be confused with the emotions themselves, the separate and "authentic" feeling. They are rather the verbalization of the feeling, which then navigates the public sphere in intricate and interactive ways. They are both relational (a negotiation with the listener) and self-altering (an experimentation—for example, whether saying "I love you" reinforces the emotion).⁶² Mapping these navigations is important, Reddy argues, because it is key to understanding both individual identity and, by extension, community or political life.⁶³ We cannot know how Petrarchists "authentically" felt, but we can know what they said, and we can study how those utterances operated in the public sphere. Barbara Rosenwein has elaborated on Reddy's concepts with the idea of *emotional communities*. These are groups of any sort—a family, a princely court, a school of writers—who share a system that categorizes certain emotions (and by extension emotional expressions) as productive, detrimental, or irrelevant, exposing the values of individuals and cohorts.⁶⁴ Applying this theory to Petrarchists, we can examine how poets formed emotional communities and consider what their shared affective values might tell us about contemporary attitudes toward institutions that governed the early modern experience. These texts' narratives are, of course, mediated by the customs of the genre. But their form should not prevent us from exploring their inordinate potential as records of how men and women grappled with changing values about gender, and by extension, family, society, and religion.

61 Reddy 2001, 105; building on Austin 1962.

62 Reddy 2001, 101–4.

63 Reddy 2001, 332.

64 Rosenwein 2006; Rosenwein 2010, 11.

Chapter Descriptions

This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of two chapters that provide literary and sociohistorical context. Part 2 comprises the latter four chapters, which present close readings of the verse itself, organized by lyric category.

Chapter 1 explores the gendered portrayal of Petrarch in early modern printings of his lyric. Particular attention is paid to the most popular edition of the Renaissance, edited by Alessandro Vellutello in 1525. Vellutello rejected Petrarch's own ordering of the poems in favor of a sequence recounting a linear amorous plotline, an interpretation underpinned by such paratextual additions as a "biography" of Laura and a two-page map of the lovers' environs. Though often dismissed by sixteenth-century humanists and modern-day scholars alike, Vellutello's Petrarch was reprinted almost thirty times, embraced by readers enamored of its hybridity between critical edition and fan fiction. Theorizing a contrast between Petrarchan *fame* and *celebrity*—Latin versus vernacular, epic versus lyric, *auctor* versus *amateur*—I argue for the specific gendered evolution of Petrarch in the early modern imagination, an investigation that underpins the rest of the book's examinations of how Petrarchan imitators used literature to remake gender.

Chapter 2 transitions from the first half of the sixteenth century to the second half, from editions of Petrarch to poetry by Petrarchists. This chapter provides sociopolitical and artistic contextualization for the peak of Italy's uniquely "bigendered" publishing culture, elaborating on the factors that enabled women and men to share the literary arena. Synthesizing important historical and literary studies of early modern gender from the last three decades, I describe how social changes coincided with the rise of print culture in Italy, creating conditions that encouraged men and women to dialogue with one another in lyric. This chapter focuses on the late Cinquecento and early Seicento—about which significantly less has been written than earlier periods—in order to highlight an important and well-populated generation of writers, who had only ever known a world in which women published in significant numbers alongside men.

At this point the study transitions to the poetry itself, organized in chapters by subgenre. That the lyric voice can take on a life removed from the author's gender identity is nowhere clearer than in Petrarchism's rich tradition of ventriloquized verse, described in Chapter 3. During the Italian Wars (1494–1559), men adopted women's voices, after the model of Ovid's *Heroides*, as a way to explore the tragedies of battle. In the second half of the century, literary giants like Tasso and Guarini exchanged amorous

verse in which one writer played the role of the female beloved. In the same decades, women writers assumed male personae as a means to facilitate experimentation with erotic verse. Men and women's engagement in poetic ventriloquism in both secular and religious verse demonstrates the malleability of gendered lyricization and its usefulness in testing the fences of societal norms.

From imagined networks of writers in Ovid's *Heroides* in Chapter 3, we move to Chapter 4, which reads real-life poetic exchanges as part of a larger vogue of using contemporary, historically identifiable speakers in Renaissance Italian literature. In contrast to the insubstantial vagueness of so much amorous lyric, correspondence verse was printed with the full names of both of the poetic participants. The reader was meant to know their identities and something about their relationship in the real world. These poems are artistically mediated portrayals of speech, to be sure. Even so, these publicly circulated documents tell us how actual men and women might have spoken in actual courtships, friendships, and mentorships, bringing to the fore Petrarchism's capacity as a socially embedded practice.

Chapter 5 examines religious lyric from 1530 to 1630, from the emergence of the spiritual *canzoniere* to the definitive edition of Angelo Grillo's landmark *Pietosi affetti* (1629). Mixing devotion with desire, spiritual Petrarchism looked to incite readers to religious fervor using imagery that could be sensuous, erotic, or even perverse. In the Counter-Reformation in particular, this verse became increasingly corporeal and gender-ambiguous: sensual blazons of the body of Mary Magdalene; male-authored impersonations of saintly women; fantasies of touching, kissing, or penetrating Christ's wounds. Such verse is evidence of writers exploring the space between gender norms that surprisingly opened up in the Counter-Reformation.

Moving from religious to amorous lyric of the Counter-Reformation, Chapter 6 demonstrates that the subgenre of conjugal verse, discussed above, was emblematic of Petrarchism's potential for sociohistorical documentation. The body of verse I have identified, which celebrates marriage as a source of emotional and sexual fulfillment, demonstrates a shared social value around marital love in Counter-Reformation Italy. The historical evidence embedded in lyric suggests the need to revise the standard scholarly timeline, which locates the birth of love-based marriage in Protestant England.

Petrarch and the Making of Gender reframes our understanding of Petrarch and of Petrarchists, both male and female. This study demonstrates how men and women of the Italian Renaissance used lyric as a means of resistance to gendered dichotomies and hierarchies. Male poets embraced more fluid expressions of masculinity, and female poets exerted more influence, than

has been previously recognized. They used poetry as a space to escape suffocating social constructs, to escape being told how to act with their spouses, their friends, their God. This poetry is evidence that top-down strictures in domestic, public, and religious realms did not always oppress poets. Many simply responded by innovating, letting the fourteen-line structure of the sonnet serve as a frame for writing new realities. Like Cartari's bearded Venus, these poets wrote lyric voices that "bore the signs of both male and female," and were only more powerful for doing so.

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