

CONVERSING WITH ANTIQUITY:  
LANGUAGE, GENDER AND SELF-  
PRESENTATION IN THE CINQUECENTO  
DIALOGUE

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the use of the classically-derived dialogue genre in the territory now called Italy in the sixteenth century, specifically considering each dialogue as an act of classical reception. In this, it aims to problematise a tendency in scholarly literature on Cinquecento dialogues to categorise post-classical works by their presumed classical model, as well as considering questions of how and why Cinquecento writers used the classical dialogue genre and the evocation of the classical world more broadly to achieve their aims in producing literary works.

Using a theoretical framework based principally on comparative literature and new historicist methodologies, the thesis begins with a study tracing the reception of the *Phaedrus* in dialogues from both antiquity (Cicero's *De Oratore*, Lucian's *Hermostimus*) and the early modern period (Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* (1534, 1536)). It then continues with three further chapters, each discussing a broad theme related to identity: language, self-presentation, and gender.

In the language chapter, the genre's use in the cultural *questione della lingua* debate will be considered, focusing on Pietro Bembo's influential *Le Prose della Volgar Lingua* (1525), but also evaluating opinions of Bembo and his contribution in both Castiglione and in Paolo Giovio's *Dialogus de Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra* (1527), two dialogues published shortly after the first edition of the *Prose*.

This is followed by a chapter on self-presentation, which discusses the limitations of authorial control and the potential for exploiting these in the paratextual apparatus of a text in relation to *Il Cortegiano* and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore* (1547). It also compares the self-presentation of Bembo in his *Prose* with his earlier self-presentation in his Neo-Latin dialogue, *De Aetna* (1496).

The final chapter, on gender, explores questions relating to women in dialogue, summarising the participation of women in classical dialogues and assessing the portrayal of women in three early modern examples: Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505), Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne* (1541) and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore*.

The thesis shows that receptions of dialogue are complex and layered, illustrating the intertextuality prized during the period and demonstrating the ways in which the history and generic possibilities of this ancient form were exploited by Renaissance writers.

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## Note on Translations and Editions

Obtaining editions of less canonical Renaissance texts is always challenging, but this project has faced the additional difficulty of being completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in disruption to library access and inter library loans.

For ancient texts, I have wherever possible used the *Loeb* edition: this was a decision made in part for reasons of consistency and for the respect with which the series is held, but it was also because the entire series has been digitised and is thus accessible even when the physical library is closed.

In the case of early modern texts, I have used modern editions where I have been able to obtain them, such as the *I Tatti* editions of Pietro Bembo's *De Aetna* and Paolo Giovio's *De Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*. Otherwise, I have used open access older versions of the texts, including many from the early modern period. Full bibliographic references for each of the primary texts used are included in the bibliography under the author's names

When referring to titles of texts, I have referred to them using their conventional titles: for Greek texts, this usually means translation into English, while Latin or Italian titles may be in the original language if this appeared the clearest way of identifying them.

All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

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## Introduction

Helen Lovatt: Hi Lauren! You're striding away very purposefully from the Humanities building — where are you going?

Lauren: To the library. You and Sarah are always encouraging me to take walks during the day to help keep my spirits up and focus my mind on my research. Besides, I just had an email about my inter library loan and I'm eager to talk to a librarian about when I can expect it to arrive.

Helen: I can spare you a trip up the hill; the library is running at reduced opening hours because of the pandemic and won't open again until well after lunch. There was a sign on the door earlier and they tweeted about it.

Lauren: Oh, that's annoying. I guess I'll just wander around campus for a bit, maybe get a coffee — there's no point in going home only to come back again in an hour or two.

Helen: Sounds like a good idea. Actually, while you're here, I've been thinking about what you were saying in our last supervision about flirting in dialogues and it would be good to unpack that a bit further. If you've got a minute, maybe we can talk about it.

Lauren: Yes, sure. In your office?

Helen: Perhaps, although that's inside, so potentially more risky. Maybe we should find somewhere shady out here to sit and think aloud — socially distanced, of course. What about under that tree over there?

Lauren: I don't know enough about trees to be able to tell you at sight what kind it is, but even if it doesn't turn out to be a plane tree, it still feels oddly appropriate to sit there and talk about dialogue.

Forgive my self-indulgence in beginning a thesis on the dialogue genre with a dialogue; aside from the obvious temptation to subvert the conventions of academic writing that the subject matter could be considered to legitimise, the intellectual justification for it is as follows. Firstly, beginning with a dialogue highlights the unusual position that dialogue falls on the continuum between formal, written, factual text and informal, spoken conversation: the differences in register between the imagined conversation with my lead supervisor and the tone in which the overall body of the thesis will be written will, I hope, become increasingly apparent. Moreover, in embracing a genre from antiquity that has formed a vital component of my education for a number of years now, inserting myself into the tradition and mobilising allusions to some of the ancient texts I will discuss during the body of the text, I consider myself to be carrying out the academic equivalent of method-acting, putting myself in the position of the sixteenth-century authors of dialogue that will be the subject of my research.

The first question that must be addressed as part of this thesis is one of taxonomy: what, exactly, is a dialogue? A working definition must be key to any study on the genre, but an initial problem is that definitions of dialogue, even purely considering classical dialogues, are often open to debate. For instance, Womack's book on the genre sets out a basic description of dialogue as 'that form of philosophical exposition that goes so far as to invent imaginary characters and write out their supposed exchanges complete with speech headings, so that the text looks rather like the script of a play.'<sup>1</sup>

While at first glance, this appears a highly reasonable definition, there are unquestionably elements within the genre that sit rather awkwardly with this classification. Lucian, for instance, is often considered one of the three most significant writers of dialogue in antiquity based on his role as a model for later dialogues —the tripartite division of Renaissance dialogues into those modelled upon Cicero, Plato or Lucian, is found in Cox, Tarrête, Kushner, and Vallée, amongst others—<sup>2</sup> yet many of his works, such as the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, do not appear overtly 'philosophical' in the way that we would usually understand the term. Cicero's dialogues often feature himself as a character (such as the *De Legibus*, *Brutus*, and *De Finibus*), or have speakers drawn from influential previous generations (such as the *De Oratore*, *De Re Publica* and *De Senectute*); in a similar vein, the characters in Plato's dialogues are overwhelmingly real people whose lives and influence were still fresh within the Athenian collective memory.<sup>3</sup> Diegetic dialogues, including many by Cicero, are not written out like the script of a play and may contain narrated descriptions of actions performed by the characters (such as the request for cushions in the *De Oratore*),<sup>4</sup> and even in the case of mimetic dialogues, a recent study by Jazdzewska has revealed that their conventional, play-like formatting was not originally a characteristic of dialogue at the time when Plato or even Cicero were writing, appearing to originate in the Imperial period as a result of the influence of court records.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Womack's definition of the genre, even when only applied to antiquity, excludes writings usually considered central to the canon of dialogic works.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Womack, *Dialogue* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011). 9.

<sup>2</sup> References for the aforementioned sources are as follows: Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 10.; Alexandre Tarrête, 'Remarques Sur Le Genre Du Dialogue de Consolation à La Renaissance', *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude Sur l'humanisme, La Réforme et La Renaissance*, 57.1 (2003), 133–52. 133.; E. Kushner, *Le Dialogue à La Renaissance* (Genève: Droz, 2004). 25.; Jean-François Vallée, 'The Fellowship of the Book: Printed Voices and Written Friendships in More's Utopia', in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 42–62. 43.

<sup>3</sup> David Halperin, 'Why Is Diotima a Woman?', in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 113–51, 190–211. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*, trans. by E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 348 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942). 22.

<sup>5</sup> Katarzyna Jazdzewska, 'Indications of Speakers in Ancient Dialogues: A Reappraisal', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 138.1 (2018), 249–60. 250.

The word dialogue originates from the Greek διαλέγεσθαι, meaning ‘to discuss’,<sup>6</sup> and conversation is at the heart of the genre. For this reason, Blair’s definition of dialogue as ‘an extended verbal exchange between two people (in its simplest form), in which the parties take turns responding to what the other said in one or more of the previous turns’<sup>7</sup> appears a more accurate description of this literary form, although the categorisation of dialogue as ‘verbal’ should perhaps be amended to ‘written’, as literary dialogue is a written representation of an imagined verbal dialogue. Crucial to this understanding of dialogue is the concept of exchange between two or more speakers who interact with and respond to each other. In insisting upon this criterion, I reject the arguments of writers such as Ulders, who includes the Occitan *salut* as a form of dialogue since it has a female addressee, though she never responds within the text;<sup>8</sup> while in some circumstances no response can, admittedly, be considered a form of response, for a work to be truly dialogic there must be some form of exchange, however one-sided this may be in reality.

Another attempt to summarise the multiplicity of forms that make up the dialogue genre is provided by Buranello, who explains that it is ‘in general, a tactful combination of artistic and philosophical considerations in which the immediacy, vividness and ‘situationality’ (general situational background) of the dialectical tendencies of the exchange of ideas form the plot of the work.’<sup>9</sup> Again, this definition foregrounds the concept of exchange, and it also refers to the philosophical origins of the genre without declaring that all dialogues are necessarily philosophical exposition.

My own definition of a dialogue, which will be used throughout this thesis, builds on the definitions put forward by Blair and Buranello: I would consider a work to be a literary dialogue that is a written text, in prose, primarily oriented towards recording an imagined conversation between two or more speakers.

These speakers do not necessarily have to have the same properties as each other in terms of fictionality, historical era or degree of development: it is perfectly possible for a dialogue to contain a mixture of real people and mythological figures, as in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Dead*; characters from different periods in history, for instance, Petrarch’s *Secretum*; or allegorical depictions of abstract qualities, such as Oratory in Lucian’s *The Double Indictment, or Trials by Jury*. Speakers may take different roles in a dialogue: some of the most common are teaching, questioning and requesting clarification, and objecting and presenting opposing views.

Regarding the requirement that works labelled as dialogues must be written in prose, this is not of my own invention but has been considered a criterion since antiquity, with Aristotle’s

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<sup>6</sup> D. Marsh, ‘Dialogue’, in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. by Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). 266.

<sup>7</sup> J. Anthony Blair, ‘The Limits of the Dialogue Model of Argument’, *Argumentation*, 12.2 (1998), 325–39. 325.

<sup>8</sup> Hedzer Ulders, ‘Le “Salut” Occitan: Du Genre Dialogué à Un Dialogue de Genres’, *MLN*, 122.4 (2007), 848–74.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Buranello, ‘Pietro Aretino between the Locus Mendacii and the Locus Veritatis’, in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 95–112. 96.



*Poetics* aligning dialogue most closely with prose mime.<sup>10</sup> This therefore means that some of the *Eclogues*, including *Eclogue I*, though dialogic in that they are entirely composed of discussion between two or more characters, cannot be considered dialogues. Drawing this distinction also excludes from the genre of dialogue dramatic texts from the ancient world that were written to be read rather than performed, as some scholars speculate was the case for the plays of Seneca the Younger,<sup>11</sup> since in antiquity, drama was written in verse. Though the interrelation of dialogue and drama, the hybridity of dialogue as a genre open to other generic influences, and specifically the known links between Platonic dialogue and drama are highly interesting and have merited discussion by other scholars, notably Charalabopoulos, Nightingale, Heitsch and Vallée,<sup>12</sup> for reasons of scope they cannot be discussed here.

A useful concept when considering the dialogue's links with other genres is Rachael Scarborough King's notion of the bridge genre, which she defines as 'a genre that facilitates change by providing writers and readers with paths across shifting media landscapes'.<sup>13</sup> According to King, these genres tend to proliferate at times of media change; it does not appear coincidental, then, that the period covered in this thesis encompassed great cultural change in terms of the production and dissemination of literary texts as the impact of the printing press grew in Renaissance Italy.

The decision to limit the study to dialogues produced in the territory that we would now call Italy in the sixteenth century is based on the wide range of dialogues that that century produced; a preliminary survey undertaken in the first few months of this project revealed that the largest single group of dialogues was from this period. This is corroborated by other research on the genre; in 2004, Heitsch and Vallée observed 'In Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italy — where the genre, in its neoclassical Renaissance guise, had emerged as early as the Trecento, with Petrarch — the number of dialogues written and published has not yet been established, but it certainly surpasses all other cultural traditions',<sup>14</sup> and Womack similarly commented that while dialogue in the Renaissance flourished in many countries, 'the home of the genre was Italy'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, given the necessity of imposing limits upon the project to confine it within the scope of a PhD thesis, it appeared most fruitful to study dialogues from where they were chronologically and geographically most abundant.

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, Longinus, and Demetrius, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style.*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell and others, Loeb Classical Library, 199 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995). 30.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent discussion on the evidence for the dramatic recitation of Seneca's plays and how this differed from theatrical performances, see Erica Bexley, 'What Is Dramatic Recitation?', *Mnemosyne*, 68.5 (2015), 774–93.

<sup>12</sup> For instance: Nikos G. Charalabopoulos, *Platonic Drama and Its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World. Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018). 2.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée, 'Foreword', in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. ix–xxiii. x.

<sup>15</sup> Womack. 23.

Of course, the term 'Italy' is not an unproblematic one before the Risorgimento in the nineteenth century; indeed, during the sixteenth century, Mac Carthy describes it as 'an aspiration rather than a reality', due to its lack of a 'central seat of power, capital city, common currency, or language'.<sup>16</sup> At the time of the Sack of Rome in 1527, the five largest states occupying the Italian peninsula were the Kingdom of Naples, the Church State, Florence, Venice and Milan.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of *italianità*, or 'being Italian', is attested in medieval and early modern authors such as Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto, as well as political commentators and historians,<sup>18</sup> although it appears to have been principally invoked in times of crisis, or when the author was away from the peninsula.<sup>19</sup> 'Italy' is therefore a useful shorthand for modern scholars discussing trends from the territories that span the Italian peninsula and the islands during this period, and a concept that would not have been entirely alien to the Cinquecento writers discussed in this thesis, but it is nonetheless still a word that must be used with cautious awareness of the limitations in using a modern geopolitical term to refer to a different historical situation.

At this juncture, a reader might reasonably ask why this interdisciplinary project is being submitted under the broad rubric of classics, rather than modern languages or comparative literature. My interest in the dialogue genre stems from its origins in the ancient world. Though the precise origins of the genre are somewhat unclear, scholarship has identified the earliest dialogues as entering the Western tradition in ancient Greece; as yet, we have discovered no evidence of any dialogues written before the *Sokratikoi logoi* from the turn of the fourth century BCE.<sup>20</sup> These were works written by followers of Socrates, in which his ideas are related in the form of conversations taking place between the philosopher and other contemporary interlocutors.<sup>21</sup> The decision to convey philosophy through the medium of dialogue is an interesting one and appears more than a stylistic decision to make these doctrines more palatable, in contrast to Lucretius' stated justification for his use of dactylic hexameter as being like putting honey on a cup to give bitter medicine to a child.<sup>22</sup> Instead, dialogue enables a proposed argument to end with an overt statement of inconclusiveness (*aporia*) or for the conclusion of an individual thesis to be missed in the flow of argumentation.<sup>23</sup>

Plato is the best-known author of such dialogues, though they were also written by others, including Xenophon; Aristotle is known to have written dialogues. These were strikingly different to the approach of Plato and Xenophon, with a formal structure that included

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<sup>16</sup> Ita Mac Carthy, *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). 13.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Hook, *The Sack of Rome* (London: Macmillan, 1972). 11.

<sup>18</sup> Mac Carthy, *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance*. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). ix-x.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Ford, 'The Beginnings of Dialogue - Socratic Discourses and Fourth-Century Prose', in *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, ed. by Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 29–44. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ford. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse and Martin F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library, 181 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1924). 78.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Margaret McCabe, 'Plato's Ways of Writing', in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. by Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 88–113. 95.

separate personal prefaces and increased use of arguing both sides of a case (*disputatio in utramque partem*),<sup>24</sup> though unfortunately, none have survived to the present day to enable comparison.

A popular subgenre of dialogue in the Greek context was the sympotic dialogue, set at that quintessentially Greek social institution, the symposium: both Plato and Xenophon wrote such dialogues, with later examples produced by Plutarch (*Sympotic Questions*), Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists*) and the early Church father St Methodius.<sup>25</sup> Another development in dialogue emerged with the second-century author Lucian, who claimed to be the first author to make dialogue amusing;<sup>26</sup> he wrote a number of comic and satirical dialogues, many of which are impossible or implausible (*Icaromenippus*, *Philosophies for Sale*), or which feature low-status characters as their protagonists (*Dialogues of the Courtesans*).

Dialogue was not, however, solely a Greek phenomenon; the first Latin prose dialogue we know of was a dialogue between father and son on the subject of civil law, which was written by M. Junius Brutus in the second century BCE.<sup>27</sup> The form was then adopted and adapted to a Roman context by Cicero, who used it for several of his philosophical works; Schofield, writing on the Ciceronian dialogue, asserts that Cicero's dialogues written between 45 and 44BCE are more genuinely open-ended than those of Plato, and Cicero's decision to include himself as a speaking character in some of them marks another notable distinction between his writings and those of his Attic predecessor.<sup>28</sup> In the early second century CE, we find the tradition continued by the influential Roman historian Tacitus, to whom the *Dialogus de oratoribus* is attributed; other examples of Latin dialogues from antiquity include the *Soliloquies* of the church father St Augustine of Hippo, in which he converses with his own soul, and the highly eclectic *Saturnalia* of the fifth century CE writer, Macrobius. It is therefore clear that the literary dialogue is a classical genre that featured in both Latin- and Greek-speaking parts of the ancient world and that research on its afterlife can legitimately claim to fall within the disciplinary remit of classics.

Fundamental to this understanding of my research are the related concepts of classical reception and vernacular classicism. In fact, it appears that studies of vernacular classicism are assessing a specific period in the long history of classical reception; Bakogianni explains that the critical component that makes something an act of reception is the acceptance of ideas and impressions from the ancient world into the mind,<sup>29</sup> while Celenza, explaining vernacular classicism, writes that it is 'studies of the diffusion, in Italian vernaculars, of thought-worlds identified with the culture of ancient Greece and Rome.'<sup>30</sup> Thus, in a Venn

<sup>24</sup> Elaine Fantham, *The Roman World of Cicero's De Oratore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).17-18

<sup>25</sup> Jason König, 'Sympotic Dialogue in the First to Fifth Centuries CE', in *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, ed. by Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 85–113. 85.

<sup>26</sup> John Jay Chapman, *Lucian, Plato and Greek Morals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1931). 10.

<sup>27</sup> J. G. F. Powell, 'Dialogues and Treatises', in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 223–40. 229.

<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Schofield, 'Ciceronian Dialogue', in *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, ed. by Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 63–84. 63-4.

<sup>29</sup> Anastasia Bakogianni, 'Introduction', in *Dialogues with the Past 1: Classical Reception Theory & Practice*, ed. by Anastasia Bakogianni (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2013), pp. 1–9. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. ix.

diagram, the circle representing vernacular classicism would be entirely within the larger circle representing classical reception more generally.

As if to exemplify why the subcategory of vernacular classics is necessary to describe the relationship between antiquity and more recent culture within an Italian context, Caruso and Laird note that in Italian scholarship, there is no conception of a divide between ‘the classical tradition’ and ‘classical reception’ more generally, though the distinction is often made in anglophone scholarship.

What, precisely, that distinction might be is unclear: the definitions of the two terms provided, and subsequently rejected, by Caruso and Laird are that ‘the classical tradition’ often refers to ‘regular cultural absorption of apparently immutable ancient legacies in times when knowledge of Greek and especially of Roman culture was more widely shared’, while ‘classical reception’ usually indicates a ‘two way interaction, mostly in modern artistic forms or popular media like cinema – with a more open-ended conception of the Greco-Roman past’.<sup>31</sup> Budelmann and Haubold comment that it is difficult to identify either the specific difference between the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’ or the implications of how these terms overlap in the case of any given research topic.<sup>32</sup> Martindale, in considering the origins of the literary use of the term ‘reception’, suggests the distinction as envisioned by the Constance school is in whether the implication is that the classical material is being handed down (tradition) or whether the active participation of readers is being foregrounded (reception), but he, too, notes that the boundary between the two concepts is constantly shifting.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, the purport of the discussion of the differences of these two approaches to the afterlife of antiquity is this: that in an Italian context, such a distinction does not exist, for it is not a useful conceptual apparatus in a culture in which antiquity is significantly closer to everyday life.

This was even more the case in the Renaissance, in which even those professedly outside the overtly neo-classical humanist movement were nonetheless participants in the widespread cultural adoption of classical ideals, motifs and genres. For instance, Pietro Aretino, proud of his lack of high culture,<sup>34</sup> was often accustomed to brag about being the first to publish his letters in the vernacular. Nonetheless, as his biographer Cairns points out, the reality is that he was merely ‘translating into the *volgare* an established literary genre with its own traditions and rules’,<sup>35</sup> a tradition that, moreover, was a favourite of the classically-obsessed humanists, with an appeal undoubtedly strengthened by Petrarch’s rediscovery of Cicero’s *Letters to Atticus* in Verona in 1345.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore evident that for

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<sup>31</sup> *Italy and the Classical Tradition: Language, Thought and Poetry 1300-1600*, ed. by Carlo Caruso and Andrew Laird (London: Duckworth, 2009). 3.

<sup>32</sup> Felix Budelmann and Johannes Haubold, ‘Reception and Tradition’, in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), pp. 42–54.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Martindale, ‘Reception’, in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Craig W. Kallendorf (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 297–311. 298.

<sup>34</sup> Giuliano Innamorati, *Pietro Aretino: Studi e Note Critiche* (Messina - Firenze: Casa Editrice G. D’Anna, 1957). 98-99.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic of Venice* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1985). 128.

<sup>36</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 42.

all his apparent rejection of antiquity, Aretino's letters are in fact acts of vernacular classicism, though it is difficult not to see almost every creative act as in some way receiving antiquity during this period.

In explaining vernacular classicism, it has been necessary to reference a number of concepts and ideas that require further discussion; before continuing to outline the approach to the thesis, we must first sketch out an outline of the developments leading up to this period in broad brushstrokes, in order to understand the Cinquecento dialogue in its literary and historical contexts.

A major development that must be mentioned is the formation of universities, which appeared 'almost spontaneously' in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and led to the evolution of new and standardised forms of Latin.<sup>37</sup> Once the first examples were founded, these institutes proliferated rapidly, until by 1500 there were 60 universities in Western Europe,<sup>38</sup> spreading these new perspectives on the Latin language and classical culture more broadly across a wide geographical area.

Arguably the most important element arising from the universities and their new approaches to Latin was the humanistic movement, as fundamental to the concept of the Renaissance as it is slippery to define. By way of illustration, Celenza's recent book uses the phrasing, 'a turn among intellectuals to a series of predominantly verbal subjects, all of them in Latin and, eventually, in classicizing Latin' to describe humanism in 'the most empirically inclusive way',<sup>39</sup> an explanation that generally corresponds to, but is not entirely synonymous with, his earlier conception of it as a 'pedagogical system rooted in the Greek and Roman classics and dimly associated with the Renaissance'.<sup>40</sup> The key commonality between both definitions, however, is the emphasis on classical antiquity, particularly its language and literature, as a foundation for contemporary intellectual work and education. Beginning in Florence in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and rapidly spreading outwards,<sup>41</sup> humanism was an (almost exclusively male) movement focused principally on the pursuit of eloquence,<sup>42</sup> and humanists thought in ways that were truly dialogical,<sup>43</sup> which makes their fondness for the dialogue genre seem almost a matter of course. Indeed, dialogue was the second most popular literary genre among the humanists, surpassed only by the letterbook —<sup>44</sup> and a published letter is, as Poliziano wrote, almost half of a dialogue ('epistola velut pars altera dialogi'),<sup>45</sup> plucked from its context in epistolary exchange to be presented to a wider audience. Indeed, the connection between the

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<sup>37</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 10,2.

<sup>38</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). 42.

<sup>41</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Mac Carthy, *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance*. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*. 87.

<sup>44</sup> Isotta Nogarola, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, trans. by Margaret L. King and Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). 46.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Janet Levarie Smarr, *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). 131.

humanists' public and performative form of masculinity and their preferred genres for expressing their ideas has been articulated thus:

Is it a surprise that humanists loved the dialogue form, which transposes private learning to an imagined public venue, where interlocutors dispute and their character is on display? Can we be astonished to find that humanists from Petrarch onward wrote and collected their own letters with the purpose of publicly circulating them? Or that oratory, whose public aspect needs no elaboration, was yet another favoured genre?<sup>46</sup>

Within these lines, we find too the figure of Petrarch, a giant among the many influential presences of the Renaissance. His contribution to the humanistic movement is considerable, to the extent that Celenza considers him the 'central figure behind the Renaissance revival of antiquity,' making him the main instigator of the shift to a more classicising Latin in intellectual discourse as well as the originator of the tendency, popular among humanists, to present themselves as outsiders while actually remaining firmly within the establishment.<sup>47</sup> While he died in 1374, over a century prior to the period covered by this thesis, his influence during the Cinquecento was nonetheless not to be underestimated; in addition to his seminal role at the beginnings of humanism and his previously-mentioned rediscovery of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, his vernacular poetry was also a prominent model for the archaising Tuscan solution to the *questione della lingua*, making him a shaping cultural force for both Latinate and vernacular writings.

Moreover, and perhaps most crucially for our purposes, he is also known to have written a dialogue, the *Secretum*, in which he converses with St Augustine, a writer of dialogue from late antiquity. It is true that dialogues were produced in the centuries between Augustine and Petrarch, but, as Burke notes, the Renaissance dialogues were different from their medieval precursors in consciously recalling the genre's classical origins and forms.<sup>48</sup> This tendency is apparent even in Petrarch's dialogue, in which Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* proves itself to have been the author's most significant model for the dialogue form,<sup>49</sup> and the revival of classical forms of literary dialogues became increasingly widespread into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Undoubtedly the appeal of reusing an ancient form was buoyed by what Cox, a highly influential scholar of Renaissance dialogue, describes as the 'humanist faith in discussion as a means of access to the truth.'<sup>50</sup> Thus, the enormous popularity of this newly reclassified genre during the early modern period — including the Cinquecento, which will be the subject of this thesis — can be viewed as another return to the perceived golden age of antiquity and a clear instance of classical reception.

The return to classical models in part reflects the great value placed upon classical culture during this period but was also augmented by a prevailing sense in contemporary culture of the importance of examples and models. This was not exclusive to literature: Burke

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<sup>46</sup> Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*. 121.

<sup>47</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 42.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995). 20.

<sup>49</sup> Francesco Petrarca and Nicholas Mann, *My Secret Book, I Tatti Renaissance Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016). ix.

<sup>50</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 61-2.

comments on the way that Renaissance saints appear to cluster around five roles, with later saints often consciously modelling themselves on earlier ones. He continues to argue that this is not a sign of insincerity but a reflection of the significance that society then placed on cultural models, particularly as saints are often revered precisely because they provide moral examples for others to follow.<sup>51</sup> Though the role of saints is an instance of moral exemplarity, using historical examples to teach virtue to readers,<sup>52</sup> similar principles may be applied to literature, which was learned through studying examples of canonical texts. This then led to Renaissance authors writing texts that conformed to those models, with the result (and often the intention) that these subsequent texts also became canonical.

Such an aesthetic of imitation may appear strange to a modern reader —today, reuse of the work of others runs the risk of plagiarism, and there is a stigma associated with fanfiction — but during the sixteenth century, using an existing text to write one's own text was standard practice, rather than an explicit act of homage.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the medieval and the early modern period have been characterised as an era dominated by an 'authentic hedonism of reuse' ('dove regna un autentico edonismo del riuso'),<sup>54</sup> a description that highlights the pursuit of pleasure in the adaptation and appropriation of language, metaphors, images and scenes from previous texts at a time when writing (and, indeed, reading) was an act of remembering what had gone before.<sup>55</sup> As if to illustrate this, a pervasive metaphor for the creative process was the image of a bee gathering nectar from many different flowers to produce honey, an image originating in Seneca's *Epistolae* 84; while Pigman's article on Renaissance imitation has revealed that the apian image in its original context is somewhat more complicated than is often thought,<sup>56</sup> it indubitably became a stock motif within Cinquecento literary culture.

A final historical development that must be noted in order to situate these Cinquecento dialogues in their historical context is that during the early modern period, the dissemination of literary texts was in a period of transition following the invention of the printing press. The first printing press established in Italy was established in the second half of the fifteenth century, at a Benedictine monastery at Subiaco, and initial output was slow, with only four books being published between 1465 and 1467. However, the industry expanded rapidly, with the result that by 1476, 40 Italian cities had functioning printing presses and Italy was responsible for almost a third of all books published in the Quattrocento.<sup>57</sup> Though the Italian print industry was negatively affected by military defeats in the early sixteenth century<sup>58</sup> and print did not entirely displace manuscript transmission of texts, it soon became clear that the existence of print publication would permanently

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 56,57.

<sup>52</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Anne Jamison, *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World* (Dallas: Texas: BenBella Books, Inc, 2013). 29.

<sup>54</sup> *Furto e Plagio Nella Letteratura Del Classicismo*, ed. by Roberto Gigliucci (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1998). 9.

<sup>55</sup> Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, trans. by Jeremy Parzen (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2001). xv.

<sup>56</sup> G. W. Pigman III, 'Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33.1 (1980), 1–32.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). 49.

<sup>58</sup> Pettegree. 66.

change the relationships between writers and readers, and provide additional grounds for the push towards a more standardised literary language across the Italian peninsula.<sup>59</sup>

Having established the chronological context and outlined the importance of antiquity to literary culture in Cinquecento Italy, I must now return to my thesis and how this relates to existing disciplinary boundaries and approaches. In positioning my work under the rubric of classics, therefore, I consider myself to have taken up Celenza's recent invitation to further work on Neo-Latin and vernacular classics, which he calls for 'as there has as yet been little work attempting to unite the Latinate and vernacular tendencies; to discuss their qualitative differences; and to show, indeed, that they were linked'.<sup>60</sup> This work on literary dialogue in Cinquecento Italy, then, must be viewed as an element of that future work with a single classical genre as its focal point; the intention behind my research is to explore both vernacular and Neo-Latin dialogues as equally valid forms of classicism, following the plea of Lines for new critical perspectives on Renaissance source material.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, as Lovatt writes, 'Anyone who claims not to be using a 'theory' in their work is being disingenuous, or rhetorical';<sup>62</sup> to avoid either the censure of the one charge or the undeserved praise of the other, I must now set out the methodological grounds upon which this work has been founded. Since the thesis is highly interdisciplinary, so too must be the methods used: in addition to the use of close reading of selected passages with a view to comparison, the related concepts of new historicism and historical anthropology have been invaluable in enabling me to evaluate and interpret texts in the contemporary societal categories that they help to create whilst also being keenly aware that my vantage point is shaped by my own contemporary history and society and the institutional setting in which I write.<sup>63</sup> Nor is this an entirely anachronistic method, unfamiliar to scholars from the early modern period under examination: indeed, it bears remarkable similarities with Cristoforo Landino's approach from the late Quattrocento, in which he used Dante to inform his reading of Virgil.<sup>64</sup> Yet while Gallagher and Greenblatt typify new historicism as a process of reading with 'double vision', being immersed in one's own time and place while also looking out and away,<sup>65</sup> in the case of my thesis, I almost appear to have developed triple vision as I consider three distinct settings: the ancient Mediterranean, Cinquecento Italy, and my own twenty-first century Britain.

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<sup>59</sup> Helena Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 9.

<sup>60</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. xi.

<sup>61</sup> David Lines, "'Beyond Latin in Renaissance Philosophy: A Plea for New Critical Perspectives'", *Intellectual History Review*, 25.4 (2015), 373–89. 374.

<sup>62</sup> Helen Lovatt, *The Epic Gaze: Vision, Gender and Narrative in Ancient Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 23.

<sup>63</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 2.

Craig Kallendorf, 'Philology, the Reader and the "Nachleben" of Classical Texts', *Modern Philology*, 92.2 (1994), 137–56. 139.

<sup>64</sup> Kallendorf. 146.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2000). 11.



Another pertinent aspect of my approach is my commitment to producing my own translations; if we accept, as Kallendorf writes, ‘There is no translation that is not at the same time an interpretation’,<sup>66</sup> then the justification for this decision will be entirely evident. Translating texts myself, whether from Latin, Greek or one of the many varieties of Italian vernacular, is thus an interpretative act, one which may be guided by the interpretations of others but which must, fundamentally, remain my own. Moreover, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research, I am aware that potential readers may come from a classics background — which may but does not necessarily involve familiarity with Latin, and possibly Greek, but may not include knowledge of modern languages —, an Italianist background — which may not have entailed use of Latin and Greek sources — or cultural history more broadly. In the interests in making this research more accessible to scholars from these different disciplines who are not able to read all the languages discussed in the thesis, I have therefore opted to provide English translations, or paraphrases akin to translations, wherever languages other than English have been used.

Other approaches have been adopted where relevant to the material under discussion, including the concept of diglossia from sociolinguistics when discussing the *questione della lingua*, recent social psychology research on self-presentation, and the concept of conversation analysis. Tannen’s analysis of conversational discourse is predicated on the understanding that ordinary conversation is made up of strategies that, when written down, are usually considered as archetypically literary;<sup>67</sup> on the other side of the coin is the tactic of using strategies from the analysis of real-life conversations to shed new light on the stylised conversations reported in literary dialogue.

The thesis will be structured thematically under four broad headings, each representing a theme that is prominent in many of the sources from this period: genre and reception, language, self-presentation, and gender. Though imposing a structure on the source material is a necessity, it must be stated at this juncture that the distinctions between the headings are, at times, somewhat artificial, since they are inexorably interconnected in numerous ways. To name but three interconnections, if we consider the humanist predilection for dialogue as part of the process through which they performed masculinity, then women being present as speakers in dialogues, or even writing them themselves, is a subversive act worthy of comment. Equally, in an era in which a book was often perceived as an extension of its author or publisher,<sup>68</sup> the decision to produce works in a fashionable, classically-derived genre provided a meaningful if implicit statement of the author’s self-presentation intentions and self-positioning in relation to the existing canon. Lastly, sociolinguists have long been aware that a speaker’s language and social world are mutually shaping,<sup>69</sup> and the language that a bilingual humanist writer chose to use to create a

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1980). 115.

<sup>67</sup> Deborah Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 1.

<sup>68</sup> Jacqueline Glomski, ‘Careerism at Cracaw: The Dedicatory Letters of Rudolf Agricola Junior, Valentin Eck, and Leonard Cox’, in *Self-Presentation and Social Identification: The Rhetoric and Pragmatics of Letter Writing in Early Modern Times*, ed. by Toon Van Houdt and others (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), pp. 165–82. 174.

<sup>69</sup> John Edwards, *Language and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 17.

dialogue was a way of determining or restricting the audience to whom they presented themselves: Ogbu's research on attitudes towards Black English Vernacular and General American in late 1990s California reveals a more recent illustration of the interconnections between language, self-presentation and social class.<sup>70</sup>

Each of these topics is, of course, highly interesting and could, itself, be a subject of a PhD thesis; I could not possibly hope to produce an exhaustive treatment of any of them within the time and the wordcount available. However, in the necessarily brief treatment of each, I hope to use these themes as a point of departure for discussion of how authors of dialogue used the authority and prestige of the ancient world, and the generic possibilities open to them through the choice of this form, to promote their own aims, particularly as they relate to intersecting aspects of their identities.

The first chapter will discuss the reception of dialogue within the genre itself, demonstrating that reception of dialogic works was already occurring in antiquity and problematising the tripartite division of classically-inspired Renaissance dialogues into 'Platonic', 'Ciceronian', and 'Lucianic'. To achieve this, a case study of the afterlife of the *Phaedrus* will be used as a microcosm for the genre, and its use in subsequent dialogues from both antiquity (Cicero's *De Oratore* (52BCE) and Lucian's *Hermotimus* (second century CE)) and Cinquecento Italy (Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), Aretino's *Ragionamenti* (1534, 1536)) will demonstrate the need for a more nuanced approach than the conventional, linear understanding of the processes of reception and genre.

The second chapter will then explore the *questione della lingua*, a cultural and linguistic debate on the form that a unified literary vernacular for the Italian peninsula would take, the relationship that this vernacular should have with Latin and how Latin should be used. This is, in itself, a question of classical reception, which the chapter's close examination of Pietro Bembo's *Le Prose della Volgar Lingua* (1525) will demonstrate both in terms of the classical arguments it uses to promote Bembo's archaising Tuscan model of the vernacular and in how the possibilities of the classical dialogue form are exploited in the text. It will also consider the sections on language in two roughly contemporary dialogues, Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* and Paolo Giovio's *Dialogus de Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus* (written 1527) to assess the impact of Bembo's text on dialogues arguing for a rather different solution to the *questione*.

Next, the theme of self-presentation will be investigated. Dialogue offers a unique potential for self-representation, allowing authors to conceal their views on a given topic by arguing *in utramque partem* and to assign their own opinions to other characters. Plato, one of the most influential classical models, never appears in his own dialogues, while Cicero includes himself in those texts set in his contemporary context, making the author's presence or absence from the discussion a matter of personal choice that, by analogy with these classical precedents, plays into their own strategies for self-presentation and motives for writing the dialogue. Bembo's *Prose* will thus be compared with his earlier, Latin dialogue, *De Aetna* (1496), to consider his self-representation when he is present and when he is

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<sup>70</sup> John U. Ogbu, 'Beyond Language: Ebonics, Proper English, and Identity in a Black-American Speech Community', *American Educational Research Journal*, 36.2 (1999), 147–84.

absent. Equally, the choice of other speakers in a dialogue is crucial because of the ways in which the speakers reflect back on the author and the point of view they are made to espouse. Finally, the chapter will also examine the way that writers in this period negotiated the act of publication and attempted to assert authorial control at this stage. To do so, it will consider the self-positioning in the paratexts of both Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore* (1547).

The last theme for discussion is the theme of gender, considering questions of dialogue as they pertain to women. After providing the relevant background on women in classical dialogue, most notably the precedent of Diotima, and early modern gender relations to situate the discussion firmly in its sociohistorical context, I will examine the portrayal of women in Bembo's early — and enormously influential— dialogue, *Gli Asolani* (1505). Considering this chapter from a classical reception point of view, I will assess how the narrator figure justifies the inclusion of female speakers and to what extent the discussion within the dialogue is consistent with the professions of the narrator figure. In the second part of the chapter, *Gli Asolani* will then be compared with two later dialogues including women, Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne* (completed 1541), and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore*, considering the possibilities dialogue presents for the depiction of women and the way antiquity could be used to legitimise this.

## Chapter One: Genre and Reception

The *Phaedrus* — Beneath the Plane Tree

On a hot day in Athens, two gentlemen meet by chance in the street and go for a walk together outside the city walls. One of them, the younger of the two, has just spent several hours with a famous speechwriter; he is amazed by what he has heard there and is carrying a copy of one of his speeches to practice it later. The two men stop in the shade of a plane tree to talk about the speech, love and the power of language.

So begins the *Phaedrus*, a Platonic dialogue that was enormously influential in the ancient world: works and authors that it influenced include Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; Hellenistic poets; Cicero; various classicising, rhetorical and epideictic prose writers of the Second Sophistic period and even a Christian apologist, Clement of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> Yet the work's afterlife in Western Europe did not stop there, as this chapter will demonstrate. Instead, Renaissance writers used, interacted with, and appropriated both the *Phaedrus* and works that it influenced to create still more literary works. This chapter will therefore examine key texts and moments in the reception of the *Phaedrus* to illustrate the process of reception, using them as a microcosm of the reception of Plato and the dialogue genre as a whole.

At this juncture, it would be wise to note a couple of caveats with this approach to these classical and sixteenth-century dialogues. The first is that this set of case studies is in no way intended to be exhaustive; such a detailed treatment of all the dialogues that were in some way influenced by the *Phaedrus* would be beyond the scope of a PhD thesis, even with the relatively limited evidence that we have that survives from antiquity and the early modern period. The second is that this study will focus primarily on the influence of different dialogues on each other and the relationships between them. Though this will undoubtedly be an oversimplification, as generic distinctions are porous at best and do not prevent stories, tropes and images flowing from one genre to the next, it would again be unfeasible to focus minutely on every cultural or literary reference in these dialogues; for this reason, this chapter will focus on intertextual references to other dialogues and major cultural touchstones.

With such caveats, it may fairly be asked why this study has chosen such an approach. The reasons for it are threefold: firstly, it illustrates the process of reception; secondly, it demonstrates that reception of classical texts was already taking place in the ancient world, a point which seems to be undervalued in discussions of much later periods and acts of reception; finally, in so doing, it problematises the categorisation and interpretation of Renaissance dialogues as 'Ciceronian', 'Platonic' or 'Lucianic'.

At the root of this case study is, of course, the *Phaedrus* itself and it is to this dialogue by Plato that we must first turn our attention. In the corpus of Platonic works,<sup>2</sup> it shares

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. by Harvey Yunis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> I use 'Platonic' here as an adjective meaning 'written by Plato'; while I reject the use of 'Platonic' to denote later dialogues that resemble Plato's in style, I do not object to the term for works that are, by scholarly consensus, deemed to be authentically by Plato.

themes with other major dialogues: like the *Gorgias*, it discusses the role of rhetoric; like the *Republic*, it touches on issues of moral psychology; and like the *Symposium*, it considers questions relating to love.<sup>3</sup> Of these three dialogues, the *Symposium* is perhaps the most interesting parallel: the two dialogues are often read together due to their shared pursuit of a theory of *eros*, and both dialogues include Phaedrus as a speaking character. Moreover, stylistic similarities have been noted between the role of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* and the speech of Diotima reported by him in the *Symposium*,<sup>4</sup> although Irwin, noting linguistic and stylistic differences between the two dialogues on the whole prefers to group the *Phaedrus* stylistically with the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the difficulties present in studying the *Phaedrus* spring from the way it combines themes; as Kraut notes, it appears to be a dialogue about two distinct subjects – love and rhetoric– but contains a theory of composition that argues that each element in a literary discourse should contribute to the work’s larger, unified organisational plan.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore the challenge of later scholars to try to reconcile these two, somewhat contradictory ideas. Hackforth, writing in the 1970s, argued that the most evident of his three conjectured purposes of the dialogue was showing that rhetoric’s claims to provide culture of the soul were false; the pursuit of philosophy as the real culture of the soul is ‘what gives the dialogue its unity’.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Yunis, writing much more recently, states that the two very different topics and forms of discourse divide the dialogue into two halves, with the first half devoted to rhetorical speeches and the second, to dialectical enquiry.<sup>8</sup>

The first speech in the dialogue is purportedly by Lysias; though its lack of design is conspicuous,<sup>9</sup> it nonetheless mimics the famous speechwriter’s style sufficiently well that scholars have wondered if it might have genuinely been composed by Lysias instead of by Plato. In the context of the dialogue, it is clear that the speech is not to be taken as a literal proof that boys should sleep with men who do not love them rather than men who do but is rather admired by Phaedrus for daringly advocating this paradoxical thesis that most contemporaries would consider shameful.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Phaedrus is not convinced by the underlying arguments but by the panache with which they are presented, a distinction that provides perhaps an initial point of comparison with the paradoxical writings of that later writer of dialogues, Lucian, and his famous *Muscae Encomium*. For there, as in this case, the emphasis is on the creativity and rhetorical virtuosity required to put a positive spin on something usually considered undesirable, disgusting, or repulsive.

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<sup>3</sup> T. H. Irwin, ‘The Platonic Corpus’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. by Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 63–87. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hunter, *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 195.

<sup>5</sup> Irwin. 82.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kraut, ‘Plato on Love’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. by Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 286–310. 288.

<sup>7</sup> R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). 9.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Kraut. 307.

One final point of background to the *Phaedrus* that must be considered is the significance of the dialogue's setting. Fantham observes that the conversation taking place outside the city walls is unique, the only dialogue written by Plato that is not set either in the public spaces of the city or the private homes of individuals.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein but going still further, Yunis notes that the sacred grove where the discussion proper takes place became a touchstone for the *locus amoenus* in Hellenistic pastoral poetry,<sup>12</sup> revealing the import of the description of the setting that transcends generic boundaries. As the only Platonic text that uses such a rural setting and a work which has been recognised to have been influential in descriptions of places in other genres, it appears entirely reasonable to assume that it will also be an influence in descriptions of outdoor settings in later literary dialogues.

#### The *De Oratore*

With these points in mind, let us then turn to the first classical dialogue to be compared with the *Phaedrus*: Cicero's *De Oratore*. While the *Phaedrus*' dramatic date is uncertain, perhaps reflecting a more flexible attitude to chronology, the dramatic date of Cicero's dialogue can be pinned down precisely to 91BCE, as in the third book, he makes it clear that Crassus' death, which we know took place in that year, happened scarcely ten days after the day the discussion is alleged to have occurred, *vix diebus decem post eum diem*.<sup>13</sup> Cicero's Roman readers would have doubtless been aware of the fact that this chronological setting places the dialogue in the year preceding the enormous upheaval caused by the Social War, adding an additional dimension of dramatic irony. Yet despite the historically significant setting, the discussion that Cicero relates is clearly stated to have taken place at a relatively rural setting, Crassus' Tusculan villa,<sup>14</sup> and during public holidays,<sup>15</sup> in which no state business could be carried out. This was therefore a more socially acceptable and proper setting to depict statesmen enjoying *otium* away from Rome;<sup>16</sup> thus Cicero makes it clear that rather than being idle and neglectful of state matters, the real historical personages he depicts are in reality using their leisure time for discussions that will not only reinforce the social and political bonds between them but also make them more effective and purposeful when the holidays end and the time comes to resume *negotium*.

Though 91BCE was during Cicero's own lifetime, he would have been fifteen years old at the time and would have been unlikely to be included in a gathering of such illustrious statesmen and orators;<sup>17</sup> it is thus probably at least partly for motives of verisimilitude that he does not include himself as a character in the dialogue. It must also be noted that Cicero's decision to not be present may also be a strategy for aligning himself more closely with Plato, who, similarly, does not appear as a named speaking character in the *Phaedrus*

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<sup>11</sup> Fantham. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Book III De Oratore, De Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, Partitiones Oratoriae*, ed. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 349 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942). 2.

<sup>14</sup> MacKendrick, incorrectly, gives the villa as belonging to Antonius, but it is difficult to interpret *de Oratore* 1.24 as indicating such, particularly given the evidence of *Att* 4.16, which will be discussed shortly.

<sup>15</sup> Fantham.22.

<sup>16</sup> Fantham. 72.

<sup>17</sup> Fantham. 27.

or, indeed, any of his other dialogues.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the character of Cotta is presented as Cicero's source for what was discussed.<sup>19</sup>

The clear influence of Platonic dialogue, particularly the *Phaedrus*, on the *De Oratore* has been observed and discussed by numerous scholars and this chapter can therefore contribute little to the critical discussion on that head. However, it appears justifiable to restate some of the most salient points of the existing scholarship in order to make clear that the later dialogues based on the *De Oratore* can be viewed as originating in Platonic reception.

Fantham has already observed that in one of his letters, *Att 4.16*, Cicero writes to Atticus about the *De Oratore*, which had been written the previous year. There, he makes it very clear that his decision about which parts of the discussion that Scaevola should be present for was as a result of careful consideration of not only the historical Scaevola's character but also of how Plato presents his characters:

Quod in iis libris quos laudas personam desideras Scaevolae, non eam temere demovi, sed feci idem quod in 'Πολιτοίᾳ' deus ille noster Plato. cum in Piraeum Socrates venisset ad Cephalum, locupletem et festivum senem, quoad primus ille sermo habe[re]tur, adest in disputando senex; deinde, cum ipse quoque commodissime locutus esset, ad rem divinam dicit se velle discedere neque postea revertitur. credo Platonem vix putasse satis commodum fore si hominem id aetatis in tam longo sermone diutius retinisset. multo ego magis hoc mihi cavendum putavi in Scaevola, qui et aetate et valetudine erat ea qua esse meministi et iis honoribus ut vix satis decorum videretur eum pluris dies esse in Crassi Tusculano. et erat primi libri sermo non alienus a Scaevolae studiis; reliqui libri τεχνολογίαν habent, ut scis. huic ioculatorem senem illum, ut noras, interesse sane nolui.<sup>20</sup>

[As to the fact that in those (later) books, which you praise, you miss the character of Scaevola - I did not banish him away rashly but I did the same thing which our divine Plato did in his *Republic*. For when, while in Piraeus, Socrates had come to the house of Cephalus, a rich and jovial man, the old man is present in the debate at first. Then, when he has himself also spoken most wisely, he says that he wishes to depart for a ritual sacrifice, and he does not return afterwards.

I believe that Plato thought it not quite proper enough if he kept a man of that age for a long time in such a long conversation. I thought I needed to be even more careful of this in the case of Scaevola; in his case, due to his age and health (which were as you remember) and of the honours he had won, it seemed not quite proper enough that he should be at Crassus' Tusculan villa for many days.

<sup>18</sup> David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). 6.

<sup>19</sup> Fantham. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, trans. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library, 7 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999). 336.

And the conversation of the first book was not unconnected to Scaevola's studies, whereas the remaining books have a systematic treatment of grammar, as you know. I did not want that old man – a joker, as you know – to be too interested in that.]

Though the Platonic dialogue to which Cicero refers is the *Republic* and not the *Phaedrus*, there is a clear sense in this letter to Atticus that both Cicero and his addressee are very familiar with and revere the works of Plato (*deus ille noster Plato*) and that Plato's actions were viewed as a precedent for Cicero in writing his own dialogues.

Moreover, Cicero has gone beyond the literal imitation of how Plato stage-managed the characters in his dialogues but has clearly given thought to why he chose to make them act in these ways and has tried to incorporate the underlying logic into the *De Oratore*, as emphasised by the repetition of *vix satis commodum*. Scaevola's character is known to them not by hearsay but by personal acquaintance: as Atticus will remember, Scaevola was an old man (*senem*), a joker (*ioculatorem*) and, as a member of the political elite, doubtless also rather rich. This makes him a direct counterpart of Cephalus, characterised as a '*locupletem et festivum senem*' and therefore, according to Cicero's argument, it is entirely appropriate for him to be treated by the author with the same concerns for propriety and for the realistic depiction of his character. At the risk of anachronism, it is essentially the same attitude that we see today in response to the remonstrances of linguistic prescriptivists: "if it was good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for me".

To be sure, the fact that this passage refers to the *Republic* as a model for the *De Oratore* rather than the *Phaedrus* appears to challenge somewhat the hypothesis that the *Phaedrus* was a formal model for the *De Oratore*, yet the influence of the one Platonic dialogue does not necessarily preclude the influence of another, particularly if we accept that, due to their shared theme of moral psychology, it would have been natural for them to have been read in conjunction with each other. In fact, in the dialogue itself, the intention to imitate the *Phaedrus* is stated explicitly by the characters; it is Scaevola himself who remarks:

"Cur non imitamur, Crasse, Socratem illum, qui est in Phaedro Platonis? Nam me haec tua platanus admonuit, quae non minus ad opacandum hunc locum patulis est diffusa ramis, quam illa, cuius umbram secutus est Socrates, quae mihi videtur non tam 'ipsa acula,' quae describitur, quam Platonis oratione crevisse: et, quod ille durissimis pedibus fecit, ut se abiceret in herbam, atque ita illa, quae philosophi divinitus ferunt esse dicta, loqueretur, id meis pedibus certe concedi est aequius." Tum Crassum: "Immo vero commodius etiam;" pulvinosque poposcisse, et omnes in eis sedibus, quae erant sub platano, consedisce dicebat.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 20-22.

I am aware that conventionally, quoted text that has been indented does not require quotation marks; however, in a thesis on dialogue, it seems appropriate to make a distinction between what is speech and what is authorial or narratorial comment. I have therefore used double quotation marks to indicate speech in diegetic dialogues and short quotations from mimetic dialogues, even in indented quotations.



[“Crassus, why don’t we imitate the well-known Socrates from Plato’s *Phaedrus*? For this plane tree of yours reminds me of that one – it is no less extensive in its wide-spreading branches for shading this place – than the one whose shade Socrates sought. It seems to me that it grew not so much from ‘that little stream’, which is described, but out of Plato’s dialogue. And because he [Socrates] made to throw himself on the grass with his rough feet and in this way said those things, which philosophers claim were said by divine influence, it certainly is to be conceded more fairly to my feet.”

He [Cotta] used to say that Crassus then replied “Yes, but we will be even more comfortable”. He demanded cushions and they all sat down together on those seats which were beneath the plane tree.”]

This passage makes it very clear that, in the story allegedly recounted to Cicero by Cotta, both Scaevola and Crassus were very deliberately and self-consciously imitating the scenario in the *Phaedrus* in which the two characters choose to sit under a plane tree by a little stream to have their discussion. Scaevola’s removal from the scene after the first day of the dialogue is a decision by Cicero based on the precedent of the *Republic* but it would be difficult on reading this extract to make a compelling case that the *Phaedrus* was not also an influence that Cicero wishes to foreground, particularly given the interest that both the *Phaedrus* and the *De Oratore* take in discussing oratory and the way that individuals should communicate.

Returning to the point in question, that of Scaevola’s conscious invoking of Platonic precedent for sitting and resting beneath a plane tree, Fantham is not by any means the first to notice this. Indeed, the humanist and Ciceronian scholar Carlo Sigonio commented on this in his treatise on the dialogue genre, *De Dialogo Liber*, in the sixteenth century.

tum vero quam proxime ad rei verisimilitudinem narret postero die, postquam maiores illi natu satis quieverunt, in ambulationem ventum esse ac Scaevolam paucis spatiis factis, quod erat infirmissimis pedibus, considerare voluisse exemplo Socratis, ut ait, cuius memoriam platanus renovarit, quae est in *Phaedro* Platonis.<sup>22</sup>

[But then he [Cicero] narrates as closely as possible to the realism of the situation that on the next day, after the older men had rested sufficiently, that the group had gone for a stroll and that Scaevola, when they had completed a few laps and because he was very unstable on his feet, wanted to sit down in the style, as he said, of Socrates. For the plane tree, which appears in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, recalled the memory of Socrates.]

It is thus apparent that even as early as in this Cinquecento treatise, Sigonio is aware of the two motives driving Cicero’s decision to open the *De Oratore* as he does: both the concern for setting up a plausible situation where these real historical figures can be seen to be discussing oratory and the almost ostentatious invocation of Plato as a precedent and a

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<sup>22</sup> Carlo Sigonio, *Del Dialogo*, trans. by Franco Pignatti (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1993). 202.

model. Moreover, Sigonio is in no way fooled that this is anything other than a clever stratagem on Cicero's part, as the below quotation makes clear:

Hoc quidem pacto Cicero magnifico in primis ac splendido apparatu clarissimos illos viros, quasi histriones quosdam, ad colloquium tanquam in scenam perduxit.<sup>23</sup>

[Indeed, when this was agreed, Cicero first, with splendid and excellent preparation brought those most renowned men, as if actors, to the conversation just as if onto the stage.]

Sigonio is keenly aware that Cicero is, in a sense, directing this re-enactment of Plato, as emphasised by the theatrical similes; though it is Scaevola who speaks and professes the desire to perform intellectual discussion in a Socratic manner, it is Cicero who writes the script and hands it to him.

The relevance of the evidence of Sigonio merits highlighting: if Sigonio is aware in the sixteenth century that Cicero's dialogue is responding to Plato's and is, at least to a certain extent, an act of reception of the earlier Greek text, then the suggestion that either he or his contemporaries might have been able to discern the traces of Platonic dialogue in the Renaissance works inspired by Cicero's imitation appears highly plausible.

Imitation is, however, perhaps not the most appropriate way to refer to what Cicero is doing in the opening of the *De Oratore*; Crassus exclaims "*immo vero commodius etiam*" with almost programmatic force. The implication of the comparative adverb is that, at least in the dimension of comfort, they will outdo Socrates and Phaedrus; thus, it is through the character of Crassus that Cicero declares his intention of participating in what can be described as a game of literary one-upmanship. To continue the theatrical metaphor, it is as if the *Phaedrus* were a dress rehearsal for the real, Roman, discussion that is to unfold. Cicero builds on the *Phaedrus* to produce what Paul MacKendrick describes as one of his most original works.<sup>24</sup> Having thus demonstrated that there is a clear link between the two texts both as regards what Cicero actually says and as regards how readers both now and in the past have perceived them, it would be wise before moving on to consider the ways in which Cicero deviates from the scenario set up by Plato.

One obvious difference is the number of speakers. Plato's dialogue, despite the ventriloquial effect provided by the different speeches on the subject of love, very clearly only contains two speaking characters: Phaedrus and Socrates. The *De Oratore*, on the other hand, contains seven speakers: Crassus, Antonius, Sulpicius, Cotta, Scaevola, Q. Catulus and Caesar Strabo Vopiscus. The significance of this change that Cicero made in this first dialogue that he wrote is that it spreads the authority more evenly throughout the dialogue.

What does this mean and how does it affect the way we understand these dialogues? In the *Phaedrus*, we see a familiar Socratic scenario: Socrates leads the title character to a deeper consideration of a particular philosophic issue by means of questions and exposing the

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<sup>23</sup> Sigonio. 202.

<sup>24</sup> Paul MacKendrick, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero* (London: Duckworth, 1989). 43.

contradictions in his interlocutor's existing thoughts on the subject. It is clear from the text that in the discussion as Plato presents it, Socrates has both the upper hand and the authoritative voice; while the relationship between the two men is friendly, there is no mistaking the balance of power between them. If we then compare this with the *De Oratore*, we notice that, although Crassus is admittedly praised above the other speakers, all the characters present have, to a greater or lesser extent, a reputation for authority and a place among the leading citizens of their day. The young, it is true, defer to their elders but the elders also defer to each other with a self-deprecating politeness that would not be out of place in an eighteenth-century drawing room.<sup>25</sup> There is thus no clear teacher/student dynamic.

This more egalitarian approach taken by Cicero's dialogue is extremely interesting given what we know about Roman society. Commenting on the specifically Roman context behind the *De Oratore*, Fantham leaves us in no doubt as to the weight given to the *auctoritas* of an orator:

Roman legal representation was hierarchical: you needed a respected person to speak for you, whether or not he knew your character or the facts of your lawsuit, because of the social authority he commanded. And his success in winning your lawsuit or your acquittal in a criminal case, while earning him no money, added to his authority and brought him more important cases.<sup>26</sup>

She all but writes that the reputation of the orator speaking on your behalf was more important than the merit of the case in determining the verdict and makes it very clear that authority is self-perpetuating: cases are won on the strength of the authority of the speaker and won cases enhance this authority. It is therefore surprising that in a society where so much weight was placed on the social position and vertical relationships of power that this dialogue actually presents a more equal set of relationships between members of the ruling class than we see in Plato.

This is particularly the case as, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates rebukes the younger man for his esteem for authoritative figures by recalling a story from Greece's ancient past:

“Οἱ δὲ γ', ὦ φίλε, ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Δωδωναίου ἱερῷ δρυὸς λόγους ἔφησαν μαντικούς πρώτους γενέσθαι. τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε, ἅτε οὐκ οὔσι σοφοῖς ὥσπερ ὑμεῖς οἱ νέοι, ἀπέχρη δρυὸς καὶ πέτρας ἀκούειν ὑπ' εὐηθείας, εἰ μόνον ἀληθῆ λέγοιεν· σοὶ δ' ἴσως διαφέρει τίς ὁ λέγων καὶ ποδαπός. οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο μόνον σκοπεῖς, εἴτε οὔτως εἴτε ἄλλως ἔχει;”<sup>27</sup>

[“Indeed, my friend, those men in the temple of Zeus of Dodona said that the first prophetic words were produced by a tree. Certainly, men at that time, since they were not as wise as you are today, through their simplicity were eager to

<sup>25</sup> MacKendrick. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Fantham. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo. Phaedrus*, trans. by Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, 36 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017). 564.

listen to trees and rocks, if only the trees and rocks spoke the truth; but to you it makes as much of a difference who is speaking and from what country. For you do not consider this only, whether it is true or not.”]

The oracle of Zeus at Dodona was one of the earliest shrines in Greece; here the irony Socrates places on σοφοῖς (wise) and εὐηθείας (simplicity) is that these primitive early Greeks can teach Phaedrus and his contemporaries a lesson about assessing the weight of an utterance based on its own validity rather than its provenance.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this is arguably difficult, if not entirely impossible to do in reality, since the source and presentation of a message influence and interact with its meaning. In fact, it is certainly possible to comment that, in writing a series of dialogues in which Socrates’ role is to lead his interlocutors to greater understanding through a series of incisive questions revealing the inconsistencies and contradictions in their prior opinions, Plato is at least to a certain extent relying on the reputation of Socrates as a wise man to support claims which cannot be definitively proven true or false. Nonetheless, the passage from the *Phaedrus* does appear to presage the situation described by Fantham in which the facts of the case are subordinate to the authority of the lawyer.

Yet this is not reflected in the way that the characters interact with each other in the *De Oratore*. Instead of Socratic questioning, we ‘overhear’ instead the more equal discussions held between members of the ruling classes in Rome. The choice of a number of prominent Romans from the previous generation is not accidental: they appear to almost represent a class, that of the quintessentially Roman orator, reflecting on what oratory should be and how it should be used. This is very different to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which also discusses oratory and the writing of speeches, but does not ever bring Lysias onto the stage to defend himself in person.

Returning, now, to the comparison between Cicero and his Platonic model, we also note the decision to set the work in a specific place and time. As Yunis in his commentary notes, Plato gives four historical indications in the dialogue as to when the *Phaedrus* is set: it must be before 403, since Lysias’ brother Polemarchus is alive, but sufficiently far after 436 that Isocrates, born in that year, has begun his rhetorical studies. References to Lysias as the leading rhetorical writer of his day and a politician’s attack on him as a speechwriter, on the other hand, suggest a time after 403, when Athenian democracy was restored and Lysias’ career flourished.<sup>29</sup> There is therefore a distinct lack of historical precision in Plato’s imagining of the scene; the references to datable historical events appear at first glance plausible but are sufficiently vague to give the text a sense of timelessness. The *De Oratore*, on the other hand, can be dated more precisely: they took place during the *Ludi Romani*, so between 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September 91.

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<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 229.

<sup>29</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 8.

Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*

Turning now to the reception of the *De Oratore*, most of its text was lost for many centuries until the Laudensis manuscript was rediscovered at Lodi in 1421. This manuscript contained not only the *De Oratore* but also the text for the *Brutus* and the *Orator*; though it was not long before it was lost once more, in the intervening period, a copy was made which enabled European scholars to have access to this Ciceronian dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Its rediscovery in the Quattrocento, the era of great Italian humanists such as Leonardo Bruni, Lorenzo Valla and Leon Battista Alberti, when Latin as a *lingua franca* was extending its empire<sup>31</sup> and translations into Latin made Cicero's Greek influences more widely accessible, must be emphasised; the dialogue was rediscovered in an era in which intellectual culture was most attuned to its ideas and most willing to be influenced by them. Over the course of the century, influential Latin (and some vernacular) dialogues showing clear traces of their classical origins would be written by Bruni, Valla and Alberti, as well as Poggio Bracciolini and Giovanni Pontano; these fifteenth-century examples would then lead into the sixteenth-century tradition discussed in this thesis.

Of the many dialogues written on the Italian peninsula and the islands in the sixteenth-century, the most famous is Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*;<sup>32</sup> around 58 Italian editions were produced in the sixteenth century,<sup>33</sup> but the text was also read more widely, as evinced by the approximately 60 editions of the text published in languages other than Italian between 1528 and 1619.<sup>34</sup>

As a dialogue in which a selection of courtiers from the Italian elite discusses the art of being a good and effective courtier, the parallel with the *De Oratore* is immediately obvious and not concealed by the various revisions it underwent during a period of decades. During these revisions, the initial Latin sketches became a vernacular dialogue,<sup>35</sup> and after 1516, a fourth book was added,<sup>36</sup> thus extending the dialogue beyond the three-book structure of its Ciceronian model. We are certain that Castiglione was aware of the *De Oratore* and the resemblances between the two dialogues are not entirely coincidental because of the evidence of a letter he wrote to his steward, dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 1514, requesting that his copy of Cicero's dialogue be sent to him.<sup>37</sup>

There are two passages in *Il Cortegiano* in which Castiglione in his own voice makes explicit reference to classical dialogue as one of the influences on the dialogue. The first, which is found in the dedicatory letter to Signor Don Michel de Silva, is in response to critics who

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<sup>30</sup> Fantham. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Hereafter *Il Cortegiano*.

<sup>33</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 55.

<sup>35</sup> Olga Zorzi Pugliese, 'The Development of Dialogue in *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*: From the Manuscript Drafts to the Definitive Version', in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 79–94. 80.

<sup>36</sup> Wayne A. Rebhorn, 'The Enduring Word: Language, Time and History in *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*', *MLN*, 96.1 (1981), 23–40. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Pugliese. 93.

contend that it is pointless to describe an ideal courtier who can never possibly exist. He writes as follows:

mi contenterò aver errato con Platone, Senofonte e Marco Tullio... sì come, seconda quella opinione, è la idea della perfetta republica e del perfetto re e del perfetto oratore, così è ancora quella del perfetto cortegiano.<sup>38</sup>

[I will content myself to have erred in the company of Plato, Xenophon and Cicero... just as, in their opinion, there exists the concept of the perfect republic and the perfect king and the perfect orator, so there exists the concept of the perfect courtier.]

If we agree with Saccone that the covering letter to the dialogue is one of the first critical analyses of the work and represents the author offering his readers a key to its interpretation,<sup>39</sup> then this is a critical piece of evidence supporting the claim that *Cortegiano* is an act of classical reception. It is difficult to believe that his invocation of three authors of classical dialogue to justify the premise behind his own dialogue is coincidental;<sup>40</sup> the reference to the perfect orator in third place in the list of models of perfection described in antiquity makes it clear that it is Cicero's dialogic *De Oratore* that is referred to here. Just as Cicero in his letter to Atticus used Plato's *Republic* as a precedent for his decisions regarding the propriety of Scaevola's presence in the dialogue, so Castiglione uses the example of Cicero (and Plato and Xenophon) to bolster his position and defend his editorial decisions.

The other explicit reference to classical dialogue is found in the preface to the first book of the dialogue, which is addressed to Alfonso Ariosto. Just as he is about to turn to the body of the text, Castiglione explains that he is not going to write a list of precepts for the courtier to follow in strict order, as might be expected from a didactic work. Instead, his plan for the work is as follows:

alla foggia di molti antichi, rinovando una grata memoria, reciteremo alcuni ragionamenti, i quali già passarono tra omini singularissimi a tale proposito.<sup>41</sup>

[In the style of many ancients and renewing a pleasant memory, we shall recount some conversations which already took place between the most eminent men on this subject.]

<sup>38</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*, ed. by Guido Preti (Torino: Einaudi, 1965). 7.

<sup>39</sup> Eduardo Saccone, 'Trattato e Ritratto: L'Introduzione Del *Cortegiano*', *MLN*, 93.1 (1978), 1–21. 7.

<sup>40</sup> The other two texts referred to are Plato's *Republic* and, in all probability, Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Interestingly, although Xenophon wrote Socratic dialogues, at least some of which survive, the *Cyropaedia* is not a dialogic work. It does, however, have a crucial place in the history of the *specula principum* (mirrors for princes) genre and, in describing an ideal prince, would almost certainly have had an influence on later works attempting to describe an ideal authority figure.

<sup>41</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 10.

Though the specific dialogues he is referring to are not identified, this passage unambiguously aligns *Il Cortegiano* with the examples of the classical dialogue genre from antiquity. Nor is it particularly surprising that the sources he wishes to imitate are not named; in her work on the different drafts of the dialogue, Pugliese observes that during the period of composition, Castiglione increasingly moves away from citing his sources by name. In fact, contrary to established practice today, his number of citations of ancient sources reduces as his actual usage of them increases.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this appears to correspond to Cinquecento literary ideals: as Cerchi remarks, alluding to the texts of others could be perceived as a sign of elegance, while there appears to have been an unwritten rule that a text's most influential sources are the least cited since they were considered part of the literary code.<sup>43</sup> In such a way, when confronted with a passage that deliberately alluded to a classical original, the educated reader would be expected to '...perceive the Latin originals they are modelled on, to sense the ghostly presence of Cicero hovering just below the surface of Castiglione's text.'<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, there are places where the ghosts of classical writers of dialogues and their texts are explicitly invoked by name: in *Il Cortegiano*, Plato and Socrates are both referenced 12 times, while Xenophon is referenced four times and Tacitus, twice. Cicero is, unsurprisingly, the most-named classical writer of dialogue in the text, with 13 references to him as *Cicerone*, one as *Marco Tullio* and one as simply *Tullio*. One of these references is, for our purposes, particularly worthy of further attention as it concerns the *De Oratore* in the context of the appropriate way to imitate. Through the character of Count Lodovico Canossa, then, Castiglione explains:

"Parmi ancor ricordare che Cicerone in un loco introduca Marc'Antonio dir a Sulpizio che molti sono i quali non imitano alcuno e nientedimeno pervengono al sommo grado della eccellenzia; e parla di certi, i quali aveano introdotto una nova forma e figura di dire, bella, ma inusitata agli altri oratori di quel tempo, nella quale non imitavano se non se stessi; però afferma ancor che i maestri debbano considerar la natura dei discipuli e, quella tenendo per guida, indirizzargli ed aiutargli alla via, che lo ingegno loro e la natural disposizion gli inclina."<sup>45</sup>

["I seem to also remember that in one place, Cicero directs Mark Antony to say to Sulpicius that there are many who imitate no one and that they nonetheless reach the highest level of excellence and he speaks of certain men, who had introduced a new form and manner of speaking – beautiful, but outside the usual register of orators of that time, in which they did not imitate at all unless they imitated themselves. But he also affirms that teachers must consider the

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<sup>42</sup> Pugliese. 88-89.

<sup>43</sup> Paolo Cherchi, 'Plagio e/o Riscrittura Nel Secondo Cinquecento', in *Furto e Plagio Nella Letteratura Del Classicismo*, ed. by Roberto Gigliucci (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1998), pp. 53–68. 56, 59.

<sup>44</sup> Rebhorn. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 63.

nature of their students and, keeping this as a guide, direct and help them to the road to which their literary capacity and natural disposition inclines them.”]

As the *De Oratore* is the only Ciceronian dialogue in which Antonius and Sulpicius are present, this clearly identifies the source text. The passage to which he is referring is a section on imitation and training spoken by Antonius in the second book of the dialogue; the most crucial extracts of it for our purposes are as follows:

“Quare ego tibi oratorem sic iam instituum, si potuero, ut, quid efficere possit, ante perspiciam. ... tentabo quid deceat, quid voce, quid viribus, quid spiritu, quid lingua efficere possit.”<sup>46</sup>

[“Hence I will now establish an orator for you, if I can, and I will first find out what he is able to do... I will test what is fitting for him, what he can do with his voice, with his strength, with his breath, with his tongue.”]

“Vidi statim indolem, neque dimisi tempus, et eum sum cohortatus, ut forum sibi ludum putaret esse ad discendum; magistrum autem, quem vellet, eligeret; me quidem si audiret, L. Crassum.”<sup>47</sup>

[“I saw his innate talent at once and I lost no time, but I encouraged him to think that the forum was a school for him to learn; he should, however, choose whichever teacher he liked but if he listened to me, he would choose Crassus.”]

“Atque esse tamen multos videmus, qui neminem imitentur et suapte natura, quod velint, sine cuiusquam similitudine consequantur. Quod et in vobis animadverti recte potest, Caesar et Cotta; quorum alter inusitatum nostris quidem oratoribus leporem quemdam et salem, alter acutissimum et subtilissimum dicendi genus est consecutus.”<sup>48</sup>

[“and yet we see many men, who imitate no one and follow their own nature as they like without similarity to any model. And this can be well-noticed in you, Caesar and Cotta: one of you indeed has reached a certain charm and wit uncommon in orators of our time, while the other of you has achieved a most wise and precise manner of speaking.”]

Two points must be made when considering this pointed reference to the *De Oratore*. The first is that the speaker who uses it as an example is Count Canossa, whose position on linguistic imitation, at least in as much as it pertains to the *questione della lingua*, has been

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<sup>46</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 260.

<sup>47</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 264.

<sup>48</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 270.



identified as Castiglione's own.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the authority of the great Roman writer Cicero lends weight to Canossa's assertions, which in turn reinforce and echo Castiglione's own arguments put forward in his preface.

The second is that Canossa is using the Cicero passage very selectively to promote an argument that doesn't quite reflect the weighting Cicero gives in the Latin to following a model versus using one's own natural talent to guide their style. Though the major elements of the Canossa quote can be found in Antonius' speech – the fact that Sulpicius is mentioned, the notion that teachers should guide students appropriately according to their own abilities, the reference to many men using their own talent – Canossa has used the final extract from the Cicero to draw different conclusions to the ones most obviously drawn from reading the whole speech. For the fundamental argument that Antonius makes is that copying the right model's style is appropriate to achieve excellence; after watching Sulpicius speak in a relatively minor case, he advised him (in the second extract) to choose a model to imitate from the more experienced orators he saw in the forum and suggested Crassus would be most suitable for him. The sense from the Ciceronian passage when read as a whole is almost that the comment about Cotta and Caesar is given as an afterthought, as Antonius becomes aware that he must address the fact that their individual styles cannot be said to resemble anyone else's and, since they are present, does not wish to slight them; they are almost the exception that proves the rule. In Castiglione, however, divorced from the previous pages of justification for the use of models, Cotta and Caesar's methods of composition appear the ideal that Sulpicius should be striving towards rather than a counterexample in a broader discussion of the value of literary models.

One final element that must be considered when assessing the resemblance between the *De Oratore* and *Il Cortegiano* are the correspondences between the events that happen in the two texts. The parallels are significant: both dialogues contain characters drawn from the recent social elite; both authors pointedly express that they were not present for the discussions and only heard a report of them from one of the actual participants; both discussions contain sections debating the use of language, a point that also recalls Plato's *Phaedrus*. Moreover, both dialogues include characters arriving late (the Prefect, Francesco Maria della Rovere, arrives at the end of the first book of *Il Cortegiano*, while Catulus and Strabo Vopiscus arrive at the beginning of the second book of *De Oratore*) and both dialogues acquire a nostalgic resonance from the fact that they are set in the past and contemplate the subsequent (and in Crassus' case, imminent) deaths of many of their speakers.

Yet one of the most immediate threads of continuity from the *Phaedrus* to the *De Oratore* is, admittedly, missing in *Il Cortegiano*: that of the setting of the dialogue as taking place under a plane tree. Castiglione's dialogue, instead, takes place at the court of Urbino, in the rooms of the Duchess rather than outside under a tree. The change of location is perhaps not surprising, given the twin demands of verisimilitude and propriety. For, firstly, it would appear far more likely that courtiers would feel an urge to reflect on and discuss the nature

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<sup>49</sup> This is discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

of the ideal courtier in a courtly setting than outside in a rural area, quite aside from any concern about how to fit the extensive cast of characters around a single tree.

In terms of propriety, Castiglione takes great care to set up his dialogue to ensure that the circumstances in which the dialogue is set up are entirely proper and appropriate. The culture at the court of Urbino was, according to Castiglione, one where every courtier worked hard to be considered worthy of the company of the Duke (*ognuno si sforzava di mostrarsi tale, che meritasse esser giudicato degno di così nobile commercio*); the activities that took place there were always honourable and pleasing (*onorevoli e piacevoli esercizi*), and the conversations and jokes were enjoyable but also morally sound (*i soavi ragionamenti e l'oneste facezie*).<sup>50</sup>

This emphasis placed on the wholesome atmosphere and innocent diversions at the Court of Urbino is probably partly related to the inclusion of women. Unusually for a literary dialogue, Castiglione depicts courtly women as taking part in the discussions; while their role is limited, reflecting the social restrictions that applied to women in Renaissance Europe, their presence as speaking characters is nonetheless noteworthy. Women's position in Renaissance responses to classical dialogues will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter but it can be speculated that, just as Cicero had to take care to make his senators visit Crassus' Tusculan estate at a time when no public business could be undertaken, thus legitimising a discussion that might otherwise have been seen as inappropriate frivolity, so Castiglione's inclusion of women made the remove to a more urbane and structured society appear more proper.

Nonetheless, there is one instance in which the image of the conversation beneath the tree penetrates the more refined court of Urbino. On the second day of the discussions, after speaking for some time about the variety of different jokes and witticisms a courtier may choose to employ, Bernardo 'Bibbiena' Dovizi attempts to relinquish the floor by commenting:

“Ma voi ... che pensaste di riposarvi sotto questo sfogliato albero e nei miei secchi ragionamenti, credo che ne siate pentito e vi paia esser entrato nell'ostaria di Montefiore;”<sup>51</sup>

[“But you ... who thought to rest under this leafless tree and in my dry conversation – I believe that you have repented of it, and you seem to have entered the inn at Montefiore.”]

The reference to Montefiore is to a particularly notorious inn on a busy route to the north-east of Urbino;<sup>52</sup> what is particularly interesting is the analogy that Bernardo draws between dry conversation and the unsatisfying shade beneath a leafless tree. Perhaps this is a self-

<sup>50</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 192.

<sup>52</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by George Bull (London: The Penguin Group, 1967). 187.

conscious remark from the character: aware of the possibility that someone may record the conversation in writing and of the lofty company such an act would place him in, he reacts with an example of Castiglione's much-discussed concept of *sprezzatura*.<sup>53</sup> Here, his modest self-deprecation which conceals a deeper and more learned allusion, recalls the setting of both the *Phaedrus* and the *De Oratore*, both of which refer to the shade and wide-spreading branches of their respective plane trees and both of which depict stimulating and edifying conversation. The tree may only be metaphorical, but it is nonetheless a thread connecting Castiglione with Cicero's own act of homage to his 'divine Plato' (*deus ille noster Plato*).<sup>54</sup>

*Aretino's Ragionamenti as a response to Castiglione*

Having discussed *Il Cortegiano's* appropriation of the *De Oratore* in some depth, let us consider its own reception. The overwhelming success of Castiglione's dialogue in sixteenth-century European literature made it somewhat inevitable that it would be incorporated into broader culture, imitated and, at times, parodied. One particularly intriguing suggestion from twenty-first century scholarship is a chapter by Robert Buranello in which he argues that Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* is one such parody.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore to the *Ragionamenti* that we will now turn.

At first glance, there is little that connects *Il Cortegiano* and the *Ragionamenti*; the elegance and courtly politeness that characterise Castiglione's text bear scant resemblance to the much coarser, more vulgar, and at times downright obscene, conversations that Aretino depicts in his six days of dialogue.<sup>56</sup> Instead of Castiglione's refined high society, which appears almost a *Who's Who* of the Italian elite in 1507, Aretino chooses instead to focus on a handful of some of the lowest-status individuals in Renaissance culture: prostitutes, madams and wet nurses.

Unsurprisingly, given the distinctly unsavoury character of Aretino's dialogues, he has generally fared worse in comparisons with Bembo and Castiglione, contemporary writers of dialogues. Even his biographer, Christopher Cairns, made the following remark about him:

Aretino's literary reputation will never stand comparison with his great contemporaries: Ariosto, Bembo and Castiglione, but his use of and vision of this literary ABC is as important to an understanding of their society as anything they wrote.

Cairns' assessment of Aretino's value to later readers is that his importance is principally of historical rather than literary-critical value,<sup>57</sup> thus agreeing with the earlier assessment made by Hutton, who wrote that Aretino's virtues as a writer were not those of a man of

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<sup>53</sup> It is nigh-impossible to touch upon self-fashioning or the aesthetic underlying *Il Cortegiano* without in some way reflecting on the concept of *sprezzatura*. Providing a detailed enumeration of all relevant texts here would therefore be impossible, but for a very recent discussion of *sprezzatura* as relates to the concept of grace in the Italian Renaissance, see Mac Carthy, *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance*.

<sup>54</sup> Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*. 336.

<sup>55</sup> Buranello. 97.

<sup>56</sup> An alternative title for the *Ragionamenti* is the *Sei Giornate*, in reference to the duration of the dialogue.

<sup>57</sup> Cairns. 7.

letters but of a journalist.<sup>58</sup> In the case of Hutton's biography, we might fairly ask ourselves to what extent his views of Aretino's literary importance are prejudiced by either the facts of his life, or the subject matter and characters he chose to depict, or the deliberate rejection of the courtly and humanistic ethos encapsulated in the works of Ariosto, Bembo and Castiglione. His biography, which was published in 1922, appears highly critical of Aretino on moral grounds; in the introduction, he actually writes of Aretino: 'The man was a monster: a monster certainly, only not a magician.'<sup>59</sup>

Initially, the *Ragionamenti* were actually two separate texts; in 1534, Aretino published the first three days of the dialogue under the title *Il Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* and two years later, in 1536, he published the second half of the work as *Il Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna alla Pippa*. They are clearly linked though; in the *Ragionamento*, Nanna discusses with another prostitute her experiences in all three of the states of life available to a woman in Renaissance society (as a nun, a wife and a courtesan) on the pretext of needing help to make a decision about her daughter's future, then in the *Dialogo*, she teaches her daughter how to be a courtesan over two days and, on the third day, the two of them listen as a midwife teaches a wetnurse how to be a procuress. For this reason, they are often discussed together and will be discussed as such in this chapter.

Hutton describes the *Ragionamenti* as 'the first effort of "realism" in European letters',<sup>60</sup> but, despite this notable first, nonetheless considers his comedy (*La Cortigiana*) the only thing of lasting value that Aretino ever wrote.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, *La Cortigiana* was published in 1534, the same year as the first part of what would become the *Ragionamenti*, though it had been drafted in 1526,<sup>62</sup> and Cairns, writing in the 1980s, considers this work too to be a parody of Castiglione and Bembo.<sup>63</sup> If we understand parody to be a cultural practice making a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice, as Dentith defines it,<sup>64</sup> it becomes clear that Cairns has identified evidence of satirical and nuanced engagement with Castiglione in a non-dialogic work by Aretino. We therefore see another instance where modern scholarship perceives a parodistic relationship between these authors, which adds weight to Buranello's claim that the *Ragionamenti* are also directly responding to the *Cortegiano*.

Of course, as Cairns notes, 'any iconoclastic or satirical intention presupposes a good knowledge of the model in question';<sup>65</sup> in other words, it would be highly implausible for Aretino to attempt to parody Castiglione's dialogue without reading it. This does not appear unlikely; even leaving aside the popularity of the *Cortegiano* in European Renaissance culture once it was published, Castiglione and Aretino were both exposed to the same

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Hutton, *Pietro Aretino: The Scourge of Princes* (London, Bombay, Sydney: Constable & Co Ltd., 1922). xiv.

<sup>59</sup> Hutton. x-xi.

<sup>60</sup> Hutton. xv.

<sup>61</sup> Hutton. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Buranello. 106.

<sup>63</sup> Cairns. 36.

<sup>64</sup> Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). 37.

<sup>65</sup> Cairns. 32.

literary influences at the court of Leo X in Rome, though their roles were very different,<sup>66</sup> making it highly plausible that Aretino could have come across the dialogue at a much earlier stage of composition. Indeed, Cairns writes:

Aretino undoubtedly knew the manuscript of the *Cortegiano* in Rome or Mantua well before its publication, possibly that same copy that Vittoria Colonna forgot to return, thus accelerating the printing of Castiglione's book.<sup>67</sup>

Aside from the dialogue form, what *Il Cortegiano* and the *Ragionamenti* have in common is the discussion of the qualities needed for a particular role in society. This is the foundation of Buranello's claim that Aretino's writings satirize Castiglione's text; he comments:

As the dialogues progress, the characters discuss all of the qualities that a whore should possess in order to succeed in this environment. From table manners, speech, and dress, to particular 'talents', all are developed to ensure success in the profession. These discussions establish the parodistic treatment that Aretino gives of Courtier-like treatises.<sup>68</sup>

He also comments on the decorum of the dialogues. This at first glance appears highly incongruous, since the settings and characters depicted are so very different, but decorum here refers to the way that the speech, interaction and subject matter of the dialogues reflect each other and are appropriate to the characters, who are drawn from a uniform social milieu in their respective dialogues.<sup>69</sup> Castiglione's noblemen speak like noblemen and discuss topics relevant to their lives at court: the proper way to serve their ruler, what jokes are appropriate to make and the ubiquitous debate on which variety of the vernacular should be written (and spoken) at court; the conversations between Aretino's lower-status sex workers are correspondingly lower in tone. To make them speak otherwise would be highly jarring. Thus, Aretino's dialogue may be said to share this specialised meaning of decorum with the dialogues of Bembo and Castiglione, though the latter dialogues are more 'decorous' in the conventional sense.<sup>70</sup>

Part of this decorum includes the occasion on which the discussions depicted in the dialogue take place. We have already seen how Cicero took pains to establish that the *De Oratore* took place during public holidays, so the statesmen of the past were using their leisure time profitably rather than using theoretical discussion as a means of avoiding more pressing state matters, and have touched upon the setting of the *Cortegiano*, in which the discussions were part of a game to entertain the guests remaining after Pope Julius' visit to the court of Urbino.<sup>71</sup> What is perhaps surprising is that Aretino includes a similar justification for Antonia and Nanna spending time in idle conversation. When trying to persuade Nanna to share her life experience as a nun, a wife and a prostitute, Antonia

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<sup>66</sup> Cairns. 33.

<sup>67</sup> Cairns.39.

<sup>68</sup> Buranello.107.

<sup>69</sup> Buranello. 98.

<sup>70</sup> Buranello. 97-98.

<sup>71</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 16-17.

states that as it is the feast day of St Mary Magdalene, they could not be plying their usual trade: “*a ogni modo oggi è la Madalena nostra avvocata che non si fa niente*”.<sup>72</sup> The apparent contradiction between their religious observance of the patron saint of their profession and the decidedly irreligious, societally and ecclesiastically unacceptable nature of that profession is amusing and, as Buranello remarks, parodies the classical notion of *otium* so pronounced in Cicero.<sup>73</sup> It also makes it possible to specify the days (though not the year) that the dialogues are set, since the day in the Catholic liturgical calendar dedicated to St Mary Magdalene is July 22<sup>nd</sup>; the first three days of the dialogue are therefore the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July,<sup>74</sup> though it is unclear how much narrative time has passed between the end of the first three books and the beginning of the second.

Both dialogues can also be said to focus on the roles and status of women, the *querelle des femmes* debate that was hotly disputed in Renaissance literary culture. The third day of the *Cortegiano* stages an explicit defence of women, with Giuliano ‘il Magnifico’ de Medici and Cesare Gonzoga defending women against the attacks of Gaspare Pallavicino. Both sides of the argument are, by this point in the history of the debate, highly conventional; Gaspare argues that women are less perfect than men and therefore defects of nature (“*quando nasce una donna, è difetto o error della natura*”) while Giuliano claims that women are just as capable as men (“*essendo, come avemo dimostrato, le donne naturalmente capaci di quelle medesime virtù che son gli omini*”).<sup>75</sup>

Aretino’s satire, on the other hand, asserts the value of women differently; though his women are gross caricatures of the worst stereotypes of what women were perceived to be, his men are hardly any better. This is particularly apparent in the fifth day of discussion, in which Nanna warns her daughter that despite the opprobrium heaped upon sex workers by the male authorities, they are actually far more frequently harmed by men than the reverse: “*Ma ponghisi da un canto tutti gli uomini rovinati da le puttane, e da l’altro tutte le puttane sfracassate dagli uomini, e vedrassi chi ha più colpa, o noi o loro*”<sup>76</sup> (“But put on one hand all the men ruined by whores and on the other all the whores butchered by men, and you will see who is more to blame, us or them”). Here, the word choice is very significant; in a sentence where the men and the sex workers are otherwise balanced syntactically, the participles differ greatly in their force. *Rovinati* is from the verb *rovinare* (to ruin), which is defined by *lo Zingarelli* as meaning *guastare, sciupare* or *mandare in sfacelo o in fallimento*.<sup>77</sup> It is therefore roughly equivalent to English verbs meaning ‘to spoil’, ‘to ruin’ or ‘to bring to destruction’, whereas the corresponding *sfracassare* means *fare a pezzi violentemente e con rumore* – to tear to pieces loudly and violently.<sup>78</sup> It is clear that, at least from Nanna’s perspective, the prostitutes suffer to a much greater extent both in terms of numbers of victims among them and the extent to which they are harmed.

<sup>72</sup> Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamento ~ Dialogo*, ed. by Carla Forno (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1988). 79.

<sup>73</sup> Buranello. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Aretino. 124.

<sup>75</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 227,237.

<sup>76</sup> Aretino. 443.

<sup>77</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, ‘Rovinare’, *Lo Zingarelli* 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, ‘Sfracassare’, *Lo Zingarelli* 2021.

This is not to say, however, that the *Ragionamenti* are to be viewed as uncomplicatedly proto-feminist or pro-woman. De Rycker explains this eloquently when she writes:

Taken as a whole, the *Sei Giornate* hinges on the contradiction that the order of female sexual morality is reversed, so that it is the nuns who are the worst behaved and the prostitutes who, though dishonest in their trickery, are paradoxically more honest than nuns or wives in their use of sex for economic advancement. This argument does not stop these dialogues being a misogynistic satire based on the convention of lascivious women, yet in comparison to contemporary satires on courtesans, it is remarkably liberal in its attempt to lift the lid on the hypocrisy of the church and the court, and in its championing of working people.<sup>79</sup>

A further point of contact between Aretino and Castiglione concerns comparisons between the two states. For, in light of Buranello's claim that the *Ragionamenti* are at least to some extent a parody of the *Cortegiano* and the similarities in form and subject matter between the two works, in addition to the social and historical circumstances that make some form of engagement between the two texts highly probable, the references to courtiers and comparisons made in the *Ragionamenti* between prostitutes and courtiers merit some discussion.

When discussing the precarity of the sex worker's life, Nanna speaks as follows:

“Le puttane non son donne, ma sono puttane; e però pensano e fanno ciò che io feci e dissi. Ma dove lascio una nostra saviezza che staria bene alle formiche che si proveggono la state per il verno? Antonia mia, sorella cara, tu hai da sapere che una puttana sempre ha nel core un pongolo che la fa star malcontenta: e questo è il dubitare di quelle scale e di quelle candele che tu saviamente dicesti; e ti confesso che, per una Nanna che si sappia porre dei campi al sole, ce ne sono mille che si muoiono nello spedale; e maestro Andrea soleva dire che le puttane e i cortegiani stanno in una medesima bilancia, e però ne vedi molti più di carlini che d'oro.”<sup>80</sup>

[“Whores aren't women but whores—<sup>81</sup> so they think and do what I said and did. But why should I pass over our wisdom which befits the ants who prepare in summer for the winter? My dear Antonia, sister, you must know that a whore always has a pressure in her heart which makes her discontent — and that is fearing ending up on those church steps and selling candles as you wisely mentioned. I admit to you that, for every Nanna who knows how to make her own affairs prosper, there are a thousand who die in the hospital. And Maestro

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<sup>79</sup> Kate De Rycker, 'Translating the *Ragionamento*: Reframing Pietro Aretino as the Castigator of Courtesans', *Literature Compass*, 12.6 (2015), 299–309. 300.

<sup>80</sup> Aretino. 256.

<sup>81</sup> I use “whore” to translate *puttana* as I feel it conveys the appropriate emotional force of the original Italian; speaking coarsely is a feature of the *Ragionamenti* and to translate it in a more formal, academic way would be to lose some of the decorum of the dialogue.

Andrea was accustomed to say that whores and courtiers should be weighed on the same scales and that you see many more cheap, low value ones than gold.”]

This speech of Nanna’s is extremely interesting not only because it provides justification for prostitutes behaving in ways outside societal norms by comparing them to insects more usually known for their pro-social behaviour and shrewd forward planning, but also because it draws an explicit comparison between prostitutes and courtiers. The comparison is perhaps not surprising, given gendered understandings of power in Renaissance society; it would not be difficult to see the relentless focus on self-promotion that we already see in Castiglione and the need to please social superiors at court (regardless of their actual qualities and moral worth) as an act of degradation akin to the shame of a woman becoming a prostitute. Aretino’s attitude towards courtly life was profoundly negative, as his later *Dialogue of the Courts* makes explicit: in it, the characters try to dissuade a young man from giving up his studies to pursue a courtly life.<sup>82</sup> Knowing this, the implications behind the comparison are particularly marked: if sex workers are no longer to be considered women but whores as a result of their profession, what can be said of courtiers?

As if to add force to the comparison, although it is placed in the mouth of Nanna, it is actually attributed to a different, more authoritative source: the Venetian painter Maestro Andrea. Present at the courts of popes Leo X and Clement VII at Rome, his connection to and experience of the court and comparatively high social standing give weight to his opinion about the relative values of courtiers and prostitutes. Indeed, he was the author of a *Purgatorio delle Cortigiane*, a satirical work against courtesans, who were essentially the more glamorous type of prostitutes in Renaissance court culture.<sup>83</sup> Of course, his credibility is also not harmed by the facts of his identity: that he is male and not engaged in the sex trade.

This is not the only comparison between prostitutes and courtiers to be found in the *Ragionamenti*. In the fifth day of discussions, Nanna recounts the following from her godfather:

“Nanna, le puttane d’oggi si simigliano ai cortigiani dal dì d’oggi, che per la divizia di loro stessi bisogna mariolare: altrimenti si moiano di stento; e per un che abbia pane in l’arca, ci son gli stuoli di accatta-tozzi. Ma il male sta nel gusto che hanno mutato i gran maestri.”<sup>84</sup>

[“Nanna, today’s whores are like today’s courtiers, who for their own wealth need to swindle others: otherwise, they die of destitution. And for every individual courtier who has bread in his cupboard, there are crowds begging for scraps. But the evil lies in the tastes which have changed amongst the great nobles.”]

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<sup>82</sup> Buranello. 95,100.

<sup>83</sup> Aretino. 223.

<sup>84</sup> Aretino. 431-2.



Once again, we see the precarious existence of both prostitutes and courtiers reported back by Nanna from a male source she appears to respect. Although in the case of her godfather Motta, we do not know for certain whether he was a real person, in her commentary, Carla Forno suggests he may have been a friend of Aretino's during his time in Rome.<sup>85</sup> The sentiment expressed is also very similar, with the poor chance of individual success foregrounded in both passages; what is different from the earlier quotation is the explicit focus on their bad behaviour. Indeed, in the conversation that ensues, Pippa remarks of courtiers that they are just as sinful as courtesans, ("*adunque le cortigiane ancora sono peccatrici come loro*");<sup>86</sup> she uses the politer term *cortigiana*, a term for a lady of the court studiously shunned by Castiglione in his more decorous text for its euphemistic undertones, to emphasise the parallels between the two social roles: the courtesan as the female counterpart of the male courtier.

In what Nanna says, the unscrupulous behaviour is not only confined to the courtiers and prostitutes but is also a characteristic of the nobles who are in charge. The change of tastes that Motta, through Nanna, mentions is the tendency towards homosexual sexual activity;<sup>87</sup> traditional understandings of the Bible viewed such acts as deeply sinful and the penalty of being burnt at the stake after decapitation was a widespread 'official' punishment for sodomy throughout Europe, though, in reality, lesser sentences were generally passed.<sup>88</sup> Leaving aside any professional difficulties a taste for homosexual acts might create for Nanna, the argument here is that courtiers and prostitutes are forced to behave in the ways they do because they are dependent on more powerful people. Here, we have an inversion of Machiavelli's famous nineteenth chapter of *Il Principe*, with its striking argument that rulers are forced to behave immorally when their main power base is corrupt;<sup>89</sup> here, the prostitutes and courtiers are wicked because of their social superiors, not the other way round.

One last way in which the *Ragionamenti* follows similar strategies to the *Cortegiano* is the apparent awareness on behalf of the characters that they exist within a literary dialogue. While Castiglione's courtiers do not state overtly that they are seeking to imitate previous dialogues, as we have seen to be the case in the *De Oratore*, the characters in the dialogue show a certain awareness of the possibility that their conversations may be recorded, as we see in Giuliano's response to Emilia Pia's assertive demand that he move away from Aristotelian arguments in his defence of women:

"se per sorte qui fusse alcuno che scrivesse i nostri ragionamenti, non vorrei che poi in loco dove fossero intese queste "materie" e "forme", si vedessero senza risposta gli argomenti e le ragioni che 'l signor Gaspar contra di voi adduce."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Aretino. 490.

<sup>86</sup> Aretino. 431.

<sup>87</sup> Aretino. 490.

<sup>88</sup> Giovanni Scarabello, *Meretrices: Storia Della Prostituzione a Venezia Tra Il XIII e Il XVIII Secolo* (Venezia Lido: Supernova, 2006). 58.

<sup>89</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. by Luigi Firpo (Torino: Einaudi, 1961). 72.

<sup>90</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 232-33.

[“If by chance there were someone here who would write down our conversation, I wouldn’t want it to seem then, in a place where these “materials” and “forms” would be understood, that the arguments that Signor Gaspar brings forward against you had gone unchallenged”.]

There appears no obvious reason why we should be obliged to decide whether, as Albury suggests, this remark is due to the consciousness that there are papal visitors among them who will report back what is said to the court in Rome, or we follow the traditional interpretation that this is a metaliterary reference on the part of Castiglione;<sup>91</sup> a message can have multiple layers of interpretation so both, or neither, may be correct.

The possibility of being heard and understood by others is more obviously metaliterary in the *Ragionamenti*. In the first day of the dialogue, Antonia complains about Nanna’s use of euphemisms when discussing the sexual shenanigans in the convent, saying that if she uses them, she will only be understood by scholars at the university college in Rome, “*che non sarai intesa se non dalla Sapienza Capranica*”.<sup>92</sup> In the context of their intimate discussion, it appears a little strange that she should care so much that her friend should be comprehensible to the many, since she is the only actual audience and has clearly understood up until this point; it therefore can be seen as a reference to or awareness of the artificiality of the dialogue.

Interestingly, Antonia concludes her complaint about euphemisms with “*ora di sì al sì e no al no: se non, tientelo*,”<sup>93</sup> (“now say ‘yes’ when you mean ‘yes’ and ‘no’ when you mean ‘no’ – or else shut up”). This bears a striking resemblance to Matthew 5:37 from the New Testament, where Jesus says,

“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> W.R. Albury, ‘Castiglione’s “Francescopaedia”: Pope Julius II and Francesco Maria Della Rovere in “The Book of the Courtier”’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 42.2 (2011), 323–47. 331.

<sup>92</sup> Aretino. 105.

<sup>93</sup> Aretino. 105.

<sup>94</sup> *The Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

I have elected to use a published translation for any quotes from the Bible, a decision made after much careful consideration. While providing the quotations in the Vulgate, the version of the Bible that would be most widely used in sixteenth century Italy, was considered, this is in itself a translation and would have then needed to be translated again for the benefit of readers who are not comfortable with Latin, risking additional translation loss for little benefit. On the other hand, translating from the original sources myself would have been possible for New Testament quotations, but not Old Testament ones.

The translation selected has also been the subject of much thought. Given that the purpose of using these quotations is to illustrate that the ideas expressed would have been familiar to individuals in Catholic Italy during this time, I wanted quotations from the Bible to feel familiar to a twenty-first century reader of English, and I believed that older, more traditional language was more likely to have seeped into anglophone culture than more recent, colloquial translations. However, the original King James Bible from 1611 uses language that is sufficiently different from modern English to be rather alienating. The New King James Version has therefore been selected as a compromise between traditionalism and readability.

The perversion of scripture here would have been immediately obvious to Aretino's readers, steeped in Catholic culture; whilst Jesus' command is in the context of swearing oaths, advising his followers that they do not need to swear by heaven and must keep their oaths, in Aretino, Antonia's demand is so that Nanna will not try to call sex organs by politer names.

This is not the only instance where the characters in the *Ragionamenti* appear to be aware of the possibility that their conversation will reach a wider audience than is currently present beneath the fig tree. At the beginning of day 3 of the dialogue, Antonia remarks:

“io pensava, mentre che mi vestiva, che sarebbe una bella cosa che qualcuno scrivesse i tuoi ragionamenti, e che ci fusse chi raccontasse la vita dei preti e dei frati e dei secolari; acciò che, udendola le mentovate da te, si ridessero di loro come eglino si rideranno di noi che, per parere di esser savie, diamo contra a noi medesime; e parmi già udire che non so lo faccia: le orecchie mi trombano, ei sarà vero.”<sup>95</sup>

[“I was thinking as I was getting dressed that it would be a good thing if someone were to write down your conversations and if there were someone who would write down the lives of priests and friars and laymen so that when the women you've mentioned hear them, they would laugh at those men as they will laugh about us who, to appear wise, speak against ourselves. And I seem to already hear that someone is doing it: my ears are buzzing, so it must be true.”]

As Forno remarks, here Aretino is evidently referring to himself recording the conversation in composing his dialogue,<sup>96</sup> a metaliterary gesture that recalls strategies not just from the *Cortegiano* but from the *De Oratore's* deliberate invocation of the *Phaedrus*. We can follow this thread through the centuries and the different acts of reception.

#### Lucian's *Hermotimus*

At this juncture, we must now backtrack somewhat; Cicero's was not the only dialogue written in antiquity that pointedly recalled the *Phaedrus* and this bifurcation of the reception of Plato's dialogue is also worthy of being studied and traced into the Renaissance. During the period referred to since Philostratus as the Second Sophistic, Lucian wrote a number of dialogues, including the *Hermotimus*, a dialogue described by Chapman as containing a complete summary of Lucian's thought.<sup>97</sup> We will turn to it now.

The dialogue is of interest to us because of the way that it begins; it opens with what Hunter describes as 'a rewriting of one of the most famous of all Platonic passages, Socrates' encounter with Phaedrus at the opening of the *Phaedrus*'.<sup>98</sup> Peterson agrees with this

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<sup>95</sup> Aretino. 229.

<sup>96</sup> Aretino. 278.

<sup>97</sup> Chapman. 175-6.

<sup>98</sup> Hunter. 2.

assessment,<sup>99</sup> elsewhere writing ‘In a Platonic, or specifically Phaedran vein, the *Hermotimus* focuses on the impact that a philosopher’s logoi have on their recipients and their propensity to become distorted’.<sup>100</sup> It is thus directly relevant to our case study.

The storyline of the *Hermotimus* is simple and the resemblances between it and the *Phaedrus* are immediately obvious: *Hermotimus*, an aged student of the stoic school of philosophy, is hurrying to meet his teacher, book in hand, when by chance he encounters *Lycinus*, a younger man than him at around forty, and someone with whom he is on friendly terms. In the conversation that follows, *Lycinus* informs him that his teacher has cancelled his classes for the day as he is recovering from overindulgence at a party the previous night and, through a process of decidedly Socratic questioning, forces him to realise the absolute impossibility of coming to any definitive understanding of key philosophical concepts.

Like the *Phaedrus*, the *Hermotimus* features direct speech between only two characters: *Lycinus* and the eponymous *Hermotimus*, who, like *Phaedrus*, is led to a new understanding of philosophical truth as a result of the conversation with, and questioning by, his interlocutor. The character of *Hermotimus* represents the kind of person so committed to a school that they accept everything it teaches unquestioningly;<sup>101</sup> in this, again, he resembles *Phaedrus*, who at the start of Plato’s dialogue is under the sway of *Lysias* and unquestioningly admires the arguments which *Socrates* will later reveal to be fundamentally flawed. Similarly, although *Hermotimus* reveres his teacher, saying that he trusts what his teacher says since he is already at the furthest point of virtue, (“Ἀλλὰ τῷ διδασκάλῳ πιστεύω λέγοντι. ὁ δὲ πάνυ οἶδεν ἅτε ἀκρότατος ἤδη ὢν”),<sup>102</sup> he appears wilfully blind to the obvious ways in which his idol does not practise what he preaches. *Lycinus* is more critical, informing his older friend about the party the previous night as follows:

“ἐλέγετο δὲ παρ’ Εὐκράτει τῷ πάνυ δειπνήσας χθὲς γενέθλια θυγατρὸς ἐστιῶντι πολλά τε συμφιλοσοφῆσαι ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ καὶ πρὸς Εὐθύδημον τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Περιπάτου παροξυνθῆναι τι καὶ ἀμφισβητῆσαι αὐτῷ περὶ ὧν ἐκεῖνοι εἰώθασιν ἀντιλέγειν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς. ὑπὸ τε οὖν τῆς κραυγῆς πονήρως τὴν κεφαλὴν διατεθῆναι καὶ ἰδρῶσαι μάλα πολλὰ ἐς μέσας νύκτας ἀποταθείσης, ὡς φασι, τῆς συνουσίας. ἅμα δὲ καὶ πεπώκει οἶμαι πλέον τοῦ ἱκανοῦ τῶν παρόντων ὡς εἰκὸς φιλοτησίας προπινόντων καὶ ἐδεδειπνήκει πλέον ἢ κατὰ γέροντα· ὥστε ἀναστρέψας ἡμεσὲ τε ὡς ἔφασκον πολλὰ καὶ μόνον ἀριθμῷ παραλαβὼν τὰ

<sup>99</sup> Anna Peterson, ‘Pushing Forty: The Platonic Significance of References to Age in *Lucian’s Double Indictment* and *Hermotimus*’, *Classical Quarterly*, 68.2 (2018), 621–33. 630.

<sup>100</sup> Anna Peterson, ‘Philosophers Redux: The *Hermotimus*, the *Fisherman*, and the Role of Dead Philosophers’, *Illinois Classical Studies*, 41.1 (2016), 185–99. 188.

<sup>101</sup> Wilson Hamilton Tackaberry, *Lucian’s Relation to Plato and the Post-Aristotelian Philosophers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930). 13.

<sup>102</sup> *Lucian of Samosata, How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the ‘Salaried Posts in Great Houses.’ Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said ‘You’re a Prometheus in Words.’ The Ship or The Wishes.*, trans. by K. Kilburn, Loeb Classical Library, 430 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959). 272.

κρέα ὅποσα τῷ παιδί κατόπιν ἐστῶτι παραδεδώκει καὶ σημηνάμενος ἐπιμελῶς τὸ ἀπ' ἐκείνου καθεύδει μηδένα εἰσδέχεσθαι παραγγείλας.”<sup>103</sup>

[“They were saying that when he had dinner yesterday at the house of the famous Eucrates (who was hosting because of his daughter’s birthday) he spoke a lot of philosophy in the drinking party,<sup>104</sup> and he was provoked against Euthydemus the Peripatetic and argued with him about the things which they are accustomed to contradict from the Stoic school. So, as they say, the symposium was extended into the middle of the night and he gave himself a terrible headache from the shouting and sweated very greatly. At the same time, while he was there, he had drunk more than, I think, than is reasonably enough in the toasts of friendship and had dined too well considering he is an old man. Consequently, when he had got home, so they were saying, he threw up a lot and, having ascertained the number of pieces of meat which he had given to the slave who had stood behind him at dinner, he has been sleeping, having carefully shown by a sign that he would admit no-one.”]

The contrast between the stoic ideal – so wise as to never become angry, moderate in eating and drinking, free from lusts and the desire for pleasure – is jarringly at odds with the way that the teacher is said to have behaved, and yet Hermotimus does not appear to appreciate the disconnect. From a literary point of view, too, the image of the hungover philosopher is interesting; as Peterson notes, it is also found in Plato’s *Symposium* but with a critical difference: the focus here is on the drunk and inappropriate behaviour of the teacher of philosophy, whereas in the *Symposium*, Socrates is depicted as being the only sober guest after the drunken Alcibiades enters.<sup>105</sup> Thus while Socrates, the ‘corrupter of the young’, is distinguished in Plato from his fellow guests by his ability to maintain his reason, the teacher, by contrast, behaves in a dissipated and otherwise wholly unreasonable way, thus highlighting his failure to live up to his own ideals and be a figure worthy of any real respect.

A more positive parallel with Socrates is found in the character of Lycinus; like Socrates, the character of Lycinus criticises those who appear to have knowledge but do not know anything substantial or meaningful. This similarity between Lycinus and Socrates is more surprising than it might initially seem; Lucian’s corpus is filled with depictions of hypocritical

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<sup>103</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the ‘Salaried Posts in Great Houses.’ Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said ‘You’re a Prometheus in Words.’ The Ship or The Wishes.* 280.

<sup>104</sup> τὸ συμπόσιον presents a particular dilemma to the translator here, as the English word ‘symposium’ has rather different connotations to the modern academic reader. Lycinus is here, of course, discussing the Greek social and cultural phenomenon of the symposium in its original sense of ‘drinking together’, rather than our primary meaning of a conference for intellectuals to share ideas. I have thus decided to translate it as ‘drinking party’ rather than ‘symposium’ to avoid potential ambiguity; while debating philosophy in depth may be an entirely reasonable activity at a modern symposium, the teacher is not acting appropriately in getting involved in an heated philosophical argument at a party.

<sup>105</sup> Peterson, ‘Philosophers Redux: The Hermotimus, the Fisherman, and the Role of Dead Philosophers’. 190.

philosophers drawing on the Menippean, iambic and Aristophanic traditions.<sup>106</sup> The Aristophanic tradition, in particular, is notable, since Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in his *Clouds* is referenced in Plato's *Apology* as a contributing factor to the charges against Socrates that ultimately resulted in his death.<sup>107</sup> Lucian's attitude towards Socrates in this dialogue and in his corpus more broadly is therefore a subject that merits further discussion.

In his book on Lucian, Wilson Hamilton Tackaberry writes that Lucian's general attitude towards Socrates is one of respect, citing the example of another of Lucian's writings, the *Demonax*, in which the revered titular character is compared with Socrates in a favourable light.<sup>108</sup> Though decades have passed since this work of criticism was posthumously published, it does not appear to have been entirely superseded; Christopher Ligota and Letizia Panizza commented in 2007 that the *Demonax* is the only work of Lucian's in which we believe that he was writing seriously,<sup>109</sup> thus suggesting that the favourable attitude towards *Demonax* and, by extension, to Socrates, is to be read unironically. In the same way, the *Hermotimus* has also been considered anomalous for its lack of comedy, despite its invocation of characters and scenarios found in other Lucianic dialogues.<sup>110</sup> If the work is not comic to anywhere near the same extent as the majority of dialogues that Lucian wrote, the positive depiction of a character resembling Socrates, in a genre which could not but recall the long-dead philosopher, is surely worthy of note.

This is particularly the case when we consider that scholars have sought to understand the relationship between the character of Lycinus and the attitudes of the author himself. Hunter's view of their relationship is straightforward, if perhaps simplistic, describing Lycinus as 'a standard alter ego of the author';<sup>111</sup> in her 2016 article, Peterson agreed with this assessment, referring to Lycinus as 'an obvious Lucianic alter-ego',<sup>112</sup> though by 2018, she had evidently reconsidered this view. She writes as follows:

Rather than simply acting as stand-ins for Lucian, these characters invite us to examine the relationship between the author and the 'created self' that they embody, bringing into relief the distance between the two.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the obvious similarity between his name and that of Lycinus, Peterson here argues for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between the character and the author, encouraging us to consider the similarities and differences between the two. In other words, we cannot simply equate the two but must rather consider the overlap between Lucian and

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<sup>106</sup> Peterson, 'Philosophers Redux: The *Hermotimus*, the *Fisherman*, and the Role of Dead Philosophers'. 186.

<sup>107</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo, Phaedrus*. 110.

<sup>108</sup> Hamilton Tackaberry. 25.

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Ligota and Letizia Panizza, 'Introduction', in *Lucian of Samosata: Vivus et Redivivus*, ed. by Christopher Ligota and Letizia Panizza (London: The Warburg Institute, 2007), pp. 1–16. 3.

<sup>110</sup> Peterson, 'Philosophers Redux: The *Hermotimus*, the *Fisherman*, and the Role of Dead Philosophers'. 186.

<sup>111</sup> Hunter. 1.

<sup>112</sup> Peterson, 'Philosophers Redux: The *Hermotimus*, the *Fisherman*, and the Role of Dead Philosophers'. 187.

<sup>113</sup> Peterson, 'Pushing Forty: The Platonic Significance of References to Age in Lucian's *Double Indictment* and *Hermotimus*'. 622.

Lycinus – and Socrates. For, as Peterson also comments, Lucian never explicitly casts himself as a speaking character, which is another way in which Lucian engages with Plato.<sup>114</sup>

There is, of course, inversion of certain features found in the *Phaedrus*; it would hardly be a Lucianic dialogue if it did not. A critical point here, which Peterson covers in great detail, is the relative ages of the participants, since Lycinus is depicted as being forty years old and Hermotimus some twenty years older. This clearly subverts both the conventional understanding that age brings wisdom and that a teacher is therefore generally older than their student and the norms set up in the *Phaedrus*; while Yunis argues strongly that the depiction of the eponymous character in Plato indicates he is around 30 and should be considered a potential *erastēs*,<sup>115</sup> the age difference with the elderly Socrates is nonetheless pronounced. The significance of this is that wisdom is not here embodied in a bearded old man intent in the study of philosophy, as befitted the stereotype of the philosopher, but rather in the iconoclastic figure of the younger man, Lycinus. For he adopts Socrates' methods of dialectical enquiry, professes ignorance rather than superiority to others in a way that recalls the famous Socratic paradox, “καὶ οὐ μνημονεύεις ὧν ἔφην, οὐκ αὐτὸς εἰδέναι τὰ ληθῆς ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἄλλους διατεινόμενος ἀλλὰ μετὰ πάντων αὐτὸ ἀγνοεῖν ὁμολογῶν”,<sup>116</sup> (“and you do not remember what I said: I do not think that I know true things over and above the other contenders, but think that I do not know the truth alongside all men”) and is able to convince his interlocutor to abandon his ultimately futile pursuit.

Indeed, at the end of the dialogue, Hermotimus exclaims:

“φιλοσόφῳ δὲ εἰς τὸ λοιπὸν κἂν ἄκων ποτὲ ὁδῶ βαδίζων ἐντύχῳ, οὕτως ἐκτραπήσομαι καὶ περιστήσομαι ὡσπερ τοὺς λυττῶντας τῶν κυνῶν.”<sup>117</sup>

[“If in the future I ever happen to meet a philosopher by chance when walking, I will avoid and shun him like the ravings of dogs.”]

Meeting a philosopher by chance in the street is, of course, the inciting incident that opens the dialogue of the *Phaedrus*; in his pseudo-Socratic role invoking the earlier dialogue, Lycinus has, however, persuaded his interlocutor to avoid philosophy rather than pursue it, as in the *Phaedrus*.

Nonetheless, this is not necessarily an indictment of the entirety of philosophy as a pursuit but rather of the state in which the author found the discipline in the second century CE.

<sup>114</sup> Peterson, ‘Pushing Forty: The Platonic Significance of References to Age in Lucian’s Double Indictment and *Hermotimus*’. 623.

<sup>115</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the ‘Salaried Posts in Great Houses.’ Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said ‘You’re a Prometheus in Words.’ The Ship or The Wishes.* 360. It is difficult not to think of the famous Socratic paradox found at Plato’s *Apology* 21d, in which Socrates acknowledges his superiority to others only in his awareness of his own ignorance.

<sup>117</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the ‘Salaried Posts in Great Houses.’ Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said ‘You’re a Prometheus in Words.’ The Ship or The Wishes.* 414.

The decline of contemporary philosophy is a theme which, as Hunter observes, frequently occurs in Lucian, though it is particularly striking here, in a dialogue alluding to a Platonic work criticising the use of writing as a philosophical tool.<sup>118</sup> It is possible to reject a corrupt form of something while admitting the validity of it in an unadulterated state, and the fact that Lucian's oeuvre contains so many criticisms of contemporary philosophy would appear to indicate a concern with the general behaviour of philosophers that is not incompatible with such a stance. Certainly, the Socratic techniques and allusions in the character of Lycinus, who is to some extent aligned with the author, suggest a discernible sympathy for philosophy in a more ideal form than that practised by Hermotimus' teacher, though Hamilton Tackaberry's assertion that '[i]t is in this dialogue that he shows himself the greatest dialectician and, in short, the greatest philosopher'<sup>119</sup> surely overstates the case.

One final point that can be made on the relationship between the *Hermotimus* and the *Phaedrus* relates to the way that the dialogue is staged. Here, I must disagree with Hunter, who makes reference to 'stage directions' in the opening of the dialogue, attributing their presence to the *Phaedrus*' status as a classic and canonical text by Lucian's day.<sup>120</sup> Such stage directions, as we would understand them, do not exist in the *Hermotimus*; what we see instead are references to the posture and behaviour of the characters to enable them to be more vividly imagined. As Lycinus remarks, Hermotimus begins the dialogue walking very fast, "τῆ τοῦ βαδίσματος σπουδῆ", muttering to himself with lips trembling, "τὰ χεῖλη διεσάλειες ἡρέμα ὑποτονθούρων", and gesticulating "τὸν χεῖρα ὧδε κάκεισε μετέφερες", which Lycinus correctly interprets as a sign of the almost frenetic activity of the elder man's mind. He is carrying a book, "τῷ βιβλίῳ".<sup>121</sup> These are more concentrated than at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, where it takes a great many more conversational turns to convey information about Phaedrus' posture and gait, which is perhaps what Hunter meant by his reference to stage directions reflecting the status of the *Phaedrus* as a canonical text:<sup>122</sup> the scene where the two men meet by chance has been imagined, evoked and discussed so many times that the gestures that are only hinted at gradually in Plato must here be established and set out at the beginning of the dialogue.

There is, though, one crucial omission to the increased specification in Lucian: the setting. Though we see that at the beginning of the dialogue, Hermotimus is hurrying to his teacher, we do not see where that journey takes them. Just before explaining the circumstances of the teacher's indisposition, Lycinus announces that he is able to spare Hermotimus what is left of his journey "ὥστε ἐγὼ ἀφήμι σοι ὅσον ἔτι τὸ λοιπὸν τῆς ὁδοῦ",<sup>123</sup> thus indicating

<sup>118</sup> Hunter. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Hamilton Tackaberry. 14.

<sup>120</sup> Hunter. 3-4.

<sup>121</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the 'Salaried Posts in Great Houses.' Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said 'You're a Prometheus in Words.' The Ship or The Wishes.* 260.

<sup>122</sup> Hunter. 3-4.

<sup>123</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the 'Salaried Posts in Great Houses.' Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said 'You're a Prometheus in Words.' The Ship or The Wishes.* 280.



that the two characters are still on the road and have not yet reached the teacher's house. No indication is given after this as to the setting, which may plausibly suggest that the two characters remain standing in the street conversing; presumably, if Hermotimus had decided to turn back when he realised that that his teacher was not seeing students that day and Lycinus had followed him, one or other of them would have made some reference to the change of direction or Lycinus' own reasons to be wandering the streets asking questions about philosophy.

The relevance of the absence of the setting is, of course, this: that in this dialogue, one that consciously evokes the *Phaedrus* both in terms of the initial staging of the encounter and in the interactions between the characters, pointedly does not include the plane tree, the distinctly Phaedran element to Plato's setting that is evoked so unequivocally in Cicero. This feature is omitted by Lucian, possibly as some acknowledgement that this is a rather different type of dialogic encounter to the long discussions on language that feature so heavily in Plato and Cicero's texts.

#### Another Lucianic Dialogue – *The Dialogues of the Courtesans*

Having considered the *Hermotimus* as an act of Platonic reception, we must now acknowledge that this was by no means the only work that Lucian wrote. Indeed, Lucian's prolific and varied literary production has presented difficulties to scholars for centuries as the selection and arrangement of works gathered for translation or publication affect the way he is understood, making it difficult to form a unified judgement of Lucianic reception. As a consequence of this, two 'distinct though overlapping traditions' developed in Italy depending on whether the Greek author was accessed through Latin or vernacular translations:<sup>124</sup> the Latin tradition, originating from around 1400, emphasised erudition, moral philosophy, satire and *serio-ludere*, while the Italian tradition made Lucian more accessible to the ordinary person and brought Lucianic ideas and themes into reformation and counter-reformation debates.<sup>125</sup> In fact, Letizia Panizza describes the reinvigorated figure of Lucian as 'the leader of an entire school of 'Lucianists'', the first of whom she names being 'the polemicist Pietro Aretino', who, of course, wrote the *Ragionamenti* we discussed earlier.<sup>126</sup>

We must now, therefore, return to the *Ragionamenti* to consider them as an act of reception of a rather different classical work to the *Phaedrus*: namely, Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. The *Dialogues of the Courtesans* are a series of short dialogues featuring sex workers; these depictions of the lives of disreputable women make an obvious point of comparison with Aretino's dialogue on the lives and sexual exploits of women.

One area that might appear potentially problematic in considering the *Ragionamenti* as an act of reception of the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* is the language barrier. The writings of

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<sup>124</sup> Letizia Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian in Renaissance Italy: Translations and Transformations', in *Lucian of Samosata: Vivus et Redivivus*, ed. by Christopher Ligota and Letizia Panizza (London: The Warburg Institute, 2007), pp. 71–114. 71.

<sup>125</sup> Panizza. 71-72.

<sup>126</sup> Panizza. 72.

Aretino make it clear that he knew little Latin and no Greek;<sup>127</sup> he is even said to have boasted of his lack of Latin, proudly admitting that he relied on Nicolò Franco to read Latin for him.<sup>128</sup> Yet in reality this does not mean that Aretino could not have had access to the Lucianic dialogues: merely that his interactions with the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* must therefore have been mediated through Italian vernacular translations.

This was certainly possible and indeed highly likely; Panizza goes so far as to use the word ‘undoubtedly’ when discussing the possibility that Aretino was one of the earliest readers of the vernacular *Dialogues of the Courtesans*.<sup>129</sup> The first printed edition of Lucian in the vernacular was the 1525 *editio princeps*;<sup>130</sup> it was published in Venice by Niccolò di Aristotele detto Zoppino and based on a manuscript that was probably prepared by Nicolò Leonicensi in the 1470s.<sup>131</sup> The significance of Venice is worth underlining since all seven of the known editions of the vernacular Lucian published in the sixteenth century were published there;<sup>132</sup> it is also where Aretino made his home from 1527,<sup>133</sup> just two years after the translation’s initial publication.

Prior to this, during Leonicensi’s lifetime, versions of many of Lucian’s dialogues were circulating in Latin, though these did not include the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* or the pseudo-Lucianic *Amores*; Panizza attributes their absence to the reluctance of humanists to engage with such lascivious content.<sup>134</sup> The vernacular version in 1525, however, despite sharing the view of Lucian featured in Latin translation up until the last quarter of the Quattrocento — that of Lucian as a pleasant moral philosopher: witty, erudite but also good at narrative in the erotic sphere —<sup>135</sup> nonetheless included the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. This was criticised by censors, particularly since the rubric of the dialogues did not explicitly pronounce moral judgement; it also must be noted that it used the coarser word *meretrici* rather than the politer, more euphemistic alternative, *cortigiane*, to translate the Lucianic title *Ἑταϊρικοὶ Διάλογοι*.<sup>136</sup>

Let us now turn to the dialogues and compare Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans* with Aretino’s *Ragionamenti*. Of the fifteen short dialogues written by Lucian in this collection, three clearly pertain to a mother and daughter working as a family unit within the sex industry: dialogue three (Philinna and her mother discuss her behaviour towards a client at a party the previous night), dialogue six (Crobyle instructs her daughter Corinna as to how to behave as a courtesan) and dialogue seven (Musarium’s mother rebukes her not to trust the promises of a client who has promised her marriage). This must be noted because the *Ragionamenti* foregrounds the mother-daughter relationship, with the premise for the discussion in the first three days being Nanna’s concern about her daughter’s future and

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<sup>127</sup> Hutton. 13.

<sup>128</sup> Panizza. 98.

<sup>129</sup> Panizza. 87.

<sup>130</sup> Panizza. 73.

<sup>131</sup> Panizza. 78,82.

<sup>132</sup> Panizza. 82.

<sup>133</sup> Hutton. 107.

<sup>134</sup> Panizza. 82.

<sup>135</sup> Panizza. 86.

<sup>136</sup> Panizza. 87.

whether to set her up as a nun, a wife or a courtesan and the second trilogy being about the education of Pippa; these three dialogues are thus key focal points in considering the *Ragionamenti* as an act of Lucianic reception.

To continue with the methodology of using a case study as a microcosm for the reception of an ancient work more widely, we will concentrate on the parallels between Pippa's instruction in how to be a prostitute in day four of the *Ragionamenti* and the sixth *Dialogue of the Courtesans*. Lucian's dialogue is short but in it, Crobyle gives her daughter advice on a variety of topics: dress, manners, eating and drinking in public, making her clients feel special, focusing on the client's pleasure during sex and maintaining good hygiene. All of these topics are also covered by Nanna and the advice that she gives is similar, strikingly so in places. For instance, when Crobyle invokes the example of Daphnis' daughter Lyra to advise Corinna on how she should drink, the conversation goes as follows:

ΚΡΩΒΥΛΗ

... πίνει δὲ ἡρέμα, οὐ χανδόν, ἀλλ' ἀναπαυομένη.

ΚΟΡΙΝΝΑ

Κἄν εἰ διψῶσα, ὦ μῆτερ, τύχη;

ΚΡΩΒΥΛΗ

Τότε μάλιστα, ὦ Κόριννα.<sup>137</sup>

[Crobyle: ... and she [Lyra] drinks very little, not greedily, but with gradual sips.

Corinna: and if it happens that she's thirsty, mother?

Crobyle: Especially then, Corinna.]

Nanna's advice to Pippa on the subject of how a courtesan should drink is similar and receives an almost identical response:

NANNA : ... e non empire il bicchiere fino a l'orlo, ma passa il mezzo di poco : e ponendoci le labbra con grazia, nol ber mai tutto.

PIPPA : E s'io avessi gran sete ?

NANNA : Medesimamente beene poco, acciò che non te si levi un nome di golosa e di briaca.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *Dialogues of the Dead. Dialogues of the Sea-Gods. Dialogues of the Gods. Dialogues of the Courtesans.*, trans. by M. D. Macleod, Loeb Classical Library, 431 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961). 388-390.

<sup>138</sup> Aretino. 314.

[Nanna : ... and don't fill your glass to the rim but just a little more than half full: and bringing it gracefully to your lips, never down it in one go.

Pippa: But what if I'm really thirsty?

Nanna: Just the same, drink very little, so that you don't get a name for being a glutton and a drunk.]

Another noteworthy parallel between the two dialogues is that both include at or near their beginning the daughter crying about becoming a courtesan, although Aretino, following Lucian's habit of satirising his models, subverts the reason why. Corinna does not initially understand what her mother has planned for her and when her mother explains that she is to become a courtesan, becomes distressed:

ΚΡΩΒΥΛΗ

Συνοῦσα μὲν τοῖς νεανίσκοις καὶ συμπίνουσα μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ συγκαθεύδουσα ἐπὶ μισθῶ.

ΚΟΡΙΝΝΑ

Καθάπερ ἡ Δαφνίδος θυγάτηρ Λύρα;

ΚΡΩΒΥΛΗ

Ναί.

ΚΟΡΙΝΝΑ

Ἄλλ' ἐκείνη ἑταίρα ἐστίν.

ΚΡΩΒΥΛΗ

Οὐδὲν τοῦτο δεινόν· καὶ σὺ γὰρ πλουτήσεις ὡς ἐκείνη καὶ πολλοὺς ἐραστὰς ἔξεις. τί ἐδάκρυσας, ὦ Κόριννα; οὐχ ὀρᾶς ὀπόσαι καὶ ὡς περισπούδαστοί εἰσιν αἱ ἑταῖραι καὶ ὅσα χρήματα λαμβάνουσι,<sup>139</sup>

[Crobyle: [you will be able to support us both in style by] Hanging out with young men and drinking with them and sleeping with them for money.

Corinna: Like Daphnis' daughter Lyra?

Crobyle: Yes.

Corinna: But she's a courtesan.

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<sup>139</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. 388.

Crobyle: That's nothing terrible – for you will be rich like her and you will have many lovers. Why did you start to cry, Corinna? Do you not see how many courtesans there are and how admired they are and how much gold they get?]

Day four of the *Ragionamenti* also begins with a daughter in distress about her future, though her attitude towards being a courtesan is rather different:

NANNA: Che collera, che stizza, che rabbia, che smania, che batticuore e che sfinimento e che senepe è cotesta tua, fastidiosetta che tu sei?

PIPPA: Egli mi monta la mosca, perché non mi volete far cortigiana come vi ha consigliata monna Antonia mia santola.

NANNA: Altro che terza bisogna per desinare.

PIPPA: Voi sète una matrigna, uh, uh...

NANNA : Piagni su, bambolina mia

PIPPA: lo piagnerò per certo.<sup>140</sup>

[Nanna: What fury, what anger, what rage, what agitation, what palpitations and what nervous exhaustion and what caprice is this, you irritating child.

Pippa: It's really annoying me because you don't want to make me a courtesan like auntie<sup>141</sup> Antonia my godmother advised you to.

Nanna: All things come to those who wait.<sup>142</sup>

Pippa: You're a wicked stepmother.

Nanna: Go on and cry then, my little doll.

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<sup>140</sup> Aretino. 309.

<sup>141</sup> I do not use auntie here in the translation to imply a blood relation; *monna* is an archaic term that signifies polite respect towards a woman, similar to modern day *signora*. In English, it is not usual to refer to a woman by both a title and a first name but it is not unusual for children to refer to their parents' close friends as 'aunt' or 'uncle' even though they are not biologically related. Since Antonia is referred to as Pippa's godmother (*mia santola*), it stands to reason that their relationship is longstanding and that such a cultural translation might therefore be an appropriate way to resolve difficulties in translation.

<sup>142</sup> Nanna is here referring to a proverbial saying 'all'ora terza non è ancora ora di pranzare' which roughly translates to 'at 9am, it's not lunchtime yet' and indicates in this situation that Nanna does not believe the right time has come yet to make Pippa a courtesan. This proverb would have sounded distinctly odd if translated literally into English; I therefore use an English proverb concerning the necessity of waiting to convey the sense of the original.

Pippa: I certainly will cry.]

The contrast here is extremely pronounced. Corinna, in Lucian, has already lost her virginity, as the beginning of the dialogue makes clear (“ὡς μὲν οὐ πάνυ δεινὸν ἦν, ὃ ἐνόμιζες, τὸ γυναῖκα γενέσθαι ἐκ παρθένου, μεμάθηκας ἤδη”)<sup>143</sup> (“ since you have now learned that it is not quite as terrible as you thought to become a woman from a virgin”) but it is apparent from her tears that she is unhappy with the label of courtesan despite the necessity of finding a way to provide for herself. Pippa, on the other hand, is upset that she has not yet been made a courtesan and embarked upon the future she feels she is owed.

This reversal of attitudes towards their future career path does not appear coincidental, for it reveals something of the attitudes of the writer towards the characters they depict and implies something of the values that the two mother characters have instilled in their daughters. Crobyle’s situation is one driven by necessity. As she makes clear, she was driven to the desperate measure of making her daughter a courtesan due to the death of her husband and subsequent loss of his income as a smith:

“ἐχάλκευε γὰρ καὶ μέγα ἦν ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν Πειραιεῖ ... μετὰ δὲ τὴν τελευταίην τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀποδομένη τὰς πυράγρας καὶ τὸν ἄκμονα καὶ σφῦραν δύο μνῶν, μῆνας ἀπὸ τούτων ἑπτὰ διετράφημεν,”<sup>144</sup>

[“For he used to work metal and had a great name in Piraeus... After his death, I first sold his fire tongs and his anvil and his hammer for two minas, and we were supported for seven months from these things.”]

Previously, we can reasonably assume, Crobyle was a respectable married woman. Corinna’s unhappiness with the prospect of being labelled a courtesan, and the need for her mother to reassure her that courtesans are much less uncommon and reviled than she might think, reflects a more conventional understanding of female sexual morality in which sleeping with men for money is something socially ambivalent: theoretically shameful but able to be mitigated with sufficient money. Indeed, despite Lucian’s reputation as a satirist, in the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, the vignettes of the lives of courtesans appear remarkably grounded in comparison to the outlandish and often graphic stories relayed in the *Ragionamenti*.

Just as Corinna’s attitude reflects the values instilled in her by Crobyle, in the same way, Pippa looking forward to life as a courtesan makes it clear that she resembles her mother. After Nanna’s account of her outrageous exploits in her youth in the previous three days of dialogue, the notion that her daughter would have grown up modest is highly implausible and, here, is proved to be wrong: the apple has not fallen far from the proverbial tree. The

<sup>143</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. 386.

<sup>144</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. 386.

situational similarities between Lucian's dialogue and Aretino's serve to heighten the contrast between the attitudes of the girls towards their future career; Pippa's attitude would have been in itself shocking but the correspondences between her situation and that of Corinna intensify the sense that this is less of a naturalistic portrayal of life and more a story so outrageous it cannot be true.

The different reasons for the daughters' tears also necessitate a different attitude on the part of their mothers towards the correct behaviour for a young courtesan, which can be seen in the example above of how the courtesan should drink. For Crobyle, the example of Lyra is key because, as someone who has already made the transition successfully, she can be a model to Corinna on how to comport herself and is a living demonstration that it is possible to thrive in this social role. Since Pippa is eager to begin this new stage of her life, she requires no such concrete example for reassurance; her question and her mother's guidance both refer to her explicitly rather than using the figure of Lyra as a proxy.

One final point that must be made regarding the *Ragionamenti* is that, interestingly, a feature from some of the earlier classical dialogues makes a reappearance in Aretino: the setting of the dialogue beneath a tree. In fact, it takes place beneath two trees: the first three days, in which Nanna tells Antonia about her life, take place beneath a fig tree ("*in questa mia vigna, sotto a questa proprio ficaia*"),<sup>145</sup> while the setting of days four to six moves to beneath a peach tree, which is made clear when a peach falls from the tree:

In questo una pesca grossa, la quale sola era rimasa nel pesco, cadde in sul capo de la Comare ; onde la Baila disse ridendo a più potere: « Tu non puoi negare che il farti dar le pesche non ti sia piaciuto »<sup>146</sup>

[At this point a fat peach, which was the only one remaining on the peach tree, fell onto the midwife's head. The wetnurse, laughing herself silly, said in reply "You can't deny that you enjoyed it when men made you give them the peaches of your arse"]

This has not gone unnoticed by modern scholars; indeed, De Rycker comments on the 'mock-Socratic setting of Nanna's vineyard, shaded by a fig tree'<sup>147</sup> but this does not take the point far enough because it does not take into account the significance of the changes to the setting to our understanding of Aretino's reception of famous instances from the dialogue genre.

The substitution of the plane tree from Plato and Cicero for fruit trees does not appear accidental; instead, it is part of Aretino's magpie-like tendency, shared with Lucian, to gather together elements and tropes from other authors and genres for subversive and satirical effect. Plane trees have little practical use other than their potential to give shade:

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<sup>145</sup> Aretino. 118.

<sup>146</sup> Aretino. 479.

<sup>147</sup> De Rycker. 302.

they do not produce edible fruit and their wood is not particularly durable.<sup>148</sup> The effort and time taken to grow a plane tree is perhaps thus comparable to the study of philosophy, which also involves the commitment of much time for little to no discernible economic benefit. On the other hand, fruit trees produce something edible and generally considered tasty. Moreover, in an overwhelmingly Catholic society, such as Italy in the sixteenth century, the image of the forbidden fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 would surely have been a familiar one, strengthening the contrast between the intellectual, philosophical, morally upright connotations of the plane tree and the connotations of the fruit tree with the practical, the worldly, the pleasurable and, given the subsequent story of the Fall, the sexual.

What is more, the choice of the specific varieties of fruit trees is entirely deliberate. Buranello comments that they were chosen to ‘reveal the metaphorical potential for obscenity’. The choice of a peach tree is an explicit reference to sodomy;<sup>149</sup> the distinctive shape of the peach recalls rounded buttocks, and the wet nurse makes the reference explicit with her comment to the midwife. Fig trees, again, recall the story of the Fall as, when Adam and Eve realise that they are naked, they sew fig leaves together to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7); Buranello gives two other reasons that the choice of the fig tree is significant. Not only does the shape of the fig fruit allude to the female genitalia but beneath a fig tree is also the location for another landmark moment in the western literary canon: the conversion of St Augustine.<sup>150</sup> For, in his *Confessions*, Augustine writes, *Ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi me nescio quomodo, et dimisi habenas lacrimis*<sup>151</sup> (Somehow, I threw myself beneath the fig tree and I let my tears flow freely). At this point, he becomes a Christian, embarking upon the holy life that leads to him ultimately being considered one of the founding fathers of the Church. Buranello therefore remarks on the parodic nature of this literary allusion in Aretino, where in an act of spectacular inversion, the conversion of the saintly Augustine becomes the perversion of the innocent Pippa.<sup>152</sup>

Yet we can expand on this point still further. The *Confessions* were not Augustine’s only written work; the saint was famously influenced by the prose writings of Cicero and wrote some of his literary works in dialogue form, most notably the *Soliloquies*, which take the form of a dialogue with his soul. These dialogues, in turn, were picked up on by Petrarch, one of the *tre corone* of Trecento Italy, who used Augustine as the figure who draws the character of Petrarch back to a proper understanding of Christianity in his Neo-Latin dialogue, the *Secretum*. In his introduction to the recent *I Tatti* edition of the *Secretum*, Nicholas Mann comments that the fig tree was to Petrarch an emblem of the process of reparation and forgiveness.<sup>153</sup> In short, Aretino’s decision to set this dialogue beneath fruit trees recalls these philosophical and spiritual watersheds in classical, late antique and early

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Platanus Orientalis - EUFORGEN European Forest Genetic Resources Programme’ <<http://www.euforgen.org/species/platanus-orientalis/>> [accessed 19 June 2019].

<sup>149</sup> Buranello. 98-9.

<sup>150</sup> Buranello. 99.

<sup>151</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. by Carolyn J.-B Hammond, Loeb Classical Library, 26 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014). 408.

<sup>152</sup> Buranello. 99.

<sup>153</sup> Petrarca and Mann. xii.



Renaissance dialogic authors only to debase them, combining and twisting models to turn the 'mock-Socratic' setting into an appropriate venue for discussing an earthier and more mercenary form of love.

### Conclusion

What, then, is the conclusion that we should draw from the two-pronged reception of the *Phaedrus* that has now been demonstrated? I suggest that we should conclude two key points that often appear to be forgotten in the eagerness of modern scholars to draw parallels between ancient and Renaissance culture.

Firstly, we must remember that the classical world was not a fleeting moment in time but a period of many centuries. Plato, Cicero and Lucian were not all writing contemporaneously and tapping into a common *Zeitgeist*: Plato wrote dialogues in the 4th century BCE that became canonical across the Greek-speaking world to the extent that they were imitated by others, including both Cicero in the first century BCE and Lucian in the second century CE. The chronological distance between Plato and Lucian is therefore six centuries, greater than the distance in time between the publication of the *Cortegiano* and the *Ragionamenti* and our present day.

From the tendency to overlook the vast periods of time covered by the catch-all heading of Antiquity, we lose sight of the way that classical authors such as Cicero and Lucian used and responded to texts that had existed and been part of intellectual culture for centuries, appropriating their themes, situations and even settings. If we would consider a literary work produced today with the same basic premise as a Shakespeare play an act of reception of the Bard, then we must also acknowledge that the *De Oratore* and the *Hermetimus*, though our conventional periodisation of history assigns them both to the same 'classical' period as the *Phaedrus*, are themselves much later works of reception.

This opens the door to a reassessment of the way that we categorise classical dialogue models of Renaissance dialogues, since it exposes a problem with labelling them 'Platonic', 'Ciceronian' and 'Lucianic'. A work that is an act of reception of the *De Oratore* is thus also an act of reception of the *Phaedrus*; should it then be classed as a 'Platonic' dialogue or a 'Ciceronian' dialogue? Where should the boundaries of the different categories lie?

The other key point that should be drawn from this case study is that there can be multiple sources for an act of reception. Even in our case study, which has focused almost exclusively on dialogic sources and disregarded other extremely pertinent influences, such as the *Decameron*, we have seen this. The *De Oratore* consciously draws on the *Republic* as well as the *Phaedrus*, as the quote from Cicero's letter to Atticus makes clear; to an even greater extent, the *Ragionamenti* of Aretino appear to imitate most overtly the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* by Lucian and yet there is sufficient textual evidence for Buranello to consider it also as a parody of the *Cortegiano*. It can therefore be seen as an heir to two different traditions originating from Platonic dialogue and is therefore, according to the conventional categorisation, both 'Lucianic', albeit mediated through vernacular translations and reworkings, and 'Ciceronian', mediated through Castiglione's text. The labels used in this way are not heuristically helpful.

This is not, of course, to say that the search for classical antecedents of a Renaissance dialogue is not a worthwhile exercise but that we must do so in a more careful and nuanced way. Here it is useful to recall the image of the bee from Seneca, gathering nectar from various flowers to produce a honey that is more than the sum of its parts. We can therefore talk about the Ciceronian or Lucianic (or indeed Plutarchan, Tacitean, Augustinian) aspects of a particular Renaissance dialogue – the similarity in setting or argumentation or conscious allusion to a specific work by a classical author – but the trap of referring to the Cinquecento work as a ‘Ciceronian’ dialogue, for instance, is to be avoided. Such labelling is too simplistic and gives rise to the mistaken impression that Cicero’s is the only influence on the dialogue in question and that Cicero’s dialogues sprang, fully formed, from the ether without any reference to the literary culture in which he lived and was educated. Instead, we must recognise the influence of each classical model as a distinctive ingredient which, when adapted, combined and transmuted by the natural talent of the author, contributes to the formation of a text in its own right: a dialogue in dialogue with the past.

## Chapter Two: Language

altro non è lo scrivere che parlare pensatamente.<sup>1</sup>

[Writing is nothing other than thought-out speech]

This claim, from the preface to Bembo's 1525 dialogue, *Le Prose della Volgar Lingua*, is thought-provoking in the relationship it draws between the written and spoken language; it is particularly pertinent for scholars of literary dialogue, where what is written purports to be a transcription of speech, albeit with varying attempts at maintaining the fiction that what is recorded was actually spoken by real people in historical time.

One crucial element of speech is the language in which it is spoken. In sixteenth-century Italy, this was a matter of some contention; many spheres of life still used Latin or were in the process of transitioning from Latin to the vernacular and the widespread *questione della lingua* debated the form that a literary vernacular would take, the relationship that this vernacular should have with Latin and how Latin should be used.

Latin and the vernaculars were not, however, the only languages spoken in the Italian peninsula and the islands: other languages spoken in this area included German and Dalmatian in the North, Greek and Albanian in the South and French and Occitan as second languages.<sup>2</sup> Though these languages are outside the scope of this chapter, which will focus on dialogues in Italian and Latin,<sup>3</sup> it is worth noting that such language communities existed and undoubtedly influenced the development and use of local vernaculars. I use the term vernaculars rather than dialects following the well-known aphorism attributed to Max Weinrich: 'a language is a dialect with an army and a navy'. In other words, the difference between a language and a dialect is often a question of social or political status.<sup>4</sup> These vernaculars, such as Venetian, Tuscan and Lombard, were not nonstandard variants of a nebulous 'future Italian', which the term 'dialect' often implies, but rather separate languages that developed in parallel from a common origin: namely, Latin.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*, ed. by Mario Marti (Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1955). 4.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 83-4.

<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile noting that Neo-Latin is not a term that Bembo and other writers in his cultural milieu would have recognised but rather a linguistic and chronological signifier imposed retrospectively by more recent scholars. In fact, since the goal of humanism was to restore the Latinity of the classical period (Keith Sidwell, 'Classical Latin - Medieval Latin - Neo-Latin', in *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin*, ed. by Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 13–26.20.) it is extremely likely that humanists would have rejected the term 'Neo-Latin' had it existed at the time for drawing a distinction between their Latin and the Latin of the ancient authors they sought to emulate. Accordingly, I have avoided the use of the term Neo-Latin except when drawing a distinction between Renaissance Latin and the Latin written in the Classical period.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Maiden, *A Linguistic History of Italian* (London: Longman, 1995). 3.

It must also be emphasised at this juncture that the *questione della lingua* was primarily focused on the question of what the literary, formal and usually written language should be across the Italian peninsula, rather than regulating the language that people spoke in everyday life. This was understood to be a form of vernacular language originating in Italy rather than an external language such as German, Greek or Occitan: it is for this reason that discussion of such languages is outside the scope of this chapter.

Latin was taught as a foreign language in Italy from 1200,<sup>6</sup> indicating a recognition on the part of the teachers on some level both that Latin and the local vernacular were separate, autonomous languages and that Latin was no longer widely considered a first language. However, the first academic position for Italian, that of *lettore di Toscana favella* at the University of Siena, was not established until 1589.<sup>7</sup> This delay can be explained in terms of the high prestige of Latin, which still had primacy in ecclesiastical, legal and university settings,<sup>8</sup> as well as in terms of the comparatively low regard in which the vernacular was held. For instance, in November 1529, Romolo Amaseo gave two orations at the meeting of Pope Clement VII and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in Bologna entitled *De Latinae Linguae Usu Retinendo Scholae* in which he argued as follows:

sed ea perinde utamini censeo: ac maiores vestri usi sunt: ut cum familiaris ei sermonis, locorum ac lusuum vestrorum partes tribueritis, quidquid grave, magnificum, sublime, excelsum, perpetuae oratione mandandum fuerit: ad unius omnium pulcherrimae, atque uberrimae linguae opem confugiatis.<sup>9</sup>

[But equally I recommend that you use this language (and your ancestors used it) when you present parts of your intimate conversation, jokes and games. Whatever is serious, magnificent, sublime, lofty should be handed down in eternal eloquence: flee to the might of the most beautiful and richest language of all.]

Though contemporary evidence suggests that he did not really think that all serious matters should be written about in Latin while the vernacular should only be used for entertainment and trivial matters— we note that not only had he both learned and even taught the rules of the Italian vernacular, but that others were aware of this fact, most notably Pietro Bembo —

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<sup>6</sup> Carla De Santis, 'Latin versus the Vernacular in Renaissance Italy. The Development of the Controversy with Special Reference to Carlo Sigonio's "De Latinae Linguae Casu Retinendo" (1556)', *Rinascimento*, 35 (1995), 349–71. 351.

<sup>7</sup> Santis. 353.

<sup>8</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 84–85.

<sup>9</sup> Cecil Grayson, *A Renaissance Controversy: Latin or Italian?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960). 6–7.

<sup>9</sup> 'sed ea perinde utamini censeo: ac maiores vestri usi sunt: ut cum familiaris ei sermonis, locorum ac lusuum vestrorum partes tribueritis, quidquid grave, magnificum, sublime, excelsum, perpetuae oratione mandandum fuerit: ad unius omnium pulcherrimae, atque uberrimae linguae opem confugiatis.'

('But equally I recommend that you use this language (and your ancestors used it) when you present parts of your intimate conversation, jokes and games. Whatever is serious, magnificent, sublime, lofty should be handed down in eternal eloquence: flee to the might of the most beautiful and richest language of all.')

Romolo Amaseo, *Romuli Amasei Orationum volumen* (impressit Bononiae Ioannes Rubrius, 1564). 143.

<sup>10</sup> these speeches demonstrate that it was socially acceptable and could be considered expedient to reject the use of Italian in a public setting. The relationship between Italian and Latin in the early modern period is therefore a complex one as the two languages coexisted in Italy since even before the dawn of humanism.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the sixteenth century can be viewed as a key era of general transition from Latin to Italian. Already, the great Trecento Tuscan authors Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, often referred to as the *tre corone*, had showed that hugely influential works could be written in the *volgar lingua*; in the previous century, Cristoforo Landino's decision to read Petrarch in the *Studio Fiorentino*, an academic setting usually reserved for Latin authors, was explained in a speech that became considered an affirmation of the claims of the vernacular.<sup>12</sup> The use of Italian was extending even into international diplomacy, an area normally the preserve of Latin; the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I's ambassadors requested an alliance with Florence *aetrusca lingua* and therefore received their response in Italian.<sup>13</sup> Continuing on this trajectory, in the early sixteenth century, new works began to be published in the vernacular, such as Pietro Bembo's dialogue, *Gli Asolani*, published in 1505 after he had produced scholarly editions of Petrarch and Dante to habituate his readers to the language he was writing in.<sup>14</sup>

An impetus for the *questione della lingua* was undoubtedly the invention and expansion of printing, which resulted in an increased desire for standardisation on the part of printers wanting to sell their wares over wider areas. In the debates that ensued between scholars and writers across the peninsula, there were three main solutions offered to the thorny question of what this new, standardised language should be: the *cortigiana lingua*, a kind of koiné based on the language of the courts, particularly that of Rome; contemporary Tuscan; or an archaising version of Tuscan modelled on the language of the *tre corone*.

While the debate on the Italian language continued, the use of Latin even in Latin-dominated contexts was not without the potential for controversy since the Quattrocento debate on what form of Latin was to be used was to extend well into the sixteenth century. Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder had been the first to articulate the notion of a single model approach to writing Latin, although this was not a viewpoint that he personally held; before that, Quattrocento humanists had based their Latin linguistic usage on many models.<sup>15</sup> From this point, renowned *litterati* including Paolo Cortesi and Angelo Poliziano periodically engaged in very public debates; these are often referred to by modern scholars as the

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<sup>10</sup> 'AMASEO, Romolo Quirino in "Dizionario Biografico"' <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/romolo-quirino-amaseo\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/romolo-quirino-amaseo_(Dizionario-Biografico))> [accessed 19 December 2018].

<sup>11</sup> Tom Deneire, 'Neo-Latin Literature and the Vernacular', in *A Guide to Neo-Latin Literature*, ed. by Victoria Moul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 35–51. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Santoro, 'Cristoforo Landino e Il Volgare', *Giornale Storico Della Letteratura Italiana*, 131 (1954), 501–47. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Migliorini, *The Italian Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966). 162.

<sup>14</sup> Marco Faini, *A Life in Laurels and Scarlet*, trans. by Viviane Lowe (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017). 31.

<sup>15</sup> Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995). 101.

Ciceronian controversies<sup>16</sup> due to the emphasis that adherents to a single model solution to the question placed on the Roman statesman and orator Cicero, an attitude satirised by Erasmus in his dialogue *Ciceronianus*, published in 1528.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the at times polemical debates on questions of language became the subject of writings in a dialogue form, a form that draws attention to the act of communication.<sup>17</sup> This chapter aims to consider the ways in which sixteenth-century dialogues in Italy confronted the *questione della lingua*, using Bembo's *Le Prose della Volgar Lingua* as a core text and comparing it with two other contemporary dialogues that can be seen as in conversation with it. Though it was enormously influential, it has been rather neglected in anglophone criticism; when it is referenced in current literature, it tends to be either a brief assessment of its contribution to *the questione della lingua* without considering how the material was conveyed (for example, Pettegree's work on the Renaissance book)<sup>18</sup> or a passing reference to its dialogic form without investigating its content in any significant detail (for example, Cox's work on the Renaissance dialogue).<sup>19</sup> This chapter will, therefore, examine *Le Prose's* contribution to the *questione della lingua* debate both in terms of what it says (and how this was received by contemporary writers of other dialogues) and the contribution of the form to its message.

#### Arguing for the vernacular in *Le Prose Della Volgar Lingua*

Having discussed the context in which Bembo was writing, this chapter will now move on to discuss *Le Prose*. This dialogue on the Italian vernacular was published in 1525, though antedated to 1515 to make it appear earlier than Giovan Francesco Fortunio's 1516 work, *Regole grammaticali della volgar lingua*.<sup>20</sup> Bembo's insecurity in his position as a cultural authority is therefore revealed in the fact that he clearly attempted to discredit previous works so that they did not overshadow his;<sup>21</sup> he even, in a letter to Bernardo Tasso, appears to accuse Fortunio of stealing his idea, though his claim appears unlikely since Fortunio applied for permission to publish his grammar book as early as 1509.<sup>22</sup> While it is true that Bembo had worked on the text in Urbino and Rome before he became apostolic secretary in 1513 and sent two of the three books to Trifon Gabriele, another Venetian scholar interested in works of Dante and Petrarch, for criticism in 1512,<sup>23</sup> that by no means indicates that his claim to have completed it by 1515 is to be relied upon; in reality, he worked on it up until the last minute.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For example, JoAnn DellaNeva's 2007 *I Tatti* Edition of various works in the debate, such as epistolary exchanges between Poliziano and Cortesi and between Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo, is entitled *Ciceronian Controversies*.

<sup>17</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Pettegree.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*.

<sup>20</sup> Faini. 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> Faini. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Faini. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Kidwell, *Pietro Bembo: Lover, Linguist, Cardinal* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004). 233.

<sup>24</sup> Faini. 97.

In the text, Bembo argues that instead of writing in Latin, authors should compose new texts in an archaized form of Tuscan based on the language of the *tre corone*. This, in some respects, may be considered surprising: Bembo was not Tuscan but Venetian, so the vernacular he espoused was not his own. He had also acquired a considerable reputation for his Latin prose, to the extent that Kidwell writes that he was considered one of the two best Latinists of the age:<sup>25</sup> his influence can be felt in that after Bembo took a role in Pope Leo X's curia, his preferred style of Latin was used to write papal letters.<sup>26</sup> Yet this style was Ciceronianism: Bembo's adherence to this idiom was well-known and clearly articulated in his epistolary exchange with Pico della Mirandola, around 1512-3, in which he stated that Latin prose writings should be modelled on the works of Cicero; similarly, he believed that Latin poetry should be based on Virgil.<sup>27</sup> His attitude towards the writing of vernacular literary works, therefore, is entirely consistent with his point of view as to how Latin works should be composed.

The dialogue is set in December 1503, Carlo Bembo's birthday, and the speakers are Carlo Bembo, brother of the author, who died within a year from the date of the dialogue; Giuliano de' Medici, known as the Magnifico; Federigo Fregoso; and the Latin poet, Ercole Strozzi. Bembo sets the stage for the discussion by having Giuliano comment on the wind using a particularly Tuscan word, *rovaio*;<sup>28</sup> when the others claim not to understand it, they turn to discussing the vernacular. Ercole Strozzi, in particular, seems to struggle to understand why anyone would use it:

“Io non so per me quello che voi in questa lingua vi troviate, perché si debba così lodarla e usarla nello scrivere, come dite. Ben vorrei e sarebbemi caro, che o voi aveste me a quello di lei credere persuaso che voi vi credete, in maniere che voglia mi venisse di scrivere alle volte volgarmente, come voi scrivete, o io voi svolgere da cotesta credenza potessi e, nella mia opinione traendovi, esser cagione che voi altro che latinamente non scriveste. E sopra tutto, M. Carlo, vorrei io ciò potere con M. Pietro vostro fratello ... che essendo egli nella lingua latina già avezzo, egli la tralasci e trametta così spesso, come egli fa, per iscrivere volgarmente.”<sup>29</sup>

[“For my part, I do not know what you find in this language that means that you should praise it so much and use it in writing, as you say. I would very much like and it would be very dear to me, either that you persuade me to believe what you yourselves believe, in such a way that I'd experience this urge to write in the vernacular, as you write, or that I would dissuade you from this belief and, drawing you towards my opinion, be the reason that you only write in Latin. In particular, M. Carlo, I would like to be able to do this with M. Pietro your

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<sup>25</sup> Kidwell. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Terence Tunberg, 'Approaching Neo-Latin Prose as Literature', in *A Guide to Neo-Latin Literature*, ed. by Victoria Moul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 237–54. 244.

<sup>27</sup> Kidwell. 162.

<sup>28</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 7.

brother... who being already educated in the Latin language, leaves it and neglects it as often as he does in order to write in the vernacular.”]

Not only does Strozzi here invite the other characters to discuss the vernacular, asserting a desire to persuade or be persuaded while setting up the conversation for the rest of the text, this passage is also significant for the way that it uses Bembo the author as an example of a classically-educated Latin author who also has developed a reputation as a vernacular author. The suggestion here is that Bembo has almost been unfaithful to his Latin, which seems to prepare the ground for Giuliano’s later comparison to abandoning one’s own mother (the vernacular), to support an unrelated woman (Latin), (“*quasi come se noi dal sostenimento della nostra madre ci ritraessimo per nutrire una donna lontana*”).<sup>30</sup> This interpretation is similar to Faini’s observation that the mother simile itself recalls Bembo’s earlier, Latin dialogue, *De Aetna*, in which Bernardo Bembo, his father, refers to abandoning a parent in his old age.<sup>31</sup>

Strozzi’s criticism of the vernacular serves a structural function in the text; by creating a sense of conflict, albeit a mild and polite one, it gives a point of departure for the other speakers to launch into the merits of writing in the vernacular and thus to expound the beliefs that Bembo sought to promote. In bringing up the author specifically, it also enables Bembo’s own views to be put forward and defended by the other speakers, making them appear more convincing in that they have already convinced. Through Carlo, his brother, Bembo writes:

“Io mi credo che a ciascuno di noi qui siamo, sarebbe vie più agevole in favore di questo lodare e usare la volgar lingua che noi sovente facciamo, la quale voi parimente e schifate e vituperate sempre, recarvi tante ragioni che voi in tutto mutaste sentenza, che a voi possibile in alcuna parte della nostra opinione levar noi. Nondimeno, M. Ercole, io non mi maraviglio molto, non avendo voi ancora dolcezza veruna gustata dello scrivere e comporre volgarmente, sì come colui che, di tutte quelle della lingua latina ripieno, a questo prendere non vi sète giammai, se v’incresce che M. Pietro mio fratello tempo alcuno e opera vi spenda e consumi, del latinamente tralasciandosi, come dite. Anzi ho io degli altri ancora, dotti e scienziati solamente nelle latine lettere, già uditi a lui medesimo dannare questo stesso e rimproverargliele, a’ quali egli brevemente suole rispondere e dir loro, che a sé altrettanto incresce di loro allo ’ncontro, i quali molta cura e molto studio nelle altrui favelle ponendo e in quelle maestrevolmente essercitandosi, non curano se essi ragionar non fanno della loro, a quelli uomini rassomigliandogli, che in alcuna lontana e solinga contrada palagi grandissimi di molta spesa, a marmi e ad oro lavorati e risplendenti, procacciano di fabbricarsi, e nella loro città abitano in vilissime case.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Faini. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 7-8.



[ “I believe that for each of us who are here, it would be easier by far to recount to you so many reasons in favour of this praise and use of the vernacular language, which we often do, though you equally treat it with contempt and insult it constantly, that you would entirely change your opinion than it would be possible for you to lift from us some part of our opinion. Nonetheless, M. Ercole, I don’t much wonder (since you haven’t yet tasted any of the sweetness of writing and composing in the vernacular, just as someone who, stuffed with all those things of the Latin language, have not yet turned yourself to these) if it displeases you that M. Pietro my brother spends and consumes some considerable time and intellectual effort in neglecting writing Latin, as you say. In fact, I have already heard that others, learned and schooled only in Latin literature, reproach him and reprove him about it. He is accustomed to reply briefly and to say to them that, for his part, it displeases him to meet those who, placing much care and much enthusiasm in other languages and using them masterfully, do not care that they do not know how to speak their own, resembling those men who in some distant and solitary contrada strive to make for themselves enormous palaces at great expense, worked in marble and gold and resplendent, and in their own cities live in cheap little houses.”]

Here, in addition to emphasising the contrast between Strozzi’s point of view and that of the other three interlocutors and hinting the ultimate outcome of the conversation, Bembo is also able to use Carlo to assert his own position. It is striking here that the opposing images of the richly adorned dwelling abroad and the cheap little house in the city appear elsewhere in the Bembian corpus: in his Latin poems. Compare the ending of his *Carmen XVII, Ad Sempronium*, to the words of Carlo in the *Prose*:

ne dum marmoreas remota in ora  
 sumptu construis et labore villas,  
 domi te calamo tegas palustri.<sup>33</sup>

[so that while you construct marble villas on remote shores at great trouble and expense, you do not cover yourself at home with a marshy reed.]

Though one excerpt is written in Italian prose and the other in Latin verse, the similarities between the two passages are unmistakable, sharing the same parallel between the expensive, marble and distant prestigious dwelling and the inferior quality of their permanent home. In fact, the version in the *Prose* in some respects expands on the image in the poem, adding to the distant location a sense of solitude (*solinga*), inflating the marble villas to enormous palaces and increasing the prestige of the image of the palaces with gold.

Nor does this repeated image seem accidental. Though Bembo arranged his *Carmina* for posthumous publication,<sup>34</sup> he is known to have submitted works to friends for their opinions

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<sup>33</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*, trans. by Mary P. Chatfield (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005). 64.

<sup>34</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. xiii.

years before publication, including the *Prose*,<sup>35</sup> making it plausible that the poem was already in circulation by 1525. Re-using an image in the *Prose* that he had already used in his Latin verse is a potent claim for the powers of the vernacular, a clear demonstration that, whatever its critics might say, the vernacular was capable of the same expressive power as Latin. It is also highly significant in terms of Bembo's self-presentation, in that he is able to have his cake and eat it; he is able to maintain the fiction of absence from his dialogue and yet make his presence felt through this paraphrase by his brother, a strategy which will be discussed in greater detail in the self-presentation chapter.

The discussion in the dialogue then moves on and, as part of his argument for moving from one language, Latin, to another, Italian, Bembo through his characters brings a third language into play: Greek. Bringing up a third, apparently unrelated language may appear a strange way of arguing in favour of the vernacular, but in historical perspective it makes a lot of sense, as in the age of humanism the authority of the ancients was strong and classical precedents and analogies were sought to contemporary situations. Hence the famous debate between Leonardo Bruni and Biondo Flavio in 1435 was not only about the relationship between spoken and cultured Latin for its own sake but also fundamentally about whether the contemporary linguistic relationship between the vernaculars and Latin had a parallel in the ancient world.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, later in the Quattrocento, Cristoforo Landino had been one of the first writers to make the comparison between the status of Latin in antiquity in relation to Greek and the vernacular in his time in relation to Latin,<sup>37</sup> a comparison that explains the relevance of Greek to the discussion of the Italian vernacular. For in his *Vita e Costume del Poeta*, he wrote:

Ognuno intende come la latina lingua diventò abbondante dirivando molti vocabuli greci in quella; così è necessario che la nostra di ricca venga richissima, se ogni di più trasferimo in quella nuovi vocaboli tolti da' romani e faremoli triti appresso de' nostri.<sup>38</sup>

[Everyone understands how the Latin language became rich by drawing many Greek words into it: in the same way it is necessary that our language must go from rich to very rich, if we transfer into it ever more words taken from the Romans and we make them everyday words alongside our native ones.]

The comparison drawn here between the relative status of Greek and Latin in antiquity and Latin and the vernacular in the Renaissance makes it clear that the Latin language so revered in Landino's own time was once in a similar state of borrowing vocabulary from a more prestigious and older rival. As Joseph Farrell would write, centuries later:

Again and again, when Latin culture confronts itself and inquires into its nature, it sees Greek. The conclusion that often follows is that Latin is derivative and inferior – that in trying to be Greek Latin dooms itself to epigonal status. For the

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<sup>35</sup> Kidwell. 163.

<sup>36</sup> Migliorini. 156.

<sup>37</sup> McLaughlin. 179.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Pompeo Giannantonio, *Cristoforo Landino e L'Umanesimo Volgare* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1971). 142.

Latin speaker an authentic and unmediated connection between nature and culture is unattainable. But such a relationship is imagined to exist for Greek, and this belief becomes a source of envy, perceived inferiority, and self-deprecation. To the Greek language Latin culture ascribes not only a more fundamental authenticity but other qualities as well – a capacity for beautiful and subtle expression, for instance – that it feels unable to claim for itself.<sup>39</sup>

In the same way, in the early fifteenth century, arguments were made that Italian was incapable of expressing complex ideas or was insufficiently prestigious to be used for ‘serious writing’; those who wanted to write elegantly wrote in Latin, with the result that those writing in Italian in the early Quattrocento often considered elegance a far lower priority.<sup>40</sup> In *Le Prose*, Bembo makes Carlo bring up the parallel between contemporary Latin and classical Greek, though he does not cite Landino:

“Sì come a’ romani uomini era ne’ buoni tempi più vicina la latina favella che la greca, con ciò sia cosa che nella latina esso tutti nascevano e quella insieme col latte delle nutrici loro beevano e in essa dimoravano tutti gli anni loro comunemente, dove la greca essi apprendevano per lo più già grandi e usavanla rade volte e molti di loro per aventura né l’usavano né l’apprendevano giammai. Il che a noi avviene della latina, che non dalle nutrici nelle culle, ma da’ maestri nelle scuole, e non tutti, anzi pochi l’apprendiamo, e presca, non a ciascun’ora la usiamo, ma di rado e alcuna volta non mai.”<sup>41</sup>

[“Just as the Latin language was closer to the Romans in their heyday than Greek, since it was the case that they were all born in Latin and drank it in together with the milk of their nurses and dwelled in it together all their lives, while Greek they learned for the most part when they were already grown and used it rarely and many of them by chance neither used it nor ever learned it. The same happens to us with Latin, which we do not learn from nurses in the cradle but from teachers in schools and not everyone, but rather, few people learn it, and late, and we do not use it every hour but rarely - and sometimes never.”]

The image of breastfeeding here is significant, with its connotations of naturalness and wholesomeness which are not necessarily at odds with the use of *nutrice* instead of *madre*. Wiesner, in her study of women and gender during this period, noted that middle and upper-class women from many parts of Europe relied on wet nurses rather than breastfeeding their own children;<sup>42</sup> though Wiesner does not list regions where it was more or less common, Rothman’s article on pre- and post-natal care in Jewish communities in late

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture: From Ancient to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 28.

<sup>40</sup> Migliorini. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 87.

Renaissance Venice, where Bembo was from, would seem to indicate that aristocratic families in Venice would have employed wet nurses. He writes:

Urban Christians tended to send their newborns to a wet-nurse in the country, where the milk was believed to be richer, because there were fewer distractions for the wet-nurse.<sup>43</sup>

It therefore seems highly plausible that, if *nutrice* does refer to a wet nurse (and lo Zingarelli gives the first definition of the word as *donna che, col suo latte, nutre un bambino*,<sup>44</sup> which does not rule out the possibility that the woman might be the mother of the child) Bembo is writing from his experience as a Venetian in a social stratum where the use of wet nurses was common.

Interestingly, the image of breastfeeding in language acquisition also appears in the commentary of 'E.K.' on the first edition of Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (published 1579), as Miller observes.<sup>45</sup> Though more than fifty years and a thousand miles separate the two publications, his complaint about how shameful it is 'that of their owne country and natural speach, which together with their Nources milk they sucked, they have so base regard and bastard iudgement'<sup>46</sup> appears strikingly similar to the argument Bembo puts forward in *Le Prose*, right down to the use of 'Nource' instead of 'mother'. The context is also surprisingly similar: like Bembo, the elusive E.K. is seeking to justify the use of an archaic native language rather than 'peces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the french, there of the Italian, euery where of the Latine'.<sup>47</sup> In both cases, the native language is absorbed along with the first nourishment of the infant in the cradle (*nelle culle*), establishing a primal and emotive connection between individuals and their first language.

Through Carlo, Bembo contrasts the claims of such an immediate and personal language with those of a more 'intellectual' language, one learned later in life (*per lo più già grandi*) and drilled into students not by a nurturing mother figure but *da' maestri nelle scuole* in a system where a pupil would be appointed as a spy, called *lupus*, to report those who slipped into the vernacular.<sup>48</sup> Compared with the vernacular, Latin's appeal thus appears cold and hollow. Moreover, the use of a more prestigious second language to produce works of literature was not what the Romans did – and they were the reason that Latin was, by Bembo's time, the prestige language. If the Romans thought it was better to use their own language than Greek, why should Italians cling to Latin instead of the vernacular?

Carlo's points about the naturalness of the vernacular are then picked up by Giuliano de' Medici, often referred to as 'il Magnifico' in the text. A Florentine and son of Lorenzo 'il

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<sup>43</sup> Leonard A. Rothman, 'Jewish Midwives in Late Renaissance Venice and the Transition to Modernity', *A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, 25.1 (2013), 75–88. 40.

<sup>44</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, 'Nutrice', *Lo Zingarelli* 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Jacqueline T. Miller, 'Mother Tongues: Language and Lactation in Early Modern Literature', *English Literary Renaissance*, 27.2 (1997), 177–96. 179

<sup>46</sup> 'The Shepheardes Calender -- Frontmatter' <<http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/sfront.html>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

<sup>47</sup> 'The Shepheardes Calender -- Frontmatter'.

<sup>48</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 85.

Magnifico' de' Medici, he perhaps has a vested interest in the *questione della lingua*, since two of the three solutions most commonly posed were based on Florentine and would therefore increase the prestige of his homeland. In addition, his father in his *Commento sopra alcuni de'suoi sonetti* in 1483-2 had argued that Latin and Hebrew were once native languages, albeit ones written down more correctly, making Giuliano's response in a dialogue dedicated to yet another Medici a matter of family pride.<sup>49</sup> He states:

“Che sì come i Romani due lingue aveano, una propria e naturale, e questa era la latina, l'altra straniera, e quella era la greca, così noi due favelle possediamo altresì, l'una propria e naturale e domestica, che è la volgare, istrana e non naturale l'altra, che è la latina. Vedete ora, quale di voi due in ciò è più tosto da biasimare e da riprendere; o M. Pietro, il quale usando la favella sua natia non per ciò lascia di dare opera e tempo alla straniera, o voi, che quella schernendo e rifiutando che natia vostra è, lodate e seguite la strana.”<sup>50</sup>

[“Just as the Romans had two languages, one native and natural (this was Latin) the other foreign (that was Greek), we also possess two languages, one native and natural and domestic, which is the vernacular, the other foreign and not natural, which is Latin. You will see now which of you two in this matter is rather to be blamed and to be reproached: either M. Pietro, who, in using his own native language does not stop devoting effort and time to the foreign one, or you, who scorning and rejecting this one, which is your native language, praise and follow the foreign one.”]

The suggestion that Latin is not a natural language recalls that most famous Tuscan writer, Dante, in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which he refers to Latin as *artificialis* and the vernacular as *naturalis*.<sup>51</sup> Though the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* was never completed and was not printed until the 1577 Paris edition, there were manuscript copies from the fifteenth century available.<sup>52</sup> Giangiorgio Trissino allowed Bembo to copy his manuscript at Rome which therefore enabled him to consult the text at his leisure.<sup>53</sup> The notion that Latin was an artificial language had also permeated the debate between Leonardo Bruni and Biondo Flavio discussed earlier: Bruni rejected the notion that a language as complex in its accidentance as Latin could be understood by women, wet nurses and the illiterate general populace (*mulierculae et nutrices et vulgus illiteratum*)<sup>54</sup> and thus concluded that Latin, even in ancient Rome, could only be learned with formal education.

However, none of these authorities are mentioned in Giuliano's response, giving the illusion that this is a spontaneous observation on the part of the character, if the reader enters fully into the fiction of the dialogue, or on the part of the author, if read with a little more

<sup>49</sup> Giannantonio. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, trans. by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 2.

<sup>52</sup> Alighieri. xv.

<sup>53</sup> Kidwell. 220.

<sup>54</sup> Giuseppe Marcellino and Giulia Ammannati, *Il Latino e Il 'volgare' Nell'antica Roma: Biondo Flavio, Leonardo Bruni e La Disputa Umanistica Sulla Lingua Degli Antichi Romani* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2015). 246.

detachment. While it must be admitted that it would be strange if every character in the discussion were to refer by name to every previous scholar whose thinking had influenced their own, given that the text is a dialogue purporting to reflect a real conversation, an occasional reference to earlier thinkers is certainly possible in the same way that Vincenzo ‘il Calmeta’ Colli, still alive at the time the dialogue is set, is quoted. Not giving names or any acknowledgement that the thinking of others contributed towards the ideas that Giuliano expresses may be a reflection of Bembo’s insecurity in his cultural role, as discussed earlier.

Giuliano’s remarks are also worthy of comment for continuing the comparison between Strozzi and Bembo drawn earlier by Strozzi. Even leaving aside the evidence from the authorship of the text, it is clear that the ideal reader will believe that Bembo’s attitude to the vernacular is to be preferred to that of his Latin-preferring friend. The answer to Giuliano’s question is therefore, clearly, Strozzi, and the loaded language that he uses, with the praise and blame of *lodate* and *biasimare* interacting with the opposition of *propria* and *istrana* to imply a sense that writing in the vernacular is almost a patriotic duty, is obviously intended to influence him towards a more favourable attitude towards the vernacular. Though the result of the persuasion in the dialogue is never in any real doubt, it appears highly plausible that the parallel between Strozzi and Bembo is a deliberate attempt to dramatise Bembo’s own journey from prominent Latinist to champion of its daughter language.

Strozzi is not yet defeated, and argues:

“... che sì come a quel tempo e in que’ dotti secoli era ne’ romani uomini di molta maggiore dignità e stima la greca lingua che la latina, così tra noi oggi molto più in prezzo sia e in onore e riverenza la latina avuta che la volgare. Il che se mi si concede, come si potrà dire che ad alcun popolo, avente due lingue, l’una più degna dell’altra e più onorata, egli non si convenga vie più lo scrivere nella più lodata che nella meno?”<sup>55</sup>

[“... just as at that time and in those learned centuries the Greek language was held in greater dignity and esteem by the Romans than Latin, so with us today Latin is much more valued and held in honour and reverence. If you concede this to me, how can anyone not say that it is more appropriate for any people with two languages, one worthier and more honoured than the other, to write in the more praised language than the less praised one?”]

While there were certainly Roman authors, such as the first Roman historian, Quintus Fabius Pictor, who wrote in Greek,<sup>56</sup> Strozzi’s point here is weak since the most renowned Roman authors of his time, figures such as Cicero and Virgil, were revered for their works not in Greek but in their native Latin. Bembo gives this unpersuasive argument to Strozzi so that it

<sup>55</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 9.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Fàbio Pittóre, Quinto nell’Enciclopedia Treccani’ <<http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/quinto-fabio-pittore>> [accessed 30 October 2018].

can be refuted far more convincingly by Giuliano, who replies that this disparity of prestige between the languages:

“...può avvenire, sì perché naturalmente maggior onore e riverenza pare che si debba per noi alle antiche cose portare che alle nuove, e sì ancora per ciò che e allora la greca lingua più degni e reverendi scrittori avea e in maggior numero, che non avea la latina, e ora la latina medesimamente molti più avere se ne vede di gran lunga e più onorati, che non ha il volgare.”<sup>57</sup>

[“... it can happen, both because naturally it seems that we must have greater honour and reverence towards ancient things than towards new ones, and also because in those days the Greek language had worthier and more venerable writers and had them in greater number than Latin had. Now Latin in the same way appears to have many more by a long way, and more honoured writers, than the vernacular.”]

Giuliano’s argument is interesting for the *questione della lingua* because it exposes the reasons that Latin was such a high prestige language and reveals the disquieting fact that, in reality, these had very little to do with the innate qualities of the language. Instead, the language’s age, the number of writers who had previously written in the language (it must be noted that Giuliano will later deny that something can be a language if no texts are written in it – “*non si può dire che sia veramente lingua, alcuna favella che non ha scrittore*”)<sup>58</sup> and the relative prestige of these writers make languages appear more or less worthy than others. However, as he makes clear, these factors can change over time and even the revered Latin language was once considered new and low-status in relation to a more prestigious neighbour. Implicitly, he suggests that if the status of Latin changed by having more authors choose it as a linguistic medium for influential texts, the same would probably be the case for the Italian vernacular: by writing in it, authors make it an acceptable and even admired language to write in. This point he then develops, continuing:

“Ma non per tutto ciò vi si concederà che sempre nella più degna lingua si debba scrivere più tosto che nella meno. Per ciò che se a questa regola dovessero gli antichi uomini considerazione e risguardo avere avuto, né i Romani avrebbero giamai scritto nella latina favella, ma nella greca; né i Greci altresì si sarebbero al comporre nella loro così bella e così rotonda lingua dati, ma in quella de’ loro maestri Fenici; e questi in quella di Egitto, o in alcun’altra.”<sup>59</sup>

[“But for all this it must not be conceded that one should always write in the worthier language than in the less worthy one. For if men of antiquity had taken this rule into consideration, the Romans would never have written in the Latin language, but in Greek. In the same way, the Greeks would not have dedicated themselves to composing in their language, so beautiful and robust, but in that

<sup>57</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 10.

of their Phoenician teachers; and they would have used the language of Egypt, or another.”]

His argument here, verging on a *reductio ad absurdum*, is that the literary canon of a particular language has to start somewhere. Someone has to be the first to write in the a less prestigious or new language; if the Romans had held the attitude that Strozzi describes then the great works of Latin literature he so admires would never have been written for later centuries to revere. Giuliano therefore continues, stating that it is entirely appropriate to write in a native language rather than a prestigious non-native language, provided that it is of sufficient quality:

“E dunque bene ... confessare che non le più degne e più onorate favelle siano da usare tra gli uomini nello scrivere, ma le proprie loro, quando sono di qualità che ricevere possano, quando che sia, ancora esse dignità e grandezza.”<sup>60</sup>

[“It is therefore right... to admit that it is not the worthiest and most honoured languages that men must use in their writing, but their own languages, when they too are of sufficient quality that they are able to obtain, whenever that may be, dignity and prestige.”]

Though he does not make the connection entirely explicit, coming as this point does after he has stated the case for the vernacular as a language of literary culture in Italy, Giuliano enables the reader to infer that the Italian vernacular has now reached this stage and is able to be considered dignified and solemn. He then builds on this point with an emotive speech:

“Perché non solamente senza pietà e crudeli dovremmo essere dalle genti riputati, da lei nelle nostre memorie partendoci e ad altre lingue passando, quasi come se noi dal sostentamento della nostra madre ci ritraessimo per nutrire una donna lontana, ma ancora di poco giudizio; con ciò sia cosa che, per ciò che questa lingua non si vede ancora essere molto ricca e ripiena di scrittori, chiunque ora volgarmente scriverà, potrà sperare di meritar buona parte di quella grazia che a’ primi ritrovatori si dà delle belle e laudevole cose, là dove, scrivendo latinamente, a lui si potrà dire quello che a’ Romani si solea dire.”<sup>61</sup>

[“Because we must not only be reputed by people without *pietà* and cruel, departing from it [the vernacular language] in our writing and passing on to other languages, as if we were avoiding providing sustenance for our mother to support an unrelated woman, but also of poor judgement. For, inasmuch as this language shows that it is not yet very rich and full of authors, whoever now writes in the vernacular can hope to deserve a good part of that favour which we give to the first inventors of good and praiseworthy things, whereas, in writing Latin, people will say what to him what they were accustomed to say to the Romans.”]

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<sup>60</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 11.



This passage is noteworthy both for the maternal language that he begins with and for the pragmatic considerations that he mentions afterwards. He begins with very loaded language; those who chose to write in Latin would not just be considered cruel (*crudele*) but impious (*senza pietà*). This is a concept that would have resonated with anyone who had received a school level education as a derivative of the Latin word 'pietas', an extremely positive quality associated with the proto-Roman hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas. One of the famous images associated with Aeneas is him escaping the destroyed city of Troy with his elderly father carried on his back: the use of the word *pietà* cannot be accidental in conjunction with the simile of supporting an unrelated woman at the expense of a writer's own mother. Faini's observation that this recalls the *De Aetna*'s reference to abandoning a parent in their old age adds an extra layer of associations to an already powerful emotional argument,<sup>62</sup> one that turns writing in the vernacular into a moral duty associated with kinship and familial loyalty.

On the other hand, he also gives a pragmatic and more self-serving reason for writing in the vernacular: a long-lasting legacy. Early adopters of the vernacular would be able to claim the glory of being among the *primi ritrovatori* of *belle e laudevole cose* which, given the parallels already created between the contemporary vernacular and early Latin, would suggest that their names would be revered centuries and even millennia after their deaths. In contrast, there would be little merit in the eyes of the literary community in writing in Latin, something which people had been doing for centuries; there would be nothing remarkable in it and instead of receiving *grazia*, they could only expect to receive a hackneyed response that had been used for generations (*a lui si potrà dire quello che a' Romani si solea dire*).

Having discussed the parallels between the status of Latin and Greek in antiquity and that of the vernacular and Latin in Renaissance Italy, let us now consider the next stage of Bembo's case for using Trecento Tuscan as the literary language of Italy. After the arguments examined above in favour of a vernacular solution to the *questione della lingua*, he then attempts to argue that Trecento Tuscan is the most appropriate form of the vernacular to fulfil this role. As seen in previous subsections of the discussion, once again it is Strozzi who introduces the concept of different vernaculars to give the other speakers a position to argue against. Bembo has him say:

“Per ciò che la latina lingua altro che una lingua non è, d'una sola qualità e forma, con la quale tutte le italiane genti e dell'altre che italiane non sono parimente scrivono, senza differenza avere e dissomiglianza in parte alcuna questa da quella, con ciò sia cosa che tale è in Napoli la lingua latina, quale ella è in Roma, e in Firenze e in Milano e in questa città e in ciascuna altra, dove ella sia in uso o molto o poco, ché in tutte medesimamente è il parlar latino d'un regola e d'una maniera; onde io a latinamente scrivere mettendomi, non potrei errare nello appigliarmi. Ma la volgar sta altramente.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Faini. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 27.

[“For the Latin language is nothing other than a single language, with one single quality and one form. All the Italian peoples and some others who are not Italian write in it equally without differences and discrepancies between one part and another — the Latin language is the same in Naples as it is in Rome and Florence and Milan and in this city and in every other where it is in use to a greater or lesser extent, because in all of them Latin is spoken according to one rule and in one way just the same. Wherever I am when I set myself to writing Latin, I cannot err in hitting the mark. But the vernacular is different.”]

Here, Strozzi refers to the fragmented linguistic situation on the Italian peninsula, where in the absence of one unifying political and linguistic force, many separate languages had sprung up. While his point does have a certain amount of validity to it, it is worth noting that even Latin was not the universal language that his words may suggest; Fraser famously notes that Arthur, son of King Henry VII of England, and his bride, Catherine of Aragon, were initially unable to communicate even though both spoke Latin because they had learnt different pronunciations.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, he appears to have conflated two separate issues, since the matter under discussion is actually the writing of the vernacular rather than the spoken vernacular.

The thorny *questione della lingua* now posed, it requires an answer, and the first possible solution put forwards is the *cortigiana lingua*, defined by Carlo as the variety of language in use at the Court in Rome, (“*che in corte di Roma è in usanza*”).<sup>65</sup> The fact that is the first solution proposed almost guarantees that it will not be the option ultimately favoured by the group and this is particularly the case when the main discussion of the viewpoint is expressed in a conversation Carlo reports within the conversation. This embedded conversation was, according to Carlo, held between Vincenzo Colli, often referred to as ‘il Calmeta’, and the same Trifon Gabriele to whose judgement Bembo had submitted an early draft of part of the *Prose* in 1512. The known literary relationship between Bembo and Trifon (and the familiarity implied by Carlo’s calling him “*M. Trifone Gabriele nostro*”)<sup>66</sup> hints that the conversation relayed will present Trifon Gabriele in the more positive light, though Calmeta is not to be dismissed lightly. In fact, he presents a comparison designed to appeal to the humanists’ cult of classicism, namely the precedent of Greek:

“esso gli rispondea che sì come i Greci quattro lingue hanno alquanto tra sé differenti e separate, dalle quali tutte una ne traggono, che niuna di queste è, ma bene ha in sé molte parti e molte qualità di ciascuna, così di quelle che in Roma, per la varietà delle genti che sì come fiumi al mare vi corrono e allaganvi d’ogni parte, sono senza fallo infinite, se ne genera et escene questa che io dico, la quale altresì, come quella greca si vede avere, sue regole, sue leggi ha, suoi termini, suoi confini, ne’ quali contendendosi, valere se ne può chiunque scrivere.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Antonia Fraser, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992). 25.

<sup>65</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 29.

<sup>66</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 30.

[“He [Calmeta] replied to him [Trifon Gabriele] that just as the Greeks had four languages, somewhat different between themselves and separate, and drew from all of them one which was not the same as any of them, but that contained within it many parts and many qualities of each, so from those in Rome, which, through the variety of peoples who rush there just like rivers to the sea and fill it from every side, are unmistakably infinite, this [language] has been formed and has originated. And I say that this language also, just as we see that Greek did, has its own rules, its own laws, its own limits, its own confines within which to struggle – that it has authority if anyone can write in it.”]

Considering the prestige of the ancient worlds in humanist circles, it is unsurprising that the linguistic parallel between the system of Greek dialects in antiquity and the contemporary situation with the different dialects on the Italian peninsula was considered relevant to the discussion of the *questione della lingua* and the issues it raised regarding the literary validity of different forms of dialogues. This did not originate with Bembo, though Carlo does not acknowledge an earlier source, but rather had been introduced by Italian humanists into European culture in the second half of the previous century.<sup>68</sup> In the dialogue, Lorenzo praises the comparison, but its illusory nature is soon revealed by Trifon Gabriele’s reported response:

“Rispose,” disse mio fratello, “che oltre che le lingue della Grecia eran quattro...e quelle di Roma tante che non si numerarebbono di leggiere, delle quali tutte formare e comporne una terminata e regolata non si potea come di quattro s’era potuto; le quattro greche nella loro propria maniera s’erano conservate continuo, il che avea fatto agevole agli uomini di quei tempi dare alla quinta certa qualità e certa forma. Ma le romane si mutavano secondo il mutamento de’ signori che facevano la corte.”<sup>69</sup>

[“He replied,” said my brother, “that since the languages of Greece were four in number, and those of Rome so many that they could not easily be counted, one established and regulated language could not be formed and composed from all of them as it was possible to do from four. The four Greek languages were continuously conserved in their own way, which has made it easy for men of those times to give certain qualities and forms to the fifth. But the Roman languages changed according to the changes of the gentlemen who made up the court.”]

Rome would have been particularly susceptible to such changes as the seat of the pope; the non-hereditary nature of the papacy meant that popes would come from different families from different areas, so their formal retinue and informal ‘hangers-on’ would have used different forms of language depending on their origin. In this statement attributed to Trifon

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<sup>68</sup> Giulio Lepschy, ‘Linguistics and Phonology’, in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, ed. by Gaetana Marrone and Paolo Puppa (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1053–57. 1054.

<sup>69</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 30.

Gabriele, however, there may also be an element of Bembo the author looking to his dedicatee, Pope Clement VII. Clement VII was, as Bembo's antedated dedication to him makes clear,<sup>70</sup> born Giulio de' Medici and therefore was not only Pope but also a Florentine. The influence of this particular pope is therefore critical: of the three solutions most commonly put forward to the *questione della lingua*, two were based on Florentine and his position as pope would enable Florentine to exert an influence on the third. It does not seem unreasonable that Bembo would want to hint subtly at the influence of his dedicatee in his dialogue, even if the chronological setting of the work precludes more overt references to the linguistic influence of a Medici pope.

Although the *cortigiana lingua* is not seriously considered from this point in the dialogue due to the impossibility of fixing a koiné from the ever-changing plethora of speech varieties in Rome, Giuliano, the Medici representative, nonetheless finds it necessary to deny that it is a language at all. To Strozzi's surprised response, he explains " ... *non si può dire che sia veramente lingua, alcuna favella che non ha scrittore.*" ("You cannot say that is truly a language, some speech that does not have an author").<sup>71</sup> While contemporary linguists would probably dispute his insistence that it is the existence of literary texts that determines the status of a language, he thereby rules the *cortigiana lingua* entirely out of consideration and the attention of the participants in the discussion turns to the Italian dialect with a pre-existing and prestigious literary canon. This is, of course, Tuscan, or to be more geographically precise, Florentine.<sup>72</sup>

At this juncture, it must be observed that the *Prose* was not Bembo's first literary work in Tuscan, nor even his first literary dialogue in that language: twenty years earlier, he published a vernacular literary dialogue on the subject of love, *Gli Asolani*. This earlier dialogue has been described by Faini as the Renaissance equivalent of a bestseller,<sup>73</sup> yet its success was not enough to ensure a resolution to the *questione della lingua*, or even to avoid criticism for his linguistic choices. In fact, through the character of Carlo, Bembo replies to his critics, justifying his decision to write his previous work in Tuscan rather than his native Venetian:

"Hallo fatto per quella cagione, per la quale molti Greci, quantunque Ateniesi non fossero, pure più volentieri i loro componimenti in lingua attica distendeano che in altra, sì come quella che è nel vero più vaga e più gentile."<sup>74</sup>

["He did it for that reason, for which many Greeks, although they were not Athenian, nonetheless narrated their compositions in the Attic language more gladly than in another, as the language which is in truth more graceful and refined."]

<sup>70</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 31.

<sup>72</sup> The two terms were often used interchangeably.

<sup>73</sup> Faini. 30.

<sup>74</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 32,33.

Once again, classical precedent is a crucial justification for contemporary literary decisions. Recalling the earlier comparison drawn between the fragmented state of the vernaculars in Italy and the stable linguistic situation in Greece two millennia previously, Bembo subverts the idea that all the languages were equally valid, suggested by the earlier discussion, and here gives a definitive status of superiority of Attic Greek. While it is true that Attic-Ionic, also called Great Attic, was chosen as the dialect of Philip of Macedon's court and used as the language of administration throughout the Hellenistic world thereafter,<sup>75</sup> Moleas also notes that individual genres had their own characteristic dialect, which often became the convention for that genre based on the dialect the first works in that genre were written in; regardless of their own native tongue, writers would use the appropriate dialect for the literary genre they were using.<sup>76</sup> Bembo's use of antiquity is therefore perhaps a little questionable here.

Fregoso, the character who speaks the least in this dialogue, also weighs in in favour of Tuscan, observing that it is not just Venetian poets who write in Tuscan in order to find a wider audience, but all Italians (*"non solamente i viniziani compositori di rime con la fiorentina lingua scrivono, se letti vogliono essere dalle genti, ma tutti gli altri italiani ancora."*)<sup>77</sup> Here, he presents the *questione della lingua* as effectively resolved; he indicates that readers exhibited such strong preferences for texts written in Florentine that writers who wished to be read wrote in that language. The preference for Florentine was not an issue exclusive to Venice, which, in addition to being Bembo's birthplace, was also a major centre for printing at this time, but, as he portrays it, a universal decision. We must surely admit that there has been a certain amount of rhetorical exaggeration in drawing this conclusion, as suggested by the earlier justification for writing the *Asolani* in Florentine; also telling is the fact that, in the previous century, Landino's vernacular translation of Pliny's *Natural Histories* was rejected for being 'too Florentine'.<sup>78</sup> Here, the hyperbole Bembo uses is a means of making Tuscan's ultimate victory appear a foregone conclusion; if it is already so widely-used as to be essentially a requirement, as he claims, then writing in any other language would be intentionally disadvantaging oneself in the competition for readers.

The preference for Florentine established, there still remained the argument of whether contemporary Florentine or the Florentine written by the *tre corone* two centuries earlier was to be preferred. Through Carlo, Bembo then moves on to justify the reasons for his preference for an archaising model.

"Non dovea Cicerone o Virgilio, lasciando il parlare della loro età, ragionare con quello d'Ennio o di quegli altri, che furono più antichi ancora di lui, per ciò che essi avrebbono oro purissimo, che delle preziose vene del loro fertile e fiorito secolo si traeva, col piombo della rozza età di coloro cangiato... Ma quante volte avviene che la maniera della lingua delle passate stagioni è migliore che quella

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<sup>75</sup> Wendy Moleas, *The Development of the Greek Language*, 2nd edn (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004). 14.

<sup>76</sup> Moleas. 10.

<sup>77</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 32.

<sup>78</sup> 'LANDINO, Cristoforo in "Dizionario Biografico"' <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cristoforo-landino\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cristoforo-landino_(Dizionario-Biografico))> [accessed 9 July 2018].

della presente non è, tante volte si dee per noi con lo stile delle passate stagioni scrivere, Giuliano, e non con quello del nostro tempo. Per che molto meglio e più lodevolmente avrebbono e prosato e verseggiato, e Seneca e Tranquillo e Lucano e Claudiano e tutti quegli scrittori, che dopo 'l secolo di Giulio Cesare e d'Augusto e dopo quella monda e felice età stati sono infino a noi, se essi nella guisa di que' loro antichi, di Virgilio dico e di Cicerone, scritto avessero, che non hanno fatto scrivendo nella loro; e molto meglio faremo noi altresì, se con lo stile del Boccaccio e Petrarca ragioneremo nelle nostre carte, che non faremmo a ragionare col nostro."<sup>79</sup>

[“It was not necessary for Cicero or Virgil, leaving the speech of their age, to speak in that of Ennius or of those others who were even older than him, since they would have exchanged the purest gold, which was drawn from the precious veins of their own fertile and elegant century, for lead worn down with age... But as many times as it happens that the style of language in past seasons is better than that of the present, just as many times we must write with the style of past seasons, Giuliano, and not in that of our own time. For Seneca and Suetonius and Lucan and Claudian - and all those authors who have existed after the century of Julius Caesar and Augustus and after that happy world and age right up to our time – they would have written much better and been much more deserving of praise in verse and prose if they had written in the style of their elders (I mean Virgil and Cicero) than they did writing in their own style. Likewise, we too will do much better, if we speak in with the style of Boccaccio and Petrarch in our own writing<sup>80</sup> on our paper than we would do in writing in our own style.”]

By this time, the arguments appealing to classical precedent are very familiar, yet there is nonetheless material in this quotation that requires further comment: the hierarchy of metals. According to Bembo, the writings of Cicero and Virgil were purest gold, *oro purissimo*, a metaphor extended by the mining imagery of its origin, *delle preziose vene: vena* can mean a vein in the body but also, as in English, a vein of precious metal. This is juxtaposed with earlier styles that they avoided, which are, in contrast, depicted as a far less prized metal, lead. Moreover, the comparison between metals is not just the material that they are made of but also their quality as examples of their own type: the lead of Ennius and his contemporaries is *della rozza età ... cangiato*, making the comparison with the *purissimo* gold starker.

It is also noticeable that, in this quotation, Carlo's preference for Augustan Latin extends as far as saying that later writers would have done better to follow Virgilian or Ciceronian models of Latinity than those of their own period. While this seems somewhat extreme, it must be noted that Teuffel's influential *History of Roman literature*, published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, still characterised the period in which Cicero and Virgil wrote as 'the golden age of Roman literature... in which its climax was reached in the perfection of form, and in

<sup>79</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 41.

<sup>80</sup> Literally 'on our own paper'.

most respects also in the methodical treatment of the subject-matters'.<sup>81</sup> Following on from this, perceived deviations from this style in the writing of Livy, a late 'golden age' author, were viewed as indications of the beginnings of the 'silver age',<sup>82</sup> with all the implications of inferiority that that implied. Indeed, though the term 'silver Latin' has fallen out of fashion in twenty-first century criticism, to be replaced by the more neutral 'imperial Latin', it was still in use towards the end of the twentieth century, as the title of Debra Hershkowitz' 1998 book, *Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica: abbreviated voyages in silver Latin epic*, demonstrates. Thus, Bembo's statement is nothing other than a more overt statement of a prejudice that has continued until relatively recently, expressed here by way of a classical precedent and justification for archaising Tuscan.

Having considered what Bembo's arguments in favour of Tuscan were, let us now consider their success. To judge this, it is necessary to consider how Bembo depicts them as having been received. At the end of the second day of the conversation, this is shown as follows:

Avea così detto il Magnifico e tacevasi, quando lo Strozza, che attentamente ascoltato l'avea, disse: "Deh, se il cielo, Giuliano, in riputazione e stima la vostra lingua avanzi di giorno in giorno, e voglio io incominciare a ragionar toscanamente da questa voce, che buono augurio mi dà e in isperanza mi mette di nuovo acquisto, non fate sosta così tosto nel raccontarci delle vostre voci, ma ditecene ancora, e sponetecene dell'altre; ché io non vi potrei dire, quanto diletto io piglio di questi ragionamenti."<sup>83</sup>

[The Magnifico had said these things and fallen silent when Strozzi, who had been listening intently, said "well, Giuliano, if heaven advances your language day by day in reputation and esteem, and even I want to begin to speak Tuscan because of this discussion, which augurs well for me and makes me hopeful for new achievements, don't stop so soon in recounting your vocabulary to us but tell us more about it and show us more words. For I could not tell you how much pleasure I take from these conversations."]

Here, we see that Strozzi, for whose benefit the detailed treatment of the Tuscan language has taken place and who initially appeared opposed to any move from Latin to the vernacular in contemporary literary culture is depicted as now having a keen interest in the vocabulary of Bembo's archaising Tuscan. Not only has he been paying close attention to the discussion, *attentamente ascoltato l'avea*, but he also urges Giuliano to tell him more. His declaration that he takes great pleasure in such conversations appears sincere rather than mere politeness; the literary interjection *deh* expresses functions such as desire, eagerness, exhortation, admiration and praise,<sup>84</sup> suggesting a genuine earnestness to learn more about this Florentine solution to the *questione*.

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<sup>81</sup> W. S. Teuffel, *A History of Roman Literature* (London: G. Bell and sons, 1873)

<<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101064069402>>. 226.

<sup>82</sup> Teuffel. 391.

<sup>83</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 92.

<sup>84</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, 'Deh', *Lo Zingarelli 2021*.

Strozzi's change of heart on this subject is crucial for a number of reasons. Firstly, as his opposition previously appeared consistent and fixed, it shows that the arguments put forward by the other speakers, particularly Carlo and Giuliano, should be understood by readers to have been persuasive; if his opposition had been less determined, it could be argued that Bembo was intentionally portraying him as easily swayed. The notion that the arguments were persuasive because they have persuaded affects the way that the readers view the characters in the work, making them appear more intelligent and eloquent. Of course, the selection of interlocutors and their depiction also reflects back on Bembo; self-representation in the choice of speakers will be discussed in chapter three.

Another, related, reason that Strozzi's conversion is important is that it also suggests how the reader should respond. Virginia Cox makes two points that appear particularly salient here: that Renaissance writers were known to make characters stand-ins for their audience and that there is an analogy to be made between the 'literary speech' of dialogue and actual speech.<sup>85</sup> Particularly in the case of vernacular didactic works, it became common to use female interlocutors to represent an audience of *idioti*, (relatively) unschooled readers, as the restrictions on female education meant that they could be assumed to be ignorant of the topics discussed and so it would be justifiable within the fiction of the dialogue to explain them.<sup>86</sup> In this dialogue, Strozzi represents the same function,<sup>87</sup> but his ignorance of vernacular grammar is due to the different focus of his education rather than its lack. He therefore can be considered a representative of the audience, someone literate but unconvinced that Italian could acquire the same literary status as Latin and unsure which form of the vernacular should be used in literary compositions; as the person with whom the readership is being compared is a member of the social and economic elite and a highly-educated Latin poet, the comparison can be considered flattering.

That he speaks after having been silent for a long time attentively listening is interesting because of the comparison that can be drawn between 'literary speech' and the speech of conversation. Bembo in writing the dialogue can be seen as dominating the conversation, a severe breach of etiquette; if we accept that Strozzi represents the reader, we see his urging Giuliano to continue as permission for Bembo to continue writing, restoring decorum to the text. Moreover, Strozzi as the representative for the reader becoming convinced that the vernacular should be Bembo's archaising Florentine is a powerful clue to the actual reader as to the response that the author desires. The reader therefore makes the journey along with Strozzi from indecision and outright opposition to promising to learn to write in the vernacular by the end of the text.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, it is also an implicit parallel with Cicero's *De Oratore*. On the second day of *De Oratore*, the character Crassus remarks that another character, Antonius, has changed his position radically from what he argued the previous day; in fact, to use his precise wording,

<sup>85</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 45,41.

<sup>86</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 45.

<sup>87</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 46.

<sup>88</sup> '... M. Ercole, il quale agli altri promettea di volere al tutto far pruova se fatto gli venisse di sapere scrivere volgarmente'. (M. Ercole, who affirmed to the others that he wanted wholeheartedly to try to see if he could learn to write in the vernacular.) Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 199.



the night has “polished him and humanised him” (“*nox te,*” *inquit,* “*nobis, Antoni, expolivit hominemque reddidit*”)<sup>89</sup> in making him express opinions that conform to the general point of view of the group. While the reason Antonius gives for his change of heart is that previously, he was trying to challenge the main speaker, Crassus, whereas on the second day, he is actually giving his real opinion,<sup>90</sup> a strategy very different to Strozzi’s in the *Prose*, the change of professed viewpoint in Bembo’s text has undertones of the earlier, Ciceronian dialogue.

This may appear a little exaggerated and far-fetched, but it is certainly the case that Baron has noted verbal parallels between Niccolò Niccoli’s recantation of his earlier position in Leonardo Bruni’s *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, written in the Quattrocento, and this scene in the *De Oratore*.<sup>91</sup> We also know that this text was enormously influential in this period, beginning a distinguished tradition of Latin dialogues in the fifteenth century from which vernacular dialogues such as Bembo’s originated.<sup>92</sup> It therefore does not seem implausible that the abrupt change of stance in the *De Oratore* was an influence on the *Prose*, whether consciously through Bembo’s known Ciceronian stance or subconsciously, either directly or mediated through Bruni or one of the subsequent texts his work inspired.

#### The *Questione della Lingua* in Castiglione

This chapter has so far demonstrated the key arguments that Bembo used in his *Prose della Volgar Lingua* to convince readers that his archaising version of Florentine should become the literary language used throughout the Italian peninsula and the islands. Though influential, it was by no means the only dialogue in this period to focus on the *questione della lingua* and the next section of the chapter will compare his viewpoint with those expressed in two roughly contemporary dialogues.

The first of these, Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, aimed to describe the ideal courtier and his female counterpart, the *donna di palazzo*, and was a fundamental text for Renaissance readers in Italy and beyond, with around fifty-eight Italian editions published in the sixteenth century,<sup>93</sup> a similar number had been published in languages other than Italian by 1619.<sup>94</sup> It was formally published in 1528, three years after the publication date for the *Prose*, but set in 1507, and circulated in manuscript form for years before being printed. Thus, the process to publication for this work can be seen as analogous to that of the *Prose*, which was set in 1503 and whose first two books were sent to Trifone for feedback in 1512.

Another relevant parallel between the two works, making the comparison between them particularly germane, is the choice of speakers. Castiglione’s extensive cast of characters includes Federigo Fregoso, Giuliano de’ Medici and even Pietro Bembo himself. To a certain

<sup>89</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 226.

<sup>90</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 228.

<sup>91</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966). 229.

<sup>92</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 23.

<sup>93</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 47.

<sup>94</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 55.

extent, the overlap of characters may simply reflect the fact that these figures were perceived within the wider aristocratic community as the cultural élite; as Cox notes, in the Ciceronian style of dialogue, the reputation and *auctoritas* of the speakers were crucial since they acted as ‘godfathers to the truth’.<sup>95</sup> However, we are aware that Castiglione revised his text over a number of years and changed his speakers based on the perceived needs of his courtly career and with this in mind,<sup>96</sup> it does not appear unreasonable to consider whether his choice of interlocutors is in some way responding to Bembo’s *Prose*.

In the first day of the conversation and in the preface, Castiglione engages with contemporary linguistic debates through the characters of Count Canossa, defending the notion of the *lingua cortigiana* and Federigo Fregoso, proposing archaising Tuscan. The choice of Fregoso as the champion of Bembo’s viewpoint is interesting given that Bembo is also an interlocutor in the dialogue and might therefore reasonably be expected to defend his own viewpoint; though the fictional date of Castiglione’s dialogue, 1507, is long before the publication of the *Prose*, it was after Bembo’s publication of *Gli Asolani* and critical editions of Dante and Petrarch. He had thus already acquired a certain reputation for his version of a literary vernacular.

A likely explanation is that Bembo’s silence in the *questione della lingua* debate in *Il Cortegiano* relates to the author’s own viewpoint. As Cox points out, in the heated dispute, Canossa becomes ‘unmistakeably identifiable as a spokesman for the author’.<sup>97</sup> This becomes clear on close examination of the following passages:

“Né sarebbe questo cosa nova; perché delle quattro lingue che aveano in consuetudine, i scrittori greci, elegendo da ciascuna parole, modi e figure, come ben loro veniva, ne facevano nascere un’altra che si diceva comune, e tutte cinque poi sotto un solo nome chiamavano lingua greca; e benché la ateniese fosse elegante, pura e facunda piú che l’altre, i boni scrittori che non erano di nazione ateniesi, non la affettavan tanto, che nel modo dello scrivere e quasi all’odor e proprietà del suo natural parlare non fossero conosciuti; né per questo però erano sprezzati; anzi quei che volevan parer troppo ateniesi, ne rapportavan biasimo.”<sup>98</sup>

[“Nor would this be a new thing, for from the four languages which they were familiar with, the Greek writers chose words, styles and figures of speech from each one as they came to mind and created a new one which was called a common language. All five languages were then called under one single name: Greek. And though Attic was more elegant, pure and eloquent than the others, good writers who were not of Athenian origin did not feign it so much that this was not known in their manner of writing and almost by the scent and correctness of their natural speech. Nor were they looked down on for this but

<sup>95</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 13.

<sup>96</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 36.

<sup>97</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 51.

<sup>98</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 59.

rather when they wanted to appear too Athenian, they were severely criticised.”]

Perciò, se io non ho voluto scrivendo usare le parole del Boccaccio che piú non s’usano in Toscana, né sottopormi alla legge di coloro, che stimano che non sia licito usar quelle che non usano li Toscani d’oggi, parmi meritare escusazione. Penso adunque, e nella materia del libro e nella lingua, per quanto una lingua po aiutar l’altra, aver imitato autori tanto degni di laude quanto è il Boccaccio; né credo che mi si debba imputare per errore lo aver eletto di farmi piú tosto conoscere per lombardo parlando lombardo, che per non toscano parlando troppo toscano; per non fare come Teofrasto, il qual, per parlare troppo ateniese, fu da una semplice vecchiarrella conosciuto per non ateniese.<sup>99</sup>

[For, if I have not wanted to use words from Boccaccio that are no longer in use in Tuscany in my writing, nor subject myself to the rules of those who think that it is not permissible to use words which today’s Tuscans do not use, I believe that I deserve absolution. Therefore, I think, both in the subject matter of my book and in its language, that I have imitated authors as worthy of praise as Boccaccio inasmuch as any language can help another. Nor do I believe that my having chosen to make myself known as a Lombard by speaking Lombard rather than a non-Tuscan by speaking too Tuscan should be imputed to me as a mistake – not to act like Theophrastus, who, by speaking too Athenian was recognised by a mere old woman as a non-Athenian.]

The correspondences are unmistakable: both passages use the same comparison with the Greek dialects and the Italian vernaculars, a parallel that we have also noted in Bembo, and both also identify Tuscan with Attic. Though one passage is in the mouth of Count Canossa and the other in Castiglione’s own voice, the sense that it is seemlier to write in one’s own, less prestigious, language than affectedly imitate a more impressive variety is clear in both. It is therefore evident which point of view Castiglione would like to be associated with in the debate and the fact that he holds an opinion different to that in the *Prose* appears a highly plausible reason for not giving Bembo the character the charge of defending the historical Bembo’s viewpoint. To do so would risk undermining his own argument by giving the opposing point of view an authoritative voice; instead, Bembo is given a major speaking role in the fourth book, in which the subject of Platonic love is discussed. This is fitting because it refers back to *Gli Asolani*, where the hermit uses Platonic love to resolve the conflicting views of love that were heard on the previous days; Bembo the character is thus given a platform to speak on a subject on which Bembo the historical person was known to have some authority but one that also did not contradict the position of the author.

Two other points must be added on the subject of these two passages. Firstly, I speculate that Castiglione’s reference to *non toscano parlando troppo toscano* may be an indirect

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<sup>99</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 6.

reference to and criticism of Bembo. Kidwell, referring to della Casa's biography of Bembo, comments that he frequently mispronounced words and did not speak as he wrote, adding that '[his] attempt to speak fifteenth-century Tuscan obviously struck contemporary Tuscans as bizarre,'<sup>100</sup> suggesting that the Venetian scholar's Tuscan speech was perceived in a similar light to the story of Theophrastus that Castiglione recounts.

The second observation that must be made is that the solution to the *questione* Castiglione championed in his dialogue and the solution that he used in his text are not necessarily the same. In fact, as Sanson observes, Castiglione had the Venetian Giovan Francesco Valier revise his book so that it would adhere more closely to Bembo's archaising model.<sup>101</sup> While it is not clear whether this is an acknowledgement on some level that the Florentine model was superior or merely a concession to the exigencies of the fledgling print industry, it must therefore be noted that there is an obvious discrepancy between Castiglione's professed opinion and his practice.

#### Bembo and the *Questione della Lingua* in Giovio

Let us now turn to another dialogue roughly contemporary with Bembo's *Prose della Volgar Lingua* and that also touches on the *questione della lingua*, Paolo Giovio's *De Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*, written in 1527 in the wake of the Sack of Rome but never published. It is perhaps not an obvious choice of text to discuss the Italian vernacular as it is written in 'highly idiomatic' Latin,<sup>102</sup> but in the second day of the dialogue, the three interlocutors discuss literary figures, a conversation that then touches upon the debate about writing in Latin or the vernacular, and make direct references to Bembo and the *Prose*. Thus, through the character of Musetius, a Latinised depiction of the Neapolitan statesman, jurist and orator Giovanni Antonio Muscettola,<sup>103</sup> Giovio writes:

“Verum ut ab insulsis ad sapidissimos poetas veniamus, duplex eorum est ordo et uterque admodum numerosus, Etruscorum scilicet et Latinorum; sed Latini utrumque munus plerumque feliciter absolvunt, cum ipsi saepe vernaculi sine litteris cultioribus ab ingenii acuitate commendationem accipient. Horum sicut plures simul pari gratia de loco summo certare conspiciamus, ita illorum Bembus facile princeps evadit. Is, nobili fretus ingenio et multis reconditis instructus disciplinis, ut veteranus et ambidexter utroque stilo feliciter pugnat, adeo ut in eadem harena cum Syncero Actio certamen non detrectet, quem tamen sibi

<sup>100</sup> Kidwell. 232.

<sup>101</sup> Helena Sanson, “‘Orsù, Non Più Signora, [...] Tornate a Segno’”: Women, Language Games and Debates in Cinquecento Italy’, *Modern Language Review*, 105.1 (2010), 103–21. 110–11.

<sup>102</sup> T. C Price Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio: The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). x.

<sup>103</sup> Kenneth Gouwens, ‘Meanings of Masculinity in Paolo Giovio’s “Ischian” Dialogues.’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 17.1 (2014), 79–101. 82.

sicut aetate, ita etiam heroico carmine superiorem esse liberali quodam pudore profitetur.”<sup>104</sup>

[“but let’s move on from bland poets to the most tasteful; there are two groups of them, each very numerous: the Tuscans and the Latins. But most Latins discharge both duties well, while those vernacular writers, unlettered in more polished texts, receive commendation from the keenness of their talent. Just as we observe that many of the latter strive for the highest place with equal popularity, so Bembo emerges as leader of the former. Relying on his noble character and skilled in many abstruse disciplines, he fights well in both styles like an ambidextrous veteran boxer, to the extent that he does not shrink from a contest in the same arena as Sannazaro, whom, however, he declares with a certain generous modesty to be as superior to him in hexameters as in age.”]

The imagery in this quotation is striking: the adjectives *insulsis* and *sapidissimos* do not only refer to the quality of the poets’ writing but are also culinary words, with the former relating to a lack of salt and the latter, to a dish being full of flavour. This culinary image then gives way to several words associated with boxing and athletic competition: *certare*, *veteranus*, *ambidexter*, *pugnat*, *harena*, *certamen*. Here, Bembo as *princeps* appears almost as a champion representing the mass of lesser Latin writers in a single combat, in the same way that Aeneas represents the Trojans at the end of the Aeneid. He is also *ambidexter*, capable of producing literary works in both languages, and is presented positively, with sportsmanship and courtesy encoded in his modest declaration of the Latin poet Sannazaro’s superiority.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that, in general, Musetius believes that the Latin writers are better placed to excel in literature than their vernacular counterparts; able to read and write both languages, *utrumque munus plerumque feliciter absolvunt*, they can draw on both ancient and modern literary traditions while the vernacular writers are characterised as *sine litteris cultioribus* and therefore must rely only on their keen natural talent to earn praise, *ab ingenii acuitate commendationem accipient*, rather than refinement acquired through studies of the ancient world and participation in the game of intertextuality. Bembo is an exception, chosen as *princeps* for his exceptionality in not just being able to write in both languages but choosing to do so rather than focusing his efforts on Latin.

Musetius then continues:

“Porro Bembus, qui accurata exercitatione ad bene sanum ac vividum pedestris eloquentiae habitum pervenerat, ad Etrusca ingenium deflexit cum certam ac summam ab his studiis dignitatem petere quam a Latinis dubio eventu speratam gloriam consecrari mallet. Nam certe hac perpetua laude florebit, quod nimiam scribentium licentiam perigrinamque luxuriam publicato ad Etruscae veteris

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<sup>104</sup> Paolo Giovio, *Notable Men and Women of Our Time*, ed. by Kenneth Gouwens (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).216, 218. I have used the Gouwens edition for the Latin text of the dialogue, while providing my own English translations. The double page reference here is simply an acknowledgement that the passage quoted runs over two pages.

eloquentiae normam exactissimo opere castigarit. Spero tamen eum prudenti iudicio ad dialogos Latinos, quos iam pridem scribere coepit in honorem Guidonis Baldi principis Urbinatis, esse rediturum et pontificias breves epistolas ab omni barbariae suspicione repurgatas editurum, ut posterius castum ipsius simul et succulentum dicendi genus”<sup>105</sup>

[“Returning to Bembo, who had reached a very correct and vivid prose style, he turned his talent away to Tuscan, since he preferred to seek a certain and lofty reputation from these studies than to pursue the glory he hoped for but was not secure of from his Latin writings. For he will surely flourish in this eternal praise because in the work he published he corrected most precisely the excessive licence and foreign luxury of other writers to the standard of old Tuscan eloquence. Nonetheless, I hope that with his prudent character he will return to the Latin dialogues which long before he began to write in honour of Guidobaldo, duke of Urbino, and that he will bring forth papal briefs purged of every hint of barbarism, so that his writing style, both pure and juicy, may be admired as a model for imitation for posterity.”]

Here, writing Tuscan is seen as a surer way of gaining fame than writing in Latin, and Bembo’s eternal reputation is assured, *hac perpetua laude florebit*, from the *Prose*, which has restored the literary vernacular to a form perceived as more authentically Tuscan, *ad Etruscae veteris eloquentiae normam*. Yet Bembo moving away from Tuscan to resume writing Latin dialogues is something that Musetius hopes for and evidence of *prudenti iudicio*, which may suggest that writing in Latin is a better long-term strategy. This may relate to the quality of patrons that a Latin writer, if lucky, could attract: he certainly makes reference to Guidobaldo, the duke of Urbino, and the pope, his own patron, but conveniently skates over the fact that Pope Clement VII was also the dedicatee of the *Prose* and a member of the Florentine de’ Medici family.

Bembo also re-emerges later during the discussion on the second day as a successor to noteworthy grammarians from antiquity:

“Erit certe Bembus, ab illo subtili luculentoque volumine quo voces vernaculae ad exactam regulam religiose revocantur, aliquando novus Aristarchus et ut grammaticae conditor inter Italos alter Priscianus, et ceteri pariter qui eleganter et accurate conscripserunt nobilium auctorum gloriam sortientur.”<sup>106</sup>

[“From that precise and splendid volume in which vernacular words are called back scrupulously to follow exact rules, Bembo will certainly in time become a new Aristarchus and, as founder of grammar among the Italians, another Priscian, and others in the same way who have written elegantly and accurately will obtain the glory of noble authors.”]

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<sup>105</sup> Giovio. 218.

<sup>106</sup> Giovio. 252.

The Aristarchus here mentioned is not Aristarchus of Samos, the mathematician and astronomer, but Aristarchus of Samothrace, librarian of the library of Alexandria, characterised by Schironi as ‘a scientific scholar with wide interests who employed a clear and consistent methodology’<sup>107</sup> and ‘the greatest of the Alexandrian grammarians’.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Priscian wrote the *Institutio de arte grammatica*, which was used for centuries after his death and described by Geiger as ‘by far our most important extant author on Latin grammar’.<sup>109</sup> There is therefore a clear sense here of repeating the past that rather recalls the parade of future heroes in the underworld in *Aeneid 6*: Bembo is, to a certain extent, re-embodiment of the great grammatical teachers of the past when he becomes *novus Aristarchus* and *alter Priscianus*. Yet the reference to Priscian may not be entirely positive; his views that earlier Latin grammarians had fallen excessively under the spell of Greek grammarians and repeated their misconceptions sits oddly with Bembo’s insistence on Cicero and Virgil as models for Latin and Boccaccio and Petrarch for the vernacular.

Having considered the role of Bembo in the *De viris et foeminis aetate nostra florentibus*, let us now turn to the case for the vernacular that is expressed in that dialogue. Though the text is in Latin, it would be impossible to discuss contemporary literary figures without making some mention of the increasing swerve towards the vernacular and discussing the relationship between the two languages. Unfortunately, however, the text for the second day of the dialogue is fragmentary: we have lost the crucial beginning and end of the discussion and so do not know highly pertinent information, such as the setting of the text and how the conversation begins. It is also possible that we are missing arguments in favour of Latin, though I speculate that this is probably not the case: it seems highly plausible that, for Giovio’s ideal audience, writing in Latin required no justification and that he therefore did not explain his reasoning. Yet although arguments in favour of Latin are either missing or were never included in the original manuscript, we do see the opposing side of the case through the character of Musetius, who explains motivations for writing in the vernacular, albeit with a not uncritical attitude.

One of the key reasons he suggests people write in the vernacular is the relative ease of both composition and its more problematic inverse, plagiarism. This, he believes, is a problem that is particularly acute in the case of the vernacular:

“nam ante omnia communi vel Etrusca lingua scribenti pulcherrimis antiquorum et recentium etiam Latinorum inventionibus et sententiis inniti commodissimum videtur ad locupletanda vel exornanda scripta quae blandius atque facilius vernaculis sermonibus excuduntur. potest enim is pudore incolumi peramoenos locos a politioribus philosophis mutuari, poetarum consecrari lumina sales argutias et totius denique Latinae linguae conspicuos flores ludenti et vaga manu impune decerpere. quae omnia, mox dulcissime translata et opportunis sedibus egregie collocata, instar lucidissimorum emblematum inter teneras vernaculae

<sup>107</sup> Francesca Schironi, ‘Plato at Alexandria : Aristophanes, Aristarchus, and the “Philological Tradition” of a Philosopher’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 55.2 (2005), 423–34. 423.

<sup>108</sup> Schironi. 424–5.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Geiger, ‘Some Latin Authors from the Greek East’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 49.2, 606–17. 606.

linguae lascivias sic refulgent tantamque excitant admirationem ut Etrusca Latinis iucundiora simul et grandiora nonnullis videantur, et iis praesertim qui ad recondita optimarum litterarum studia vel occupationibus vel ingeniorum imbecillitate minime penetrarunt.”<sup>110</sup>

[“For first of all it appears extremely convenient for someone writing in the common or Tuscan language to lean upon the most beautiful inventions and sentiments of the ancients and even of recent Latin writers in order to embellish or adorn writings which are composed more agreeably and easily in the vernacular. For he can borrow the most pleasant passages from more polished philosophers without shame, imitate their brilliance, wit, clever wordplay and even ultimately pluck illustrious flowers with a playful and wandering hand from the whole of the Latin language without punishment. All these things, soon translated pleasantly and placed in singularly fitting places, shine just like the brightest mosaics among the tender playfulness of the vernacular language and attract so great admiration that the Tuscan writings may seem at once more pleasing and grander than many Latin writings – and especially to those who have not at all entered into the abstruse studies of excellent literature either because of their employment or because of their intellectual weakness.”]

Here we see a kind of cultural anxiety; vernacular writers who borrow images from classical or Neo-Latin texts are shameless, *incolumi pudore*, in passing off the creative work in coming up with the image as their own. This increases their own prestige, particularly in circles where the audience are insufficiently educated to recognise the original, *praesertim qui ad recondita optimarum litterarum studia... minime penetrarunt*. The plagiarised versions even seem more pleasing than the originals, *Etrusca Latinis iucundiora simul et grandiora nonnullis videantur*, which may possibly suggest that in the future, the study of Latin will be seen as obsolete since vernacular texts can convey the same sentiments and images more effectively.

It is possibly also worthwhile to remember at this juncture that in the *Prose*, a dialogue in the vernacular, there was clear evidence of Bembo not citing the authorities whose arguments he had used, such as borrowing the comparison between Latin and Greek and the vernacular and Latin from Landino. There is therefore a certain truth to what Musetius is saying, though he surely overstates his case when he adds:

“neminem certe Latine scribentem tanta insania prorsus invaserit ut sibi pro libidine cuncta rapiendi mutuandi transferendi potestatem sine risu concessam putet. fieri enim nequit nisi impudentissime vel ineptissime ut quis in eadem lingua optimorum auctorum verba, sententias ac integros etiam versus stulta libertate suffuretur, aut illorum sensus et divinas cogitationes, elocutione commutata, se melius atque felicius expressurum esse confidant.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Giovio. 220,222.

<sup>111</sup> Giovio. 222.



[“Such great insanity – to think that the power of snatching, borrowing, appropriating according to his every whim without ridicule had been granted to him- surely would never take possession of anyone writing in Latin. For only very impudently or inappropriately would anyone steal away the words, sentiments and even whole verses of the best authors with foolish liberty in the same language, or to trust that they can express better the feelings and divine thoughts of the best authors with the wording changed.”]

As any modern classicist knows, Latinity is no guarantee that an idea will not be changed, developed and adapted by a later author writing in the same language; indeed, Stephen Hinds’ axiom on allusiveness is as follows:

There is no discursive element in a Roman poem, no matter how unremarkable in itself, and no matter how frequently repeated in the tradition, that cannot in some imaginable circumstance mobilize a specific allusion.<sup>112</sup>

One of the best known examples of this is, in fact, found in Virgil; Aeneas in the underworld assures Dido that he left her shore unwillingly (“*invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi*” (unwillingly, queen, I left your shore)),<sup>113</sup> picking up on a line from the rather less serious Catullus 66.40 (*invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi* (unwillingly, o Queen, I left your scalp)).<sup>114</sup> This clearly makes a mockery of Muetius’ notion that no Latin writer would ever attempt to rephrase a word or line of another’s to use in a different context. Indeed, much later in the conversation, he comments on literary imitation in a way that almost appears to be correcting his earlier statement:

“nam si non puduit summum vatem Virgilium integrum carmen a Catullo aequali suo mutuari cum dixit “*invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi,*” profecto non erubescet quispiam nostrorum temporum poeta liberaliter institutus si aliqua ad praesentem usum verecunde sumpta atque ingeniose collocata sustulerit.”<sup>115</sup>

[“For, if it did not shame Virgil, the greatest poet, to borrow a whole line from his contemporary, Catullus, when he said, “unwillingly, queen, did I leave your shore”, surely no liberally educated poet of our times will blush if he has lifted some elements for present use, having taken them with humility and placed them cleverly”]

He thus appears to be backtracking, with his earlier criticism of those who borrow and adapt the writings of others modified to admit that the kind of intertextuality used in Virgil and other Latin poets can be considered a legitimate literary technique, even if the two texts were written in the same language. This raises the question of whether his rejection

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 26.

<sup>113</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid Books 1-6*, trans. by H Rushton Fairclough and G.P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library, 63 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1916). 564.

<sup>114</sup> Catullus and Tibullus, *Catullus. Tibullus. Pervergilium Veneris*, trans. by F. W. Cornish and others, Loeb Classical Library, 6 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1913). 130.

<sup>115</sup> Giovinio. 328.

expressed earlier of imitation in vernacular texts is to some extent based on linguistic and intellectual snobbery: borrowing is only acceptable when Latinists do it.

Yet consciously, Musetius rejects being labelled a snob; when he continues with his explanation of why writers were increasingly moving to writing in the vernacular, he explains it as follows:

“alia quoque causa est, nec ea omnino contemnenda quoniam si hilariter atque praeclare scribere velimus, eas quas ab uberibus matrum exuximus voces ad quasque sensuum ingenique motiones excipiendas atque enunciandas facilius quis<que> admoverit et inflexerit quam verba assiduis comparata lectionibus, velut ea potius studio ac industria passim deligente quam ad celerem usum offerente natura, ita ut nobis hodie multo difficilius et gravius et (si dicere fas sit) etiam ad laudem gloriosius esse censeatur perornate et luculenter Latina conscripsisse quam ipsis antiquioribus fuerit Romanis, cum editissimam illam arcem nativae patriaeque eloquentiae tenentibus ullae aliae civitates ullique populi in dicendo vel scribendo pares esse nequivissent.”<sup>116</sup>

[“There is also another cause, and it is not to be despised at all. For if we wish to write in a lively and distinguished style, anyone will apply and turn towards those words which we sucked away from the breasts of our mothers to capturing and expressing every movement of the senses and the character more easily than words acquired through incessant reading. Just as that language is chosen with study and industry everywhere rather than with nature offering it up for swift use, so today it is supposed much more difficult for us and burdensome and (if I may say so) more ostentatious seeking of praise to have written in highly ornate and splendid Latin than it was to the Romans of old. When they held that most lofty stronghold of native and ancestral eloquence, no other cities and other peopled were able to equal them in speaking or in writing.”]

Though not stated entirely explicitly, it is clear from this section of the text that Musetius does not consider Latin a native language for his contemporaries in the same way that it was for the Romans, even though this point is purportedly being made in an oral conversation that took place in the Latin language. Rhetoric by now familiar from the *Prose* reappears: the imagery of imbibing vocabulary at the breast, *quas ab uberibus matrum exuximus voces*, and the contrast between Latin, a language acquired through diligent study, *studio ac industria*, and the comparative ease of the vernacular being perceived as natural, *offerente natura*. This is closely related to the comparison between the relative status of Latin and Greek in antiquity and the vernacular and Latin in Renaissance Italy, which is worthy of further examination.

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<sup>116</sup> Giovio. 252,254.

Let us turn to that now. In a discussion introduced by Iovius,<sup>117</sup> who requests that Musetius explain the reasons for the increasing numbers of writers choosing to compose in the vernacular, Musetius uses the comparison which we see below:

“certe ante alias in promptu causa est, quoniam studendum sit ei linguae quae, tametsi hodie sit popularis atque vernacula, tamen cum ex grammaticae praeceptis ab aequabili norma receperit dignitatem aliquando apud posteros sit futura fortasse nobilior ipsa Latina. Namque eam non negabimus vere maternam atque domesticam antiquitus exstitisse, siquidem idiotae rusticani homines, cum Latine vulgo loquerentur, Graecum idioma ut litteratum auribusque alienum, quod non a nutrice sed a doctoribus cum labore peteretur, suspicere admirarique solebant, ut nunc huiusmodi litterarum ignari ceteros Latina eleganti lingua loquentes, dum nihil fere intellegant, penitus admirantur.”<sup>118</sup>

[“For certainly before others the cause [of people writing in the vernacular rather than Latin] is in view. For that language must become an object of study—although today it is a popular and vernacular language, yet when it has received dignity from a uniform rule for the precepts of its grammar, it may perhaps be considered nobler than Latin itself by posterity. For we surely do not deny that it existed as a mother tongue and a domestic language in antiquity. Accordingly uneducated people or rustic men, since they spoke Latin in the common herd, were accustomed to look up to and admire a Greek saying as something literary and foreign to their ears, because it was not sought from a nurse but from teachers with labour, just as nowadays those ignorant of this kind of literature inwardly admire others speaking in elegant Latin, though they understand almost nothing.”]

Here, Giovio goes beyond the comparison in Bembo, itself taken from Landino; while for Bembo, it was simply a case that the Greek language was more respected, for Giovio the ability to speak Greek would be considered a source of wonder and admiration. Equally, the relative paucity of people in Renaissance Italian society capable of speaking good Latin is demonstrated by the uncomprehending admiration of ordinary people who appreciate the effort that has been expended in the acquisition of such language skills.

That there was a social issue in Giovio’s day of educated people displaying their knowledge of ancient languages publicly despite the near-total lack of understanding amongst their audience appears to be indicated by a comment made earlier in the text on the learning of the Greek language. If, in the model where Greek gives way to Latin and Latin gives way to the vernacular, Greek is two steps removed from the experience of the ordinary people in Cinquecento Italy, its use outside of university and other scholarly contexts would be little

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<sup>117</sup> Following the distinction made by Curtis-Wendlandt in her article on Tullia d’Aragona’s *Dialogo della infinità d’Amore* between ‘Tullia’ (the character in the dialogue) and ‘d’Aragona’ (the author of the dialogue), I will refer to the author of the dialogue as ‘Giovio’ and the character in the dialogue by the Latin form, ‘Iovius’. For more information, please see: Lisa Curtis-Wendlandt, ‘Conversing on Love: Text and Subtext in Tullia d’Aragona’s *Dialogo Della Infinità d’Amore*’, *Hypatia*, 19.4 (2004), 77–98.

<sup>118</sup> Giovio. 250.

more than mere noise. Thus, in this Latin conversation, Musetius expresses amusement at the attitude of those who learn Greek and speaks of them as follows:

“Plerique adeo ambitiose Graecas litteras et, cum paullo fervidius ebullit ingenium, etiam Hebraicas amplectuntur ut Latinas plane deserant atque despiciant, quoniam gloriosius putent ignota lingua in coronis publice loqui quam si communi concinne et eleganter utantur et scribant. Ego enim Graeca... quatenus et lucem et ornamenta Latinis afferent studiis sedulo perdiscenda arbitror, non ut ab his peculiarem laudem ubique Graecissantes tamquam Athenis nati petere videamur.”<sup>119</sup>

[“The majority embrace Greek literature so ostentatiously, and, when their intellect bubbles up a little hotter, Hebrew, that they completely abandon Latin and look down on it, seeing that they think it is more prestigious to speak in public in an unknown language than if they used and wrote in a common language precisely and elegantly. For I think... that Greek matters should be taught carefully as far as they bring light and adornment to Latin studies, not so that we should seem to seek special praise from them, Hellenising everywhere as if we were born in Athens”]

Aside from the obvious absurdity of their point of view, this passage is interesting to the discussion of how the *questione della lingua* was expressed in literary dialogues from Cinquecento Italy for how it related to points of view of authors we have previously encountered: namely, Landino and Castiglione. Approaching the question from the vernacular point of view, Landino is famous for observing *è necessario essere Latino chi vuole essere buono Toscano*, (it is necessary to be a Latin writer if you wish to be a good vernacular one),<sup>120</sup> which, while not explicitly stating that this is the sole purpose of learning Latin, nonetheless gives it an instrumental purpose that is not entirely unfamiliar in the twenty-first century. Similarly, Musetius in Giovio’s dialogue expresses the point of view that Greek is beneficial inasmuch as it benefits an individual’s study of Latin rather than being a subject of study in its own right; it may add a little polish, *lucem et ornamenta*, but should not become a source of excessive pride, *gloriosius*, or a means of seeking extraordinary praise, *peculiarem laudem*.

Equally, it recalls the criticism in Castiglione, both in his own voice and in that of Canossa, in which he states that an attempt to feign an Athenian manner of speech was a cause of reproach and ultimately futile, since even a simple old woman, *una semplice vecchiarella*, could see through the pretence.

Nonetheless, it must also be noted that this is a reflection of an élite point of view for the reason that it considers Latin a common language, *communi*, that speakers can reasonably assume that their speakers know. Admittedly, this is perhaps an understandable point of view given the circumstances of the text’s production: it was written by a sixteenth century Catholic clergyman to be dedicated to another clergyman at a time when the language of

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<sup>119</sup> Giovio. 242,244.

<sup>120</sup> Giannantonio. 174.

church administration, such as papal briefs, was Latin. In addition to this, the conversation is recorded in, and therefore can reasonably be assumed to have taken place in, Latin, perhaps because the regional vernaculars that were the first language of the three speakers were not entirely mutually intelligible. In Giovio's social milieu, therefore, Latin may well have been viewed as a common language, but as observed earlier, to the majority of uneducated people, a speech given in Latin would have been scarcely more intelligible than the Greek that Musetius derides.

Yet even the elite must acknowledge that the tide is turning, as Musetius later explains with a grim prediction for the future of Latin studies:

*"Nec dubitandum est quin Etruscae litterae paucis temporum curriculis omnino Latinis in commune mortalium usum sint successurae, quando iam Latina in ore nobilium sensim obsolescabit et neglecta etiam intereant, sic ut Latine eruditi in ea aliquando sint futuri existimatione qua nunc sunt qui Graece sciunt et pretio Homerum et Lucianum curiosis et studiosioribus adolescentulis interpretantur."*<sup>121</sup>

[*"Nor should we doubt that in a short stretch of time, Tuscan literature will entirely supplant Latin literature in the common use of humans when already Latin is gradually fading away on the lips of nobles and even, neglected, ceasing entirely, so those erudite in Latin will eventually be considered in future reckoning as those are who know Greek nowadays and teach Homer and Lucian to curious and particularly keen students for a fee."*]

For a Latin speaker to admit in a Latin dialogue that Latin is a dying medium, soon to be relegated from language of culture to historic, fringe subject, is strangely poignant. While Giovio through Musetius is a little more positive about the role of Latin than Bembo, who stated bluntly that the vernacular has entirely replaced Latin, the gerundive construction foregrounds the inevitability of the relegation of classical languages. It is also interesting here that we see an inversion of the familiar comparison between the status of the different languages; whilst previously, the comparison in Italian has focused on the increasing power and status on the emerging language, in Latin here, the emphasis is on the gradual loss of prestige of the older language.

Later, though, Musetius makes the decline of Latin appear rather more immediate:

*"sunt enim et gratae senibus et suaves et commodae iuventuti et feminarum ingeniis optabiles et periucundae, ita ut quisque vel egregie Graecis et Latinis excultus litteris ab omnibus contemnatur velut insulsus, agrestis, ab humanitate penitus alienus et, quod turpissimum est, in hac civili luce excludatur etiam ab his vestris elegantissimorum hominum et feminarum coronis, nisi Etruscae linguae leporem et suavitatem omnino degustarit."*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Giovio. 250.252.

<sup>122</sup> Giovio. 258.

[“For it [Tuscan literature] is pleasing to the old and gratifying and convenient to the youth and desirable and very agreeable to the talents of women, so that anyone who is highly educated in Latin and Greek letters is despised by everyone as stupid, a country bumpkin, entirely out of touch with culture and, which is most shameful, excluded in this civil life from your circles of the most elegant men and women, unless he has fully tasted the pleasantness and sweetness of the Tuscan language.”]

Reading this, the lack of respect for expertise that Musetius resents appears strikingly modern; it may be relevant at this point to comment that in the 2016 UK referendum on membership of the European Union, a prominent politician infamously declared that the British people “have had enough of experts”.<sup>123</sup> In just the same way, Musetius laments that in sixteenth-century Italy, a classical education is not a sign of sophistication, as one might expect, but the reverse. The words *insulsus*, *agrestis* are thereby turned against those people who might be expected to use them by those one might assume such insults would conventionally refer to.

Nor does the parallel with twenty-first century Western society stop there; while it is probable that the social exclusion, *excludatur*, and stigma, *contemnatur*, he associated with being highly skilled in Latin and Greek is entirely in his head, given his earlier remarks about ordinary people being impressed by Latin, it is also difficult not to see in it a reflection of his own cultural anxiety. In the wake of the #metoo scandal, it is difficult not to see in the increasingly hysterical suggestions of how men should now behave to protect themselves from false allegations, such as recording consent videos,<sup>124</sup> at best a sign of their confusion and uncertainty over the change in societal mores and at worst, an attempt to ridicule and discredit those calling for change. In the same way, it appears plausible that the way that Musetius speaks about the insults and exclusion levelled at the classically educated is not necessarily based in historical reality but in his own insecurity over a loss of privilege and constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum*. In particular, the use of *vestris* is noteworthy here; it is certainly possible that he is specifically addressing Davalus at this point, whose family own the fortress at Ischia, and therefore referencing the culture of the island. Vittoria Colonna, Davalus’ aunt, was renowned for her literary talent but her poetry was written in the vernacular; the uneasy relationship between the hyperbolic praise bestowed on her in book 3 of the dialogue, praise using terms associated with the Latin language, and the criticisms of the vernacular in book 2 is explored in detail by Goethals.<sup>125</sup> It is thus tempting to speculate that vernacular literary culture was a frequent subject of discussion amongst the group at Ischia, leading to a sense of marginalisation on the part of Musetius and other classically-educated guests.

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<sup>123</sup> rpmackey, *Gove: Britons ‘Have Had Enough of Experts’*

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgiGtJk7MA>> [accessed 17 December 2018].

<sup>124</sup> ‘Should Men Record “consent Videos” before Sex?’, *Evening Standard*, 2018

<<https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/consent-videos-the-new-rules-of-engagement-a3968086.html>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>125</sup> Jessica Goethals, ‘The Flowers of Italian Literature: Language, Imitation and Language Debates in Paolo Gioivo’s *de Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*’, *Renaissance Studies*, 29.5 (2015), 749–71.

This section has focused on Giovio's attitude towards Bembo, his *Prose* and the *questione della lingua*; it is very much a series of negations. He has praise for Bembo, but it is not unqualified; the vernacular is easy and more natural to write in, but that also makes it easier for unscrupulous writers to pass off the work of others as their own; the familiar comparisons with Greek appear, but the focus is very much on the old language's loss of prestige and speakers rather than the rise of a new language and its literature. The view of the vernacular is thus highly ambivalent, an interesting counterpoint to the views expressed in the other two dialogues by Bembo and Castiglione.

#### The Choice of Dialogue for the *Prose*

In the next section, we will return to the *Prose* to consider not *what* Bembo says in support of his vernacular, but *how* he exploits the possibilities of the dialogue form to do this. We have seen earlier that in his preface to the first book of the *Prose*, Bembo wrote that writing was nothing other than more thought-out speech,<sup>126</sup> introducing the form as well as the subject-matter of his discussion of the *questione della lingua*. His attempt to draw a link between writing and speech also reflects Burke's observation of the centrality of oral culture in the early modern era, for which he cites the space devoted to speech in Castiglione and Della Casa as well as the vernacular's rich vocabulary to describe speaking and speech acts.<sup>127</sup>

However, as scholars such as Sanson have noted,<sup>128</sup> the *questione della lingua* was not particularly focused on the spoken language but rather on a literary, written vernacular. This is certainly the preoccupation of Bembo in writing the *Prose*, as he makes Carlo explain:

“La lingua delle scritture, Giuliano, non dee a quella del popolo accostarsi, se non in quanto, accostandovisi, non perde gravità, non perde grandezza; che altramente ella discostare se ne dee e dilungare, quanto le basta a mantenersi in vago e in gentile stato.”<sup>129</sup>

[“The language of literature, Giuliano, must not approach that of the people, except inasmuch as, approaching it, it doesn't lose its decorum, it doesn't lose its nobility; otherwise, it must distance itself from it as much as it needs to in order to maintain its delicate and refined state.”]

There is something at once both apt and ironic in Bembo's using a literary genre purporting to be a representation of an oral exchange to divorce the written language he espouses from the oral form by which it is justified. It is apt because, just as the written idealised version of the discussion that may or may not have taken place in 1503 can be seen as having more authority than the original and in some way superseding it, so in Bembo's system the norms of the spoken language are subordinate to those of literature; it is ironic

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<sup>126</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 81-2.

<sup>128</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 38.

because the dialogue form makes it less clear to the casual reader that in fact he is contradicting his earlier arguments in favour of the vernacular over Latin.

When trying to convince Ercole Strozzi of the benefits of writing in the vernacular, the characters of Carlo Bembo and Giuliano ‘il Magnifico’ de’ Medici use arguments that stress the naturalness and domesticity of the language: it is referred to as native, natural and domestic “*l’una propria e naturale e domestica, che è la volgare*,”<sup>130</sup> and a language imbibed by children in infancy “*insieme col latte delle nutrici*”.<sup>131</sup> Returning briefly to the comparison with breastfeeding, the image is powerful and emphasises the emotional closeness and immediacy of the first familial and linguistic ties to society. However, by distancing the literary language from the spoken language, Bembo seems to be advocating feeding young readers the literary equivalent of formula milk – something that, while perfectly adequate for the needs of communication (or child development), lacks that primal connection with the mother.

In fact, the situation that Bembo advocates with his distinction between speech and writing more closely resembles the literary system already in place in Italy at this time, a situation of diglossia in the Fergusonian sense of the term:

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language... there is a very divergent, highly codified...superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, ... which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.<sup>132</sup>

While the discussion in the *Prose* makes clear that Italian and Latin were considered separate languages at this time, later scholars such as Wexler and Snow explicitly give the development of Romance forms in early modern Europe as an example of this phenomenon and a parallel with the linguistic status of Arabic from the 1970s on.<sup>133</sup>

In particular, Snow’s more recent and more nuanced view of Ferguson’s definition of diglossia merits some consideration in discussions of this subject. In his 2013 article, he divides the languages discussed by Ferguson into three distinct types of diglossia: traditional, revived and modern.<sup>134</sup> In the traditional category, originating in pre-modern societies where only a small, elite group is literate, the prestige of the ‘higher’ variety is derived from the fact that not everyone can use it,<sup>135</sup> as he explains in more detail:

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<sup>130</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 9.

<sup>131</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 8.

<sup>132</sup> Charles A. Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’, *Words*, 15.2, 325–40.336. Quoted in Paul Wexler, ‘Diglossia, Language Standardisation and Purism: Parameters for a Typology of Literary Languages’, *Lingua*, 27.1 (1971), 330–54. 331.

<sup>133</sup> Wexler. 345.

Don Snow, ‘Revisiting Ferguson’s Defining Cases of Diglossia’, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34.1 (2013), 61–76. 62.

<sup>134</sup> Snow. 62.

<sup>135</sup> Snow. 63.



In pre-modern societies, generally only a small elite group had adequate free time and resources to become literate, not least because of the special challenges posed by learning an H variety quite different from the L variety users already knew.<sup>136</sup>

While this is certainly the description of the situation with Latin and Italian at the time Bembo was writing, it can also accurately describe the way that Bembo's archaising Tuscan would relate to the local and regional vernacular languages of Italy: as Sanson notes, it would have been considered a foreign language to the majority of speakers across the peninsula with the relative exceptions of Tuscans and (to a lesser extent) those from Rome.<sup>137</sup> Bembo's vernacular, far from replacing the system where anything written or spoken formally was in a language inaccessible to the majority, in reality replaced Latin with a language only slightly less artificial.

A consummate scholar himself, Bembo did of course provide justification for his choice of Trecento Tuscan as his preferred solution to the *questione della lingua*. These he again places into the mouth of Carlo, his brother:

“Il che avviene per ciò che appunto non debbano gli scrittori por cura di piacere alle genti solamente, che sono in vita quando essi scrivono... ma a quelle ancora, e per avventura molto più, che sono a vivere dopo loro: con ciò sia cosa che ciascuno la eternità alle sue fatiche più ama, che un breve tempo. E per ciò che non si può per noi compiutamente sapere quale abbia ad essere l'usanza delle favelle di quegli uomini, che nel secolo nasceranno che appresso il nostro verrà, e molto meno di quegli altri, i quali appresso noi alquanti secoli nasceranno, è da vedere che alle nostre composizioni tale forme e tale stato si dia, che elle piacer possano in ciascuna età, e ad ogni secolo, ad ogni stagione esser care; si come diedero nella latina lingua a' loro componimenti Virgilio, Cicerone e degli altri, e nella greca Omero, Demostene e di molt'altri agli loro; i quali tutti, non mica secondo il parlare, che era in uso e in bocca del volgo della loro età, scriveano, ma secondo che pareva loro che bene lor mettesse a poter piacere più lungamente.”<sup>138</sup>

[“This is why writers must not only pay attention to pleasing to those people who are alive when they are writing... but also perhaps much more to those who will live after them given that everyone would prefer eternity for his labours rather than a short time.<sup>139</sup> And since we cannot know entirely the linguistic usage of those men who will be born in the century that follows ours and even less of those others, who will be born some centuries after us, we must ensure

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<sup>136</sup> Snow. 64.

<sup>137</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 10.

<sup>138</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 38.

<sup>139</sup> From a twenty-first century feminist perspective, the use of singular 'they' appears by far preferable to the masculine; however, I have aimed while translating to convey the sentiments of the original as accurately as I can convey them. Since, agreeing with Sanson, I will argue that Bembo's *Prose* is a work written by an élite man for other élite men, the masculine appeared closer to the attitude I discerned on reading the text.

that our compositions are in such a form and such a state that they are able to give pleasure in any age and to be dear in every century, every season. Virgil, Cicero and the others composed in the Latin language in the same way, and Homer, Demosthenes and many other writers in Greek – they all wrote not according to the speech which was in use and on the lips of the common herd of their age but according to what seemed to them sufficiently well-phrased to be able to give pleasure for much longer.”]

In short, his justification for choosing a Trecento Tuscan as his ideal literary language is to make texts accessible to future readers, with the implication that the language of the *tre corone*, able to be understood two centuries later, should still be intelligible for centuries to come, while using trendy buzzwords from the popular language would quickly pass into disuse and incomprehensibility.

He also again refers to the precedents of classical authors to lend their authoritative voices to his argument with perhaps more enthusiasm than truth: Shipp writes that the language of Homer is full of rare, late neologisms in similes whilst archaisms are very few in number and mostly uncertain;<sup>140</sup> in the same way, Lyne’s book on Virgilian style argues that Virgil ‘exploits’ and ‘extorts’ meaning created by the use of poetic diction, which then legitimises the use of ‘unpoetical’ lexis in serious literature.<sup>141</sup> The possibility that these writers were in fact more innovative than Bembo suggests was not unknown in the sixteenth century: in the previous century, Landino, whose work influenced Bembo, had argued the following in his *Orazione per Francesco Petrarca*:

[on Cicero] Da costui fu tanto la Romana eloquenzia sormontata che, chi una delle sue orazioni con una del primo Catone equiparasse, senza fallo stupirebbe et vedendolo nol crederebbe esser possibile; che *da* tante angustie e sì stretti termini, a sì ampi e spaziosi campi la latina fosse venuta. Ma a che proposita direbbe alcuno tante cose de’ Greci e de’ Latini ricanti? Acciò che voi intendiate, il nostro patrio sermone non avere avuto più debile principio che gli altri, e per niente altro essere rimasto indietro se non per carestia di dotti scrittori.<sup>142</sup>

[By this man Roman eloquence was so far surpassed that anyone who compared one of his speeches with one written by the first Cato would certainly be amazed and, seeing it, would not believe that it was possible – that from such narrow and restricted beginnings Latin had reached such wide and spacious fields. But why, you repeat, would someone say so many things about the Greeks and Romans? So that you would understand that our native language has not had a weaker start than others and it has been by no means held back except by lack of cultured writers.]

<sup>140</sup> G. P. Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). 3.

<sup>141</sup> R.O.A.M Lyne, *Words and the Poet: Characteristic Techniques of Style in Vergil’s Aeneid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989). 14.

<sup>142</sup> Giannantonio. 170-1.

From this passage in the speech that became viewed as an assertion of the rights of the vernacular,<sup>143</sup> it is clear that according to Landino, Cicero was innovative in developing Latin literature beyond the limits set down by previous prose writers, exemplified by Cato the Elder. Though he does not explicitly mention how close or otherwise the language that Cicero used was to speech, the contrast between the narrow and restrained beginnings of Latin prose and the broad and spacious results of Cicero's language suggests a freedom and fluency consistent with a more natural approach to language.

In the same way, in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, which was in circulation at the time the *Prose* was printed and includes some of the same speakers, Castiglione has Count Canossa remark:

“Cosí successivamente gli oratori e i poeti andarono lassando molte parole usate dai loro antecessori: ché Antonio, Crasso, Ortensio, Cicerone fuggivano molte di quelle di Catone e Virgilio molte d'Ennio; e cosí fecero gli altri; che, ancor che avessero riverenza all'antiquità, non la estimavan però tanto, che volessero averle quella obligazion che voi volete che ora le abbiam noi; anzi, dove lor pareva, la biasmavano... Cicerone in molti lochi riprende molti suoi antecessori; e per biasmare Sergio Galba affera che le orazioni sue aveano dell'antico: e dice che Ennio ancor sprezzò in alcune cose i suoi antecessori, di modo che, se noi vorremo imitar gli antichi, non gli imiteremo.”<sup>144</sup>

[“Therefore, the orators and the poets gradually moved on, leaving behind many words used by their predecessors with the result that Antonius, Crassus, Hortensius, Cicero rejected many of those used by Cato, and Virgil [rejected] many used by Ennius. The others did the same since, even though they revered antiquity, they did not think of it so highly that they wanted to have that obligation towards it that you would have us have towards it now; in fact, where they perceived that attitude, they criticised it... Cicero in many places censures his predecessors greatly; to criticise Sergius Galba he affirms that his orations sound too old-fashioned and he says that Ennius too rejected some aspects of his predecessors. In this way, if we want to imitate the ancients, we do not imitate them.”]

Once again, we see the notion that Cicero had developed and improved upon the earlier language of Cato the Elder and rejected excessively archaic tendencies in his writing, an argument which sits oddly with Bembo's use of the ancients to justify using the language of Florence two hundred years previously. While there is some merit in the idea of trying to ensure that writing does not appear embarrassingly dated and, in places, incomprehensible to later readers, Bembo's attempts to use Cicero and other classical writers as precedents for using archaic, Trecento, words rather than more contemporary, Cinquecento, vocabulary are unconvincing.

In addition to contradicting his earlier arguments that people should write in the vernacular rather than Latin because it is a natural language for Italians to write in, Bembo's stance in

<sup>143</sup> Santoro. 570.

<sup>144</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 55.

distancing written language from speech also challenges the perspective he puts forward in his *Carmen XVII (ad Sempronium)* in which he stressed the importance of the vernacular for communicating with female relatives. The language is called the '*materna...voce*', linked in with the idea of learning the language naturally from a mother while breastfeeding expressed in the dialogue. Similarly, he writes later in the poem:

Nam pol qua proavusque avusque lingua  
sunt olim meus et tuus loquuti,  
nostrae quaque loquuntur et sorores  
et matertera nunc et ipsa mater,  
nos nescire loqui magis pudendum est.<sup>145</sup>

[For by Pollux it is more shameful that we do not know how to speak in the language which our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, yours and mine, once spoke and which our sisters and aunt and even our mother now speak.]

Here, we see that the vernacular is equated with the spoken language, spoken by both male relatives in the past and female relatives who are still alive. This language would have been the local or regional dialect rather than Trecento Tuscan; Burke observes that it is reasonable to presume that most women were only fluent in their local dialect.<sup>146</sup>

This is due to the limitations frequently placed on female education; from the age of about seven, called *pueritia*,<sup>147</sup> the gendered expectations of education became apparent along with its different purposes: boys were to become courageous, active and virtuous male citizens whereas girls were brought up to be chaste, silent and obedient women, wives and mothers.<sup>148</sup> These different purposes were both a cause and consequence of greater social restrictions on how girls could access education: for reasons of propriety, girls were usually educated within the home and although richer families might employ a private tutor to teach their daughters, this was expensive and not without risk to their honour and reputation.<sup>149</sup>

What girls could learn and read was similarly limited : they were rarely educated in the classical languages,<sup>150</sup> and other aspects of the *studia humanitatis* were considered by notable thinkers as pointless for them since their gender meant that they would never use their knowledge in a practical setting.<sup>151</sup> Bembo's attitude of turning the vernacular into 'in a sense, a new Latin'<sup>152</sup> with fixed, fossilised rules that must be learned as, effectively, a

<sup>145</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 64.

<sup>146</sup> Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*. 85.

<sup>147</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 26.

<sup>148</sup> Joan Gibson, 'Educating for Silence: Renaissance Women and the Language Arts', *Hypatia*, 4.1 (1989), 9–27. 10.

<sup>149</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 27,28.

<sup>150</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Gibson. 12-13.

<sup>152</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 10.

foreign language, put up the familiar barriers and prejudices against female participation in this new literary vernacular.

It therefore appears the case that in the *Prose*, Bembo is prioritising *gravitas*, prestige and the needs of hypothetical future male readers over accessibility and the needs of very real contemporary female readers. Sanson remarks that the text was intended for an elite male readership,<sup>153</sup> which perhaps explains in part the use of a prestigious, classically-derived genre, but it is not clear whether the exclusion of women was intentional or merely an oversight; it seems entirely plausible that Bembo was at least to some extent unaware of the social privilege that he possessed. After all, how many people would have had the opportunity to travel to Sicily for two years to learn Greek, only to conclude that people only wrote Greek for fun? (*“non perché pensiamo di scrivere e comporre grecamente, che niuno è a questo fare ponga opera, se non per gioco.”*)<sup>154</sup> There are also no female speakers in the dialogue who might point out that insisting on an archaising model of the vernacular would make it much more difficult for them to learn the vernacular sufficiently well to be able to write it - although in reality, decorum would have silenced them if they had been written in.

In the same speech in which he argues that Ciceronian and Virgilian Latin was superior to the Latin that came before and after them, Carlo adds:

“quale ora latinamente scrive, a’ morti si debba dire che egli scriva più che a vivi, per ciò che gli uomini, de’ quali ella era lingua, ora non vivono, anzi sono già molti secoli stati per lo adietro.”<sup>155</sup>

[“whoever now writes in Latin must be said to be writing more to the dead than to the living, since those men to whom it was a native language are no longer alive, and have actually been that way for many centuries now”]

The image of writing to the dead would have particularly struck contemporary readers who had been educated in the humanist tradition fixated on the ‘unbroken vital continuity of Latin’,<sup>156</sup> but it must be noted that the literary vernacular he proposed was also not a living contemporary language. In a sense, therefore, his alternative to writing to long dead people is actually writing to slightly less long dead people.

This speech of Carlo’s continues, uninterrupted, for over two pages before the dialogue is concluded by the other three speakers. Fregoso cannot think of an argument against what he has said *“forse per ciò che aggiungere non si può sopra ‘l vero”* (“perhaps because you cannot add to the truth”); the Florentine Giuliano does not mind whether modern or archaising Tuscan is used because *“l’onore in ogni modo ne va alla patria mia”* (“either way, the honour goes to my homeland”) and Strozzi admits himself convinced:

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<sup>153</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 87.

<sup>154</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 13.

<sup>155</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 42.

<sup>156</sup> Grayson. 10.

“Lo avermi voi tutti oggi fatto chiaro d’alquante cose sopra la volgar lingua, delle quali io niuna contezza avea, m’ha posto in disio di dimandarvi d’alquante altre, e fareilo volentieri se l’ora non fosse tarda.”<sup>157</sup>

[“Today you have all made clear to me several things about the vernacular language which I had no idea about – you have made me want to ask you about several more and I would do so gladly if the hour were not so late.”]

There is therefore no contradiction: Carlo’s ideal of an archaising model for language is accepted as right by all and the discussion moves on to setting the scene for the next day’s conversation. Showing that a speaker as formerly hostile to the vernacular as Strozzi has been persuaded guides the reader as to the attitude they should hold after reading the text, a key advantage of the dialogue genre over the treatise. The dialogue form also allows Bembo to pass over the fact that issues of accessibility and the conflict between his attitude in his poem and different parts of the *Prose* have not been resolved.

#### Conclusion

In this chapter, one aim was to assess the discussion of the *questione della lingua* in Bembo’s *Prose* and its impact on two roughly contemporary dialogues: Castiglione’s *Cortegiano* and Giovio’s *De Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*. There are common elements to the different discussions of language, such as the parallel with the dialects of Ancient Greece, found in both Bembo and Castiglione, and the comparison between Neo-Latin and Italian and Classical Latin and Greek, found in Bembo and Giovio. However, these shared concepts are polyvalent and can be deployed in different ways for different ends, like Lego bricks that can become first a house, then a rocket, then a mountain.

For Bembo, archaising Tuscan is the solution to the *questione della lingua*; the Romans wrote in their own language rather than the more prestigious Greek because it was natural to them, yet those who wrote after Cicero and Virgil would have written better had they adhered to Augustan linguistic norms since that was the pinnacle of Latin excellence. The parallel between the linguistic diversity of the Italian peninsula and the islands in the sixteenth century and the Greek dialects is a false one, he argues, since the Greek dialects were four distinct entities that could be easily maintained, while the sheer number of Italian vernaculars makes establishing a universal koiné impossible. Castiglione’s dialogue, which must to some extent respond to Bembo’s, instead argues that attempting to imitate a more prestigious linguistic variety is both pretentious and ultimately futile, since even the uneducated can perceive that this is not a native language, using the example of the Greek dialects to instead support the notion of the *cortigiana lingua*.

Then, Giovio’s Latin dialogue, uses the comparison between the relative statuses of Neo-Latin and the vernacular and Classical Latin and Greek in antiquity to focus on the decline of Latin in his own period. While Giovio praises Bembo for his work in writing the *Prose* and imposing grammatical rules of, comparing him to Aristarchus and Priscian and prophesying eternal fame, through the character of Musetius the dialogue’s attitude towards the

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<sup>157</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 42.

vernacular is revealed to be ambivalent: despite the guarantee of his reputation from his Italian work, Bembo would do better to write Latin dialogues.

Running in parallel with the discussion of the arguments in the *Prose*, the second aim of this chapter was to examine how the work exploits the possibilities of the dialogue form to support his argument. Ercole Strozzi, the Latin poet, plays a crucial structural role in the dialogue because his objections to the vernacular in favour of Latin function as statements against which Bembo's other characters can define their own views. Following Cox, he can be considered a stand-in for the uneducated reader - but the dialogue of persuasion could also make him a proxy for the author himself on his journey from expert Latinist to Italian grammarian. Moreover, his persuasion and the assent of the other speakers conceals the crucial flaw in Bembo's argument: if it is necessary to write in the vernacular rather than Latin because the vernacular is natural whereas Latin is not, choosing a vernacular to be the standard that was in use two hundred years previously and is nobody's first language undermines the case that he has just painstakingly made. Through the dialogue form, however, the change in direction of the conversation and the agreement of the speakers that they are convinced is enough to divert the reader from the lapse in logic and enable them to be carried away by the flow of argumentation into accepting archaising Tuscan as the only solution to the *questione della lingua*.

## Chapter Three: Self-Presentation

I stared at my reflection and grimaced. It was June 2016 and, with the end of my MA rapidly approaching, I had applied for a job teaching Latin at a prestigious boarding school on the South coast. Now, in my hotel room, I could almost see the word “imposter” flashing in neon letters over my head.

I glanced over at my notes on the dresser. My lesson plan was in order, and I had researched the school thoroughly, as the brightly coloured spider diagrams attested. Nonetheless, considering my blue blouse and linen skirt – both still a little crumpled from the journey despite my attempts to iron the creases out – it struck me that I looked uncomfortably like one of the pupils. Maybe I should have bought a suit, one with aggressively angular shoulder pads, or at least a blouse in a colour that couldn't be mistaken for school uniform. But it was too late to do anything about that now.

Would letting my hair down help or would it add an air of eccentricity to the ensemble? Already, wispy tendrils were escaping the many hair grips I had used trying to subdue it into a style that could be interpreted as professional. No, it was better to leave it up and risk overemphasising my youth. I was ready. It was time to go.

The questions troubling me that morning were questions of self-presentation, a phenomenon defined in a recent social psychology article as ‘an attempt to establish a favourable image in the eyes of others’.<sup>1</sup> This makes it effectively a synonym of impression management or ‘the way in which we try to manage others’ perceptions and interpretations of ourself in order that they see us in a positive light’.<sup>2</sup> The favourable image and the perceptions of ourselves that we try to manage are, of course, different in different circumstances: at the job interview, I wanted to be seen as authoritative and professional; on a first date, I would want to seem funny and attractive but not ‘easy’;<sup>3</sup> in my thesis, my aim is to appear a credible academic producing an original contribution to the sum of human knowledge. To accomplish these self-presentation goals, I would therefore adapt my behaviour to what I would feel was most appropriate for the situation and for the impression of myself I wanted to convey to those around me.

Writers in sixteenth-century Italy were no different. The issue of self-presentation (and the highly related concept of self-fashioning) has been present in discussions of Renaissance authors since the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Stephen Greenblatt in his 1980 book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* describes the situation in Italy as follows: ‘in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a

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<sup>1</sup> Ovul Sezer, Francesco Gino, and Michael I. Norton, ‘Humblebragging: A Distinct - and Ineffective - Self-Presentation Strategy’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 114.1 (2018), 52–74. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Attrill, *The Manipulation of Online Self-Presentation: Create, Edit, Re-Edit and Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 7.

<sup>3</sup> This is a matter of personal preference and is not intended to imply moral judgement by me, though I cannot deny that historic double standards relating to gender and promiscuity exist in twenty-first century British culture.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 2.



manipulable, artful process';<sup>5</sup> though, building on the ground-breaking work of Jacob Burckhardt, he also stresses the notion that self-fashioning is enmeshed with the process of being fashioned by external cultural institutions.<sup>6</sup> While he writes about self-fashioning rather than self-presentation, the distinction between the two is almost negligible: I propose that it lies in the explicit intent to display the constructed self to others. In this way, the creation of a private diary can be considered an act of self-fashioning, since in choosing which material to add and how to express the events of the day, the writer is creating a written representation of themselves, but one that it is not intended to be read by anyone else. Self-presentation, on the other hand, requires the active intention to bring this fashioned self into the wider world by, for instance, circulating or publishing literary works to an external audience.

Increased attention paid to the concept of self-presentation by writers in the Renaissance makes self-presentation a particularly fruitful area for discussion when considering the reception of classical dialogues in the Cinquecento. This is for several reasons: firstly, writing in an explicitly classical genre is an act of self-positioning, situating the author in relation to ongoing cultural movements and debates, such as humanism, Ciceronianism and eclecticism.

Moreover, the dialogue genre gives great flexibility to authors in terms of their authorial choices. Unlike other genres, such as letters or treatises, where it is expected that the writer will adopt one position on any given subject, dialogue gives authors the possibility to argue *in utramque partem*, on both sides of the discussion, a technique that was a crucial part of the rhetorical training of all educated men in this period. This therefore means that an author can write about a contentious topic without necessarily committing themselves to a stance that might negatively impact the way they are perceived by readers, which might have real life consequences.

Yet this is not the only way the dialogue genre's flexibility could benefit a Cinquecento writer; it also extends to the way that authors could manipulate the degree of their personal involvement in the text by either presenting themselves as an active participant in the discussion that the literary work relates, a silent member of the audience, or as a mere scribe recording a report of a conversation at which they were not actually present. In fact, even when an author was not present within the conversation described, they could nonetheless make themselves appear closer or more distant from their work by their decision on what level of narrative intervention to include. By way of illustration, while mimetic classical dialogues such as Plato's *Euthyphro*, Lucian's *Timon, or the Misanthrope*, Cicero's *De Legibus* and Plutarch's *Beasts are Rational* give only the words of the participants in the discussion, there is also precedent for diegetic classical dialogues featuring a narrator figure, such as Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Republica*, Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* and Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. Thus, the decision whether or not to include a narrated role and to what extent that narrated role comments on the text is another way in

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<sup>5</sup> Greenblatt. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Greenblatt. 256.

which the author of a dialogue can choose to control their own image, either by making themselves present or by distancing themselves from their literary creation.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to consider the ways in which authors writing in the classically derived dialogue genre used this form to present themselves to best advantage in literate, courtly society. This will include discussion of how authors tried to negotiate the act of print publication and assert authorial control, as well as specific authorial choices that had great impact on how dialogues were read and by whom. As self-presentation is a highly interdisciplinary topic, in addition to the literary criticism and cultural history already established from the influence of Greenblatt and Burkhardt, concepts and terms from social psychology will be used to explore the dialogues in greater depth. This will include concepts from recent research on self-presentation strategies on social media; while modern technology has created another stage on which individuals can perform their self-fashioned identities, the desire to create these images and the techniques that can accomplish particular roles are broadly the same five centuries on.

The main case study for the chapter will be a comparison between the strategies used by Pietro Bembo in his 1496 Latin dialogue, *De Aetna*, and his later, vernacular dialogue *Le Prose della Volgar Lingua* (1525), as choosing two dialogues by the same author will enable change in strategies over time to be considered. However, the chapter will also analyse key passages from Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), arguably the most well-known and influential Italian dialogue of the sixteenth century, and the paratexts to Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore* (1547) to inform the discussion and provide relevant parallels.

Publication and Authorial Control: Cicero, Quintilian, Castiglione

Let us consider first of all the related issues of publication and authorial control.

Commenting on Cicero's extant judicial speeches and in particular on Kurczyk's observation that the goals of Cicero's self-fashioning and the needs of his clients diverge after his year as consul, Craig argues that the fact that Cicero's speeches were published shows that he must have had a self-fashioning intention.<sup>7</sup> I contend, however, that he is actually referring to self-presentation, since self-fashioning does not inevitably rely on an external audience, which appears to be central to Craig's point.

Leaving aside the issue of the dispute in terminology, his view also appears overly simplistic and does not allow for the possibility that the author may not have full control over when, how and in what form a text enters into circulation, a fact that can be demonstrated even from Cicero's own life. Rice Henderson notes that towards the end of his life, Cicero approved the compilation of a small permanent collection of his letters, which was to be corrected before publication, but after his death, his literary executors published a larger

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher P. Craig, 'Rhetorical Expectations and Self-Fashioning in Cicero's Speech for P. Sulla', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 32.3 (2014), 211–21. 221.

number of letters than he intended.<sup>8</sup> We can certainly assume that if a writer takes steps to publish their own work under their own name, they have some desire to present themselves to the reading public but it is not always possible to identify to what extent they are in control of the process; it is therefore difficult to justify a statement that the act of publication is in itself an act of self-fashioning or self-presentation.

Relevant to the discussion here is Rabinowitz's distinction between the actual audience and the authorial audience.<sup>9</sup> Within this intellectual framework, the intended recipient of a letter, as in the earlier example of Cicero's letters, is both actual audience and authorial audience, since they are a real, historical person but the author is nonetheless obliged to presuppose their views. To be sure, it is certainly easier to presuppose the views of a known individual and to assume that their opinion has not changed since the last time a given topic was discussed, but there is always some guesswork involved as it is impossible to fully know another human being's mind. Thus, there is still an element of uncertainty and the potential for an author to misread the situation and assume, incorrectly, that the reader will interpret the letter in the way its author intended.

Writing to an unspecified reading public, the authorial audience, is in a sense riskier than writing to an individual because more needs to be assumed on a less secure foundation. For this reason, the desire to correct and amend the letters before they were published is understandable: Cicero felt this process was required to make his collection more suitable for a faceless, general and diverse audience. Of course, this too is a simplification; we must remember that letters were not necessarily perceived as private in the same way that they are today in either antiquity or the early modern period; in fact, during the early modern period, a new literary work would frequently be sent to one person with the unspoken intention that they would give it to someone else, ideally the work's intended recipient.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore perhaps more accurate to talk not of self-presentation but of self-presentations, in order to reflect the way that writers present themselves in different ways to different audiences using different self-fashioned images.

Of course, we must note here that the example of Cicero's letters pertains to a different genre than the one under discussion in this thesis, yet this does not prevent the issues raised within being relevant to literary dialogues, particularly given that Cicero is known to have written both genres, the link drawn by Poliziano between letters and dialogues,<sup>11</sup> and the fact that both were favoured genres of humanists. Indeed, to demonstrate how these questions of publication and authorial control are still applicable in a sixteenth dialogic context, let us now consider what is often regarded as the most influential Cinquecento dialogue of them all, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.

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<sup>8</sup> Judith Rice Henderson, 'Humanist Letter Writing : Private Conversation or Public Forum', in *Self-Presentation and Social Identification: The Rhetoric and Pragmatics of Letter Writing in Early Modern Times*, ed. by Toon Van Houdt and others (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), pp. 17–38. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987). 20.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Nalezyty, *Pietro Bembo and the Intellectual Pleasures of a Renaissance Writer and Art Collector* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017). 62.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Smarr, *Joining the Conversation : Dialogues by Renaissance Women*. 131.

If we are to believe the author's own professions, he did not have any particular intention of publishing the work but felt obligated to do so when the text reached a wider audience than he had initially wished. In the prefatory letter dedicated to Don Michel de Silva, Bishop of Viseu, he explains his decision as follows:

Ritrovandomi adunque in Ispagna ed essendo di Italia avvisato che la agnora Vittoria dalla Colonna ... alla quale io già feci copia del libro, contra la promessa sua ne avea fatto trascrivere una gran parte, non potei non sentirne qualche fastidio, dubitandomi di molti inconvenienti, che in simili casi possono occorrere... In ultimo seppi che quella parte del libro si ritrovava in Napoli in mano di molti; e, come sono gli omini sempre cupidi di novità, pareva che quelli tali tentassero di farla imprimere. Ond'io, spaventato da questo pericolo, diterminai di riveder súbito nel libro quel poco che mi comportava il tempo, con intenzione di publicarlo; estimando men male lasciarlo veder poco castigato per mia mano che molto lacerato per man d'altri.<sup>12</sup>

[Finding myself therefore in Spain and being notified that in Italy, the marchioness Vittoria Colonna..., to whom I had already made a copy of the book, against her word had had a great part of it transcribed, I could not help feeling some irritation, suspecting many inconveniences which can happen in similar cases... Ultimately, I learned that that part of the book had wound up in Naples in the hands of many and, since people are always eager for novelty, it seemed that these individuals would try to get it printed. Consequently I, frightened by this danger, resolved to revise the book immediately in the little time I had with the intention of publishing it, thinking that it was less bad to see it corrected a little [*poco castigato*] at my own hand than greatly wounded [*molto lacerato*] at the hand of others.]

The implications are clear: Castiglione had been let down by the discretion of an influential member of his literary acquaintance, whom he had trusted with a work that was not suitable for wider consumption. Indeed, the anxiety (*spaventato*) and irritation (*fastidio*) that he felt only appeared when he discovered that the work was in the hands of many (*in mano di molti*) and that it might then be published by others in a way that would severely damage it (*molto lacerato per man d'altri*).

The preface therefore conveys the impression that the publication of *Il Cortegiano* was a rushed attempt to control the dissemination of the work, a fact which is stressed by the violent metaphor with which he refers to the revisions he felt it necessary to make before the work was made available to a wider public. *Castigato* is a word that could refer to corporal punishment and, referring to a literary text, denotes correction and emendation; the concept underlying the metaphor is one of inflicting pain on someone, such as a child, in order to improve them and make them a better person. *Lacerato*, on the other hand, represents being torn to pieces, tortured, or mangled: destructive pain that does not benefit the recipient in any way. It is thus apparent that Castiglione felt that revision was necessary

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<sup>12</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 1-2.

to make the work fit for a wider audience and that it was critical to him that these revisions were made by himself in order to produce a definitive, controlled form of the text. Controlling his text was also controlling his self-presentation within it. The fact that the version of *Il Cortegiano* that Castiglione had copied for Vittoria Colonna was suitable for her but not for a wider readership in Neapolitan society demonstrates that the version of himself created by the initial text of *Il Cortegiano* was perceived as similarly inappropriate for wider display. After all, a book was, in this period, perceived as an extension of its author or its publisher,<sup>13</sup> and could perhaps open career or networking doors in a similar way to a LinkedIn profile today.

There is, however, more to be said on the subject of Castiglione's dedicatory letter, as it raises the question of to what extent the author's claims reflect the genuine, historical process of publication and to what extent the preface is also a rhetorical strategy designed to mitigate against the possible negative consequences of being seen to publish. As noted by Burke, the associations of publication with seeking fame and profit meant that some contemporaries felt it was inappropriate for a nobleman to be seen to be connected with print publication, a new form of dissemination of literature that in this period coexisted alongside the more traditional manuscript culture. Given the perceived unseemliness of print, the act of publication became 'a somewhat ambiguous activity for a courtier'.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly so in a work permeated by the concept of *sprezzatura*, defined within the text as a quality that 'hides its art and shows that what is said and done takes place effortlessly and almost without thinking about it' (*che nasconda l'arte e dimostri ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza pensarvi.*):<sup>15</sup> a quality incompatible with overt strategies of self-promotion. There is therefore an additional motive for Castiglione to present the publication of his work as an attempt to prevent it being disseminated by others in a way that would damage it or misrepresent his views.

To shed light on this, let us turn to another classical source which may have provided a precedent or model for Castiglione's self-presentation: Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. Janson's work on prose prefaces observes that the traditional version of this text is preceded by a letter usually referred to as the *Epistula ad Tryphonem* (*Letter to Trypho*), which is then followed by a proem dedicated to Marcus Vitorius Marcellus, creating the effect of a double preface and two possible dedicatees.<sup>16</sup> In assessing the motivation for this unusual authorial decision, Janson suggests that that the *Letter to Trypho* should not be interpreted at face value, instead requiring further interrogation.

Interestingly for our purposes, the letter stresses emphatically that the timing of the publication of the *Institutio Oratoria* was motivated by pressure from Trypho, a bookseller who was effectively functioning as Quintilian's publisher, making frequent demands for the work, (*efflagitasti cotidiano convicio* [you have demanded every day with a reprimand]) and being unwilling to wait for the author to deem the work ready for wider dissemination (*nam ipse eos nondum opinabar satis maturuisse ... sed si tantopere efflagitantur quam tu adfirmas* [for I myself was of the opinion that they were not yet sufficiently mature ... but if

<sup>13</sup> Glomski. 174.

<sup>14</sup> Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. 39-40.

<sup>15</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Tore Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1964). 50.

they are demanded as much as you assert]).<sup>17</sup> Janson's hypothesis, then, is that this letter was included in the final version because it would reflect badly on Quintilian if he, as a professor of oratory, were to produce an unfinished or insufficiently polished work; such a strategy encourages readers to excuse any defects that are present and, where no defects are apparent, makes the author appear humble and encourages the reader to pay close attention to the style in a modest and self-effacing way.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Quintilian includes the letter as a self-presentation strategy to neutralise potential criticism and to enhance his own reputation as someone who produces, even with comparatively little revision, fluent and refined prose. In addition, a related purpose of the inclusion of the letter is that it implies that many wish to examine the text, thereby raising the expectation of the readers by suggesting that the forthcoming work that will follow will be valuable and worth reading.<sup>19</sup>

Janson's argument is convincing, and its basic premises can be applied to Castiglione's text. The pressure imposed by Trypho on Quintilian in his demands for the publication of the allegedly unpolished work corresponds in large measure to the pressure on Castiglione created by Colonna when she made her unauthorised transcription of the work available to many in Naples. Though Trypho's demands affect Quintilian in a more direct and immediate way, there is still in both cases a single individual whose actions and influence are given as a justification for potential infelicities as a consequence of rushed dissemination of the text.

Moreover, in both cases, there is the implication that this individual is in a sense representing the wider demand for the work within literary society, and that their actions are therefore creating and feeding off of the anticipation of potential readers. This is less overt in Quintilian's case, where the passive construction 'if they are demanded as much as you assert' (*si tantopere efflagitantur quam tu adfirmas*)<sup>20</sup> obscures who, precisely, is doing the demanding, but nonetheless intimates that there have been repeated and earnest enquiries about when a definitive text can be expected. More explicitly in Castiglione's introduction, his dismay is that his text is already in the hands of many (*in mano di molti*).<sup>21</sup> The tactile image of being in the hands of these numerous but nameless readers does not appear accidental: it is not just that they have been shown short excerpts in passing or had them read aloud to them while visiting Colonna, but they have taken it away with them to continue to hold. These numerous readers are therefore clearly engaged with the text, and their fascination may well pique the interest of others.

Parenthetically, we may also note that the mention of Colonna in *Il Cortegiano* may itself be an example of self-presentation on Castiglione's part in using the authority of a well-known literary figure to support the work. Granted that evidence from their correspondence indicates that Colonna really was involved in the work reaching a wider audience than was initially intended, with Castiglione noting that his source, a Neapolitan gentleman, had attributed the dissemination to *Vostra Signoria* (Your Ladyship) and claiming to have himself

<sup>17</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, trans. by Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library, 124 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002). 51.

<sup>18</sup> Janson. 51-52.

<sup>19</sup> Janson. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 1.

seen a letter in which she admitted to the theft of his dialogue (*il furto del Cortegiano*),<sup>22</sup> it is nonetheless also the case that Castiglione did not need to specify in his dialogue the individual responsible for the leak. He could have denied all knowledge of who had shown his text to others in Naples, or he could have referred to Colonna using vague terms that would not have identified her except to people who were already aware of at least some of the circumstances surrounding the text's publication. Instead, he chose to use her name in his preface and make her involvement public.

We must not forget that, despite not yet having published any writings, Colonna's reputation as a literary figure was already widespread by the late 1520s, with her first poem lamenting her husband's departure for the battlefields having circulated in manuscript form from as early as 1512;<sup>23</sup> Iovius, in Giovio's Ischian dialogue written only a year after the publication of *Il Cortegiano*, panegyrises her as praised by philosophers, theologians, poets and humanistic scholars for her learning and literary prowess, referring to her vernacular poems as "painted with flowers of more tender eloquence" ("*tenerioris eloquentiae floribus depicta*").<sup>24</sup> If Colonna is known to be discerning producer and judge of literature, an 'avatar of literary taste' as she is described by Diana Robin,<sup>25</sup> then her praise and enthusiasm is worth having; the fact that the work has inspired such intense interest in such a figure as to lead her to break her promise of discretion (*contro la promessa sua*) and to act against her usual reputation of almost divine goodness (*la virtù della quale io sempre ho tenuto in venerazione come cosa divina*, [whose goodness I have always held in veneration as if a divine quality])<sup>26</sup> would appear to indicate that the dialogue that follows is something truly remarkable.

Returning, then, to the comparison between the self-presentation strategies in Castiglione and Quintilian, we must also note the striking coincidence of the double dedications. Like Quintilian, Castiglione also has a dedicatory letter to one recipient, Don Michel de Silva, then a proem dedicated to someone else, namely Alfonso Ariosto. In *Il Cortegiano*, what is particularly striking is that although Ariosto died about two years prior to the publication of the dialogue, references to him persist in all four books;<sup>27</sup> while it would have been possible for them to be removed in the process of revising the text for publication, Castiglione evidently decided against this. Justifying this decision, Saccone posits that Ariosto constituted the reality of the courtier when the text began and Michel de Silva represented the endpoint,<sup>28</sup> which is a persuasive reading, but it is also possible to speculate that there may be an element of using Quintilian as a model in this distinctive double proem. The similarities between *Il Cortegiano* and Cicero's rhetorical treatise *De Oratore* have been

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<sup>22</sup> Vittoria Colonna, *Carteggio*, ed. by Emanno Ferrero, Giuseppe Müller, and Domenico Tordi, Seconda (Torino: Ermanno Loescher, 1892).49.

<sup>23</sup> Diana Robin, 'The Breasts of Vittoria Colonna', *California Italian Studies*, 3.1 (2012), 1–16. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Giovio. 523.

<sup>25</sup> Robin. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Saccone. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Saccone. 9.

noted by scholars including Richards and Leach;<sup>29</sup> it does not therefore appear implausible, given Castiglione's known interest in one Latin text on oratory, that he may have been influenced by another, even though Quintilian did not make use of the dialogue form.

The notion that Quintilian may have been an influence on the double preface to Castiglione is corroborated by the story that Castiglione recounts about Theophrastus in the dedication, which was discussed in the chapter on language. This appears in book 8 of *the Institutio Oratoria* as follows:

illa Attica anus Theophrastum, hominem alioqui disertissimum, adnotata unius adfectatione verbi hospitem dixit, nec alio se id deprendisse interrogata respondit quam quod nimium Attice loqueretur.<sup>30</sup>

[That Attic old woman said that Theophrastus, a man otherwise extremely eloquent, was a foreigner, having noted a peculiarity in a single word, and when asked, replied that she had recognised it by nothing other than that he spoke too good Attic.]

The story is unmistakably the same as the one reported centuries on in *Il Cortegiano*, and in the notes to his translation of the *Institutio Oratoria*, Russell comments that the argument that Theophrastus' Attic was so excessively correct he could not be a native speaker appears unique to Quintilian.<sup>31</sup> While it is certainly possible that Castiglione discovered the story through an intermediary source, the case for Castiglione having some familiarity with Quintilian and wanting to use the *Institutio Oratoria* as a secondary model for his dialogue appears a cogent one.

This is particularly the case as Quintilian was an enormously influential source in the Renaissance, especially after the rediscovery of a complete text by Poggio Bracciolini in 1416.<sup>32</sup> His theories were not without controversy, including a strain of Anti-Quintilianism that can be documented from the early Quattrocento to the end of the Renaissance in Italy,<sup>33</sup> but Monfasani has observed that there were many more editions of Renaissance manuals promoting Quintilian's definition of the goal of rhetoric than even those promoting Cicero's,<sup>34</sup> indicating the enormous influence the classical writer had on generations of Renaissance thinkers. Indeed, the approach to education that the Roman author advised

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<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Richards, 'Assumed Simplicity and the Critique of Nobility: Or, How Castiglione Read Cicero', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54.2 (2001), 460–86. 463.

Eleanor Leach, 'Harry Berger's Sprezzatura and the Poses of Cicero's de Oratore', in *A Touch More Rare: Harry Berger Jr., and the Arts of Interpretation*, ed. by Nina S. Levine and David Lee Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 182–96. 188.

<sup>30</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education: Volume III, Books 6-8*, trans. by Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library, 126 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002). 324.

<sup>31</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education: Volume III, Books 6-8*. 325.

<sup>32</sup> John Monfasani, 'Episodes of Anti-Quintilianism in the Italian Renaissance: Quarrels on the Orator as a Vir Bonus and Rhetoric as the Scientia Bene Dicendi', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 10.2 (1992), 119–38. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Monfasani. 119.

<sup>34</sup> Monfasani. 138.



was common throughout Europe for centuries and transmitted to America, where its dominance remained largely unchecked until the late nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, there is a key difference between the self-presentation of Castiglione in his prefaces and that of Quintilian; namely that Castiglione, in his letter to de Silva, explicitly engages with and rejects outright the notion that he might be seen as the ideal courtier. Though Castiglione does not deny that he has attempted to acquire all the accomplishments he values in a courtier, *A questi tali non voglio già negar di non aver tentato tutto quello ch'io vorrei che sapesse il cortegiano*, (To these individuals I do not want to deny that I have tried to learn everything that I would want the courtier to know) he does not lay claim to that knowledge, *io non son tanto privo di giudicio in conoscere me stesso, che mi presume saper tutto quello che so desiderare* (I am not so devoid of judgement in knowing myself that I presume to know everything that I am aware that I want).<sup>36</sup> This is a step beyond the modesty of Quintilian, who only gives excuses (and those, according to Janson, insincerely)<sup>37</sup> for why the work is not as polished as he would like and does not explicitly deny that he is the ideal orator his work intends to educate and describe.

Publication and Authorial Control: d'Aragona

The paratext to Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* has revealed some of the limitations to authorial control of a text and how these might be manipulated for motives of self-presentation; such limitations can be further explored by examining the paratext to Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore*, published in 1547. The dialogue is prefaced by a letter from Girolamo Muzio, a courtier, poet and author with whom she enjoyed a close relationship, in which he declares emphatically that it was his decision to publish the work and that the author was entirely unaware of it: *io non solamente ho preso ardire di pubblicare questa opera vostra senza vostra saputa* (I not only had the audacity to publish this work of yours without your knowledge).<sup>38</sup>

Though it does not necessarily follow that a work published without her knowledge was published entirely without her consent, since he could, for instance, have secretly carried out a task that she had expressed the intention of doing herself at some future date, it is strongly implied that she did not consent. This is particularly the case because of changes made to the text. As we have seen, Castiglione claimed that his ultimate decision to publish had been motivated by the fear that others would publish it in a mangled version, having made editorial revisions to his text that materially damaged the work; Castiglione's fear became d'Aragona's reality, since Muzio admits to altering d'Aragona's text in his prefatory letter. In writing *presi per partito ... di rimetter Tullia in luogo di Sabina*,<sup>39</sup> (I took the decision... to put back Tullia in place of Sabina) he states openly and unapologetically that he has reversed a decision made by the author to distance herself from the constructed self

<sup>35</sup> James J. Murphy, 'Quintilian and Modern Writing', *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 19.2 (2016), 188–94. 191-2.

<sup>36</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Janson. 51.

<sup>38</sup> Tullia d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore: dialogo* (Milano: G. Daelli, 1864). 6.

<sup>39</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 6.

who speaks within the text; while she renamed her female speaker 'Sabina', Muzio has changed the name back to 'Tullia'. Such a decision has significant implications for how the text is read, so the notion that it was made against d'Aragona's wishes complicates our understanding of her self-presentation strategies in the dialogue.

The ostensible reason for the change from 'Tullia', her own first name, to 'Sabina', was out of modesty: as Muzio explains, the compliments paid to Tullia in the dialogue led her to consider it inappropriate to give her own name:

... perciocchè in quello si dicono molte cose della virtù vostra, e delle vostre lode, a voi non pareva che vi si convenisse nominarvi per lo proprio vostro nome, e per modestia vi eravate appellata Sabina.<sup>40</sup>

[Because in the dialogue many things are said about your excellent and in your praise, it did not seem appropriate to you to call yourself by your own name, and through your modesty you had named yourself Sabina]

In this, she plays into conceptions of femininity which required, and indeed still require, greater modesty from women.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in the early modern period, public speech by women, including publication of literary texts, was often considered a sign of sexual dishonour,<sup>42</sup> and, as a courtesan, Tullia d'Aragona's reputation was already compromised. Already she had fallen foul of the authorities in a case regarding the sumptuary laws and appropriate dress for courtesans, though she had been pardoned in May of that year on the grounds of her reputation as a poet.<sup>43</sup> In the biographical introduction to her English translation of the work, Russell makes it extremely clear that in her opinion, d'Aragona had a sincere interest in shaping the image of herself that she presented to others,<sup>44</sup> a desire and a struggle that she dates back to a similar incident in Ferrara in 1544 and her subsequent desire to secure a measure of social tolerance for herself.<sup>45</sup> To accomplish this, she needed to abide by the social customs regulating female behaviour and show herself as appropriately modest.

Interestingly, the name Sabina has a classical resonance which may have supplied additional meaning to the dialogue. At least two historical women were called Sabina: one was the wife of the Hellenophile emperor Hadrian, and the other was the daughter of the philosophically-inclined emperor Marcus Aurelius. Though neither woman was known to have literary leanings, in an era when antiquity was to many a fashion and to some more akin to a cult, this connection to the literature and high culture of antiquity was perhaps enough to signal the justice of this particular woman's participation in the discussion. Moreover, the etymology of the name is significant. Literally meaning 'Sabine woman', it is

<sup>40</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita d'amore*. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 69.

<sup>42</sup> Wiesner. 160.

<sup>43</sup> Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. by Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). 26

<sup>44</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 27.

<sup>45</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 24.

difficult not to recall the legendary rape of the Sabine women, in which Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, and his men seized women from the neighbouring Sabines to be their wives. The resulting union of proto-Roman and Sabine led to what ultimately became the Roman race. Since, in the dialogue, a female vernacular speaker is discussing love with a highly cultured (and therefore, by definition, classically educated) male speaker, the name Sabina may be an additional argument to support the assessment of Leushuis that the dialogue is to be viewed as their literary offspring,<sup>46</sup> a fusion of classical and vernacular ideas.

Whatever the reason for the choice of pseudonym, had the dialogue been published in the form that d'Aragona gave it to Muzio, it would have at least superficially removed her from her text and displayed an appropriate degree of feminine modesty. Muzio effectively sets himself up as a foil to this modesty when he attempts to justify his decision to re-establish 'Tullia' as a character; in contrast with d'Aragona's attempted downplaying of her own role, his concerns in publishing it appear rather self-interested, wanting to ensure that the trifling praise he receives within the work is understood properly. For his justification for changing 'Sabina' back to 'Tullia' is essentially that he was flattered that in the dialogue, the character of Varchi mentioned him specifically as belonging to Tullia, *che essendovi piaciuto di fare che il non men dotto che eloquente Varchi di me faccia onorevole menzione, come di cosa vostra* (because it pleased you to make Varchi, no less learned than eloquent, make honourable mention of me as something belonging to you), and did not feel comfortable that his name was linked to that of 'Sabina', for:

'io non so di essere mai stato di alcuna Sabina: so bene di essere stato, e di essere della signora Tullia.'<sup>47</sup>

[I know that I have never belonged to any Sabina: I know rather that I have belonged, and belong now, to signora Tullia.]

His attention to his own reputation in being so concerned about a passing mention from Varchi (a man he characterises as 'no less learned than eloquent' in order to stress his learning and thus the value of his compliment), differs greatly from d'Aragona's attempt to minimise her role. This is particularly striking as d'Aragona's praise from Varchi in the dialogue is far more significant: the contrast between her self-effacement when her role in the dialogue is critical and Muzio's self-assertion with a much lesser role thus increases the impact of her modesty.

To consider the issue of authorial control over the text from a different perspective, however, the fact that the change of name reflects so well on her brings into question the veracity of the prefatory letter. To what extent is his unauthorised publication a convenient fiction? Would it be unduly cynical to speculate that perhaps Tullia d'Aragona encouraged Muzio to write such a preface? We know that she had influence over him to the extent that she was able to persuade him to adapt some of his poems about her to portray her not as a

<sup>46</sup> Reinier Leushuis, *Speaking of Love: The Love Dialogue in Italian and French Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). 16.

<sup>47</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita d'amore*. 6-7.

nymph but rather as a muse.<sup>48</sup> Another related issue perhaps worth considering is Smarr's 1998 article, in which she notes that the character of Tullia in d'Aragona's dialogue explicitly responds to and refashions her depiction in Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo di Amore*, published in 1542.<sup>49</sup> Such a response would surely lose a great deal of its impact were Tullia replaced by Sabina. Muzio's letter, however, enables d'Aragona to have her (proverbial) cake and eat it. She can display her desire to be suitably modest and yet be absolved of blame from appearing in the work under her own name.

#### Presence and Absence in Bembo: Paratexts, Metatext, Language

The case of Tullia d'Aragona has further revealed the difficulties in assuming that a published work is an act of self-presentation; it also demonstrates that the question of the author's presence or absence from their dialogue is more complicated than it may initially appear. Yet it is a crucial question for the study of Renaissance appropriation of classical dialogues, since this authorial choice contributes towards aligning the dialogue with a classical precedent, since Plato never appears as a character in his own dialogues,<sup>50</sup> whereas Cicero often does when they are set in his adulthood.

Related to and following on from this alignment with a classical precedent, the extent of an author's presence or absence from the dialogue they relate is a key factor in determining the author's relation to their text. For instance, if they are present, they are able to depict and present themselves more overtly and portray themselves as an active participant in the discussion, as in Paolo Giovio's dialogue *De Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*, in which the character of Iovius, the Latin form of his name, is a clear representation of the author. Conversely, in dialogues in which the author is not present, they are able to distance themselves from the opinions expressed in the text and even from the creation of the text itself, since reducing their role to that of an amanuensis reduces the impact of their personal effort or role in creating the dialogue. Not appearing in their dialogue, can, itself, be a less direct strategy of self-presentation; a recent article by Sezer et al., comments that humility is one of the other-focused techniques that people use in order to be liked by their peers, and a key component of this is giving credit to others or shifting the credit from themselves to others.<sup>51</sup> In this way, recording a conversation allegedly held between distinguished others, ostensibly to praise them or to enable their wit and wisdom to reach a wider audience, can be a show of humility to influence the perception of readers.

Since the presence or absence of the author can have such a great effect on our understanding of a dialogue, let us now consider two dialogues written by Pietro Bembo in which he uses different strategies. The earlier of the two, the *De Aetna*, was printed when Bembo was 26 years old, his first published work;<sup>52</sup> it was also the first use of new typeface

<sup>48</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Janet Levarie Smarr, 'A Dialogue of Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni', *MLN*, 113.1 (1998), 204–12. 204.

<sup>50</sup> David Marsh. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Nalezty. 27.

based on Roman inscriptions,<sup>53</sup> which Williams comments on as a reflection of the author.<sup>54</sup> The *Prose della Volgar Lingua* was written much later and published in 1525 after a long process of composition, as discussed in the chapter on language.

First, though, we must digress, because the presence and absence of the author is not the most immediately noticeable difference between the two dialogues. Instead, what is striking at first view is actually the choice of language used since the *Prose* was written in the vernacular and the earlier *De Aetna*, in Latin. Though the *questione della lingua* and its treatment in dialogues from Italy in the Cinquecento was discussed in more detail in the chapter on language, it is necessary to consider briefly the choice of language here, as language is a crucial facet of identity and is thus very relevant to the question of self-presentation. Despite a risk of anachronism, a relevant parallel is the study done by Ogbu in the 1990s in which he investigated attitudes towards language use in inner-city Black-American neighbourhoods in Oakland, California. The study portrays the relationship between General American (GA) and Black Vernacular English (BVE) as a situation of diglossia, in which black children learn BVE at home and have to learn GA at school as the medium of instruction,<sup>55</sup> a scenario similar in many respects to the experience of Italian schoolboys in the sixteenth century, who would receive their education in Latin, though their first language was the vernacular. Ogbu noticed two commonly-held incompatible beliefs regarding the acquisition of GA, namely that it was both necessary for success in school and the workplace but also a threat to BVE identity.<sup>56</sup>

As we have seen, Bembo wrote about the relationship between Latin and the vernacular languages in his poem *Ad Sempronium*, expressing a strikingly similar point of view:

Nam pol qua proavusque avusque lingua  
sunt olim meus et tuus loquuti,  
nostrae quaque loquuntur et sorores  
et matertera nunc et ipsa mater,  
nos nescire loqui magis pudendum est,  
qui Graiae damus et damus Latinae  
studi tempora duplicemque curam,  
quam Graia simul et simul Latina.  
hac uti ut valeas tibi videndum est:  
ne dum marmoreas remota in ora  
sumptu construis et labore villas,

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<sup>53</sup> Nalezty. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Gareth D. Williams, *Pietro Bembo on Etna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ogbu. 150.

<sup>56</sup> Ogbu. 158.

domi te calamo tegas palustri.<sup>57</sup>

[‘For by Pollux it is more shameful that we do not know how to speak in the language which our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, yours and mine, once spoke and which our sisters and aunt and even our mother now speak – we, who give to Greek and give to Latin hours of study and double care, as much for Greek as for Latin. You must see to it that you use this language while you live<sup>58</sup> so that while you construct marble villas on remote shores at great trouble and expense, you do not cover yourself at home with a marshy reed.’]

The points of comparison between this poem and Ogbu’s article are clear: the emphasis on the familial nature of the vernacular (*proavusque avusque, et sorores et matertera nunc et ipsa mater, domi*) versus the learned, studied nature of the more prestigious second language (*studi tempora duplicemque curam, in remota ora*) which is learned principally for show. Like General American, the poem makes it clear that Latin is an intellectual language but one that is not native to Bembo or Sempronius, his nominal addressee.

It must be noted here too that the decision to align oneself with Latin or the vernacular in the sixteenth century was more than simply a linguistic decision or one that delineated a writer’s target audience: it also aligned the writer with a particular set of attitudes. To refer back to our more contemporary example of the diglossic situation recorded by Ogbu, he explains, ‘Talking proper English among Blacks signifies adopting White attitudes of superiority.’<sup>59</sup> We can reasonably assume that a Cinquecento author’s decision to use Latin over the vernacular may have had some similar connotations in positioning them in relation to contemporary intellectual and pedagogical schools of thought.

Having considered the significance of the language of the dialogue for the author’s self-presentation strategies, let us now return to the *De Aetna* and the *Prose* and compare them in regard to their metaliterature and paratext, the material surrounding the work provided by authors, editors and printers. This can include dedicatory letters, explanation of the text’s production and justification for its publication. It can be divided into different sections (Tullia d’Aragona’s dialogue contains the letter by Muzio, then d’Aragona’s own, much shorter dedicatory letter to Cosimo de’ Medici), or have a separate dedicatory letter before the beginning of the dialogue proper (such as the first preface to *Il Cortegiano*), or be integrated with the beginning of the dialogue (as in the *Prose*, where the dedication to Giulio flows straight into day one of the discussion related).

It is worthwhile dwelling for a moment on dedicatory letters in general to expound why and how they are so important to questions of self-presentation. At first glance, they may appear inconsequential due to their formulaic nature: typically, the author presents him or herself as humble but also industrious; the work is depicted as small or trifling and is often

<sup>57</sup> Bembo, *Lyrical Poetry, Etna*. 64.

<sup>58</sup> Following Mary P. Chatfield’s translation in the *i Tatti* edition of the *De Aetna*, I have elected to translate *ut valeas* as ‘while you live’, rather than interpreting the subjunctive as indicating a purpose clause.

<sup>59</sup> Ogbu. 170.

referred to by use of diminutives; the completion of the work is hoped to be beneficial to students, though of course the dedicatee will be far too learned to require such a resource, as it was considered inappropriate to be seen to be instructing a socially superior person.<sup>60</sup>

Yet to dismiss such letters as meaningless literary padding denies the very real function that they served in early modern culture, as key components of what Nalezyty calls 'the economy of obligation'<sup>61</sup> and referred to by Glomski as 'one of the most important means of cultivating a patron'.<sup>62</sup> In an era when almost all writers were at least to some extent dependent on the favour of more powerful individuals and politico-dynastic structures, this was no matter of indifference: the right patron could supply various kinds of material and immaterial support, which might include specific interventions such as arranging employment for a protégé as a tutor or lecturer at a university, as well as more general protection and support.<sup>63</sup> Thus, for writers, cultivating relationships with these individuals was very much a pragmatic course of action and one that involved walking the ever-present tightrope between being perceived as likeable, which often involves showing appropriate humility and deference to others, and being viewed as competent, worthy of respect, which often involves self-promotion.<sup>64</sup> The letters are therefore formulaic because they are functional, striking a delicate balance between demonstrating the merits of their creators and avoiding the perception of vanity and self-importance.<sup>65</sup>

But what of the patrons? From the perspective of a dedicatee of a written work, being addressed in this way in the prefatory material was more than mere flattery: these individuals benefitted from having their generosity foregrounded, thus improving their reputation and increasing goodwill towards them. Moreover, being the dedicatee of a work of literature could contribute towards a reputation for being a promoter of culture, with all the prestige that this bestowed. However, the act of dedication also implied a connection between the author and the dedicatee, a circumstance that did not always please certain patrons, though it of course conferred social and intellectual status on the writer.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Sanson notes that the dedication of a book to a particular noblewoman may have encouraged other women to read the work,<sup>67</sup> suggesting that these dedications and the private conversation between writer and dedicatee that they implied functioned as a kind of celebrity endorsement. The choice of a dedicatee was therefore one to which an author can reasonably assume to have given much thought and is worthy of serious consideration.

Turning now to the dialogues under consideration, the first major difference between the integrated dedicatory letters of the *Prose* and the *De Aetna* are the dedicatees: the *Prose* is dedicated to Pope Clement VII —though he is referred to by his former title of cardinal to

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<sup>60</sup> Glomski. 169.

<sup>61</sup> Nalezyty. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Glomski. 168.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 55.

<sup>64</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 53-4.

<sup>65</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Pettegree. 164

<sup>67</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 53.

further the illusion that the text had been finished years earlier— while *De Aetna* has a much more lowly dedicatee. In fact, it is dedicated to Angelo Gabriele, a close friend to Bembo and a companion on the journey up Etna that he relates. Williams characterises Gabriele, like Bembo, as a young man ‘seeking to make his way in the world’ and observes that he did not have any success until 1499,<sup>68</sup> three years after the work was published. In other words, while the *Prose* conforms to the traditional dedicatee/patron pattern, in which the writer dedicates a work to a more prominent individual in the hope of obtaining some form of benefit from the connection, the *De Aetna* is dedicated to a young man just as politically insignificant as Bembo himself.

Yet this choice of dedicatee may not be a naïve mistake but actually an assertion of Bembo’s own worth. It calls to mind the famous opening to Catullus’ extant corpus, *cui dono lepidum novum libellum*,<sup>69</sup> (to whom shall I give my smart new booklet...?) an opening which gives the lie to his pose elsewhere that he is a penniless poet. After all, a poet who really was as poor as poems 10 and 13 appear to imply would be reliant on cultivating someone socially superior in the hope of material benefits. Such a poet would not have the luxury of being able to choose to dedicate his book to Cornelius Nepos for sentimental, rather than pragmatic, motives, while the dedication to Nepos appears to be an affectionate acknowledgement of his encouragement of Catullus’s earlier writings, *namque tu solebas meas esse aliquid putare nugas*<sup>70</sup> (for you were accustomed to think my trifles were something). Similarly, Bembo’s choice to dedicate the *De Aetna* to a relative nobody may be a statement that though few people have yet heard his name, he is nonetheless significant enough not to need to rely on the favour of the more powerful.

Incidentally, it is also worth noting here that Bembo would probably have had to make a financial contribution to his dialogue being published; in his book on print culture, Pettegree writes that even the consummate scholar Erasmus may have had to contribute financially to the publication of his *Adages* in 1500, though the terms on which he published were greatly improved as his academic reputation grew.<sup>71</sup> Given that the *De Aetna* was Bembo’s first published work, it therefore appears highly plausible that he would have had to invest a considerable sum in it, a circumstance which makes it appear more likely that its publication was at least partially motivated by a desire to present himself to the wider literary community, though this is not stated in the preface. Instead, it gives the text a twofold purpose: both to record the conversation that he had with his father so both he and Gabriele can refer others to it (*ad quem reiiciendi essent ii, qui nos deinceps quippiam de Aetna postularent*),<sup>72</sup> thus avoiding having the same conversation repeatedly, and as a testament to their friendship.<sup>73</sup> The question of publication is not raised though it hangs over the text like a spectre.

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<sup>68</sup> Williams. 161,163.

<sup>69</sup> Catullus and Tibullus. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Catullus and Tibullus. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Pettegree. 84.

<sup>72</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 196.

<sup>73</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 194.



By contrast, the motivation for publication of the *Prose* is very clear and conforms to a certain extent to Glomski's observations on the formulaic nature of prefaces: he wants to help, *giovare*, scholars of the Tuscan language, whom he feels are so numerous they cannot be counted, *i quali sento oggimai essere senza numero*.<sup>74</sup> The dialogue is therefore to be perceived as having been written in order to be useful to a large number of people who wish to learn this emerging new language. The art of speaking and writing good Tuscan, moreover, is to be encouraged because:

quale più bella cosa può alcun uomo avere, che in quella parte per la quale gli uomini agli altri animali grandemente soprastanno, esso agli altri uomini essere soprastante, e specialmente di quella maniera che più perfetta si vede che è e più gentile?<sup>75</sup>

[What more beautiful thing can any man have than to be superior to other men in that quality by which men are greatly superior to other animals, and especially in that style which we see is more perfect and more refined?]

This raises the status of someone who uses Tuscan elegantly to almost superhuman heights. Doubtless this would have pleased Clement VII, a Florentine pope from the powerful Medici family, a family known for their promotion of the Tuscan vernacular; Clement's own personal interest in the vernacular is given as a reason for the dedication: *non solo le latine cose, ma ancora le scritte in questa lingua vi piacciono e diletano grandemente* (not only Latin things, but also writings in this language please and delight you greatly).<sup>76</sup> Bembo also feels that such a dedication would be appropriate given the family connection: one of the speakers, Giuliano, is referred to as the brother of his cousin, *fratel cugino vostro*.<sup>77</sup> The Pope is therefore characterised in the proem as a man of outstanding culture and one with close familial ties to the sources that Bembo will treat as authorities later in his text.

In a much less obsequious way, it is also possible that the lofty praise bestowed upon a skilled writer of Tuscan could refer to Bembo himself; if he is sufficiently skilled in the vernacular language to be able to write the *Prose* and is considered an authority by the speakers within it, it would be reasonable to assume that Bembo is another person who is able to speak Tuscan elegantly and thus claim this elevated status. He therefore subtly asserts his worth through apparent flattery in the preface to his dialogue.

#### Presence and Absence in Bembo: Metonymical Characterisation

Having considered the proems to these two dialogues, let us now move on to assess, compare and contrast the self-presentation strategies used by Bembo in these two dialogues. Since there is little direct characterisation, particularly when the character in question is portrayed as absent from the dialogue, this chapter will examine indirect characterisation. More specifically, it will examine metonymical characterisation, described by De Temmerman as characterisation that 'draws upon a relation of contiguity between

<sup>74</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 5.

the characterised person and the characterising attribute'.<sup>78</sup> De Temmerman's article on the subject states that ancient rhetorical theory distinguished six attributes of metonymical characterisation: emotion, membership of a specific group or groups, action, speech, appearance and setting.

Though on closer examination he appears to acknowledge that such classification is a much later invention,<sup>79</sup> examining these acts of classical reception through a lens based on classical understandings of characterisation appears a cogent strategy for considering questions of self-presentation. It will therefore be used as a conceptual framework and structuring principle for the comparison of the metonymical characterisation in the *De Aetna* with the limited evidence we find in the *Prose*. However, in recognition of the fact that both texts are dialogues and therefore almost entirely composed of speech, discussions of what the characters say will be integrated with other categories. Additionally, there is little meaningful metonymic characterisation provided by the appearance of the characters in either of the dialogues, with the result that this aspect of characterisation is not relevant to the present chapter. What follows will therefore be a character study structured through the remaining four principles of De Temmerman's system: emotion, group membership, action, and setting, before continuing into an exploration of the motivations underlying the differences uncovered.

Emotion, the first of the characteristics in De Temmerman's taxonomy, is clearly easier to display in a dialogue where the character is present. In the *De Aetna*, we see Pietro express a number of emotions that contribute to an understanding of his character, the first of which is his delight in nature. Though he admits that viewing the fire was dangerous, he states that his eagerness to examine the natural phenomenon carried him up the mountain, "*perlustrandi studio vel potius aviditate ferebamur*" ("we were carried by our enthusiasm — or rather our keen desire — to thoroughly investigate"). Here, the passive verb serves to make Bembo almost an innocent bystander dragged into the situation by an unstoppable force: namely, the sheer power of his desire to scrutinise and examine the fires of Etna. This desire was so unstoppable that even the knowledge of how the ancient naturalist and natural philosopher, Pliny the Elder, met his end did not faze him; when his father, Bernardo, brings up Pliny's death to indicate to his son the danger of his expedition, Pietro's response, "*quid ni sciremus?*"<sup>80</sup> ("how could we not have known?")<sup>81</sup> reveals that he is acutely aware of it but that this was insufficient to deter him from his quest to personally experience this natural phenomenon.

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<sup>78</sup> Koen De Temmerman, 'Ancient Rhetoric as a Hermeneutical Tool for the Analysis of Characterization in Narrative Literature', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 28.1 (2010), 23–51. 29.

<sup>79</sup> De Temmerman. 29.

'To be sure, ancient rhetoricians themselves do not explicitly address the differences between direct and indirect characterization, nor do they explicitly distinguish metonymical from metaphorical characterization. However, they do discuss a number of specific techniques of characterization that can all be classified accordingly.'

<sup>80</sup> Bembo, *Lyrical Poetry, Etna*. 224.

<sup>81</sup> A more literal rendering would be 'Of course we knew', but this denies the force of the rhetorical question; my translation is therefore a compromise between wanting to convey what Pietro is reported to have said and how he reports that he expressed himself.

Another key emotion that Pietro expresses during the discussion with his father is love and concern. His first speech in the dialogue demonstrates his concern for his father in commenting that the bank he is sitting on might be rather too cold for him “*certe ripa haec... aliquanto frigidior est fortasse quam sit satis*”<sup>82</sup> (“certainly this bank... is somewhat colder than is perhaps satisfactory”) Similarly, his motivation for moving the conversation away from the riverbank later on is that sitting on riverbanks for a prolonged period of time, “*ea si longior est*”, is “*admodum gravior*” (“rather burdensome”),<sup>83</sup> the comparative reinforced by the adverb to reveal the genuine concern for the harmful effects an extended rest on the riverbank might have on his father’s health. Though he does not explicitly state it is his father’s health he is thinking of, the fact that he has portrayed himself as a young man, with connotations of strength and vitality, suggests that it is rather for his father’s benefit that he advises the change, possibly as a result of him having returned from two years away in Sicily to find his father rather frailer than he remembered. When setting the scene for the dialogue, he does, after all, acknowledge that his father sitting by the riverbank was a habitual activity, *ut solebat* (as he was accustomed),<sup>84</sup> which would usually indicate that concern was unnecessary. If we are to assume that the concern Bembo has the character of Pietro display regarding his father’s wellbeing is based on the genuine affection of a son towards his aging parent, it presents a very positive picture of the young Pietro’s sense of loyalty, which may have had implications for his as yet unrealised hopes for political advancement.

Gratitude to his father is certainly in evidence in the dialogue, as we see in his passionate response to his father’s regret about not having been able to supply him with plane trees. His gratitude has a number of reasons: his father saw to his education from boyhood with devotion and scrupulous care, “*qui me puerum educaveris non diligenter modo, sed plane, ... etiam religiose*”, took him with him on his embassies, “*habueris tecum in legationibus tuis*”, thereby providing the young Pietro with opportunities to observe diplomacy in action and providing him with valuable contacts, trained his character by instilling excellent values into him “*imbueris optimis moribus*” and taught him all the best arts to the best of his ability “*omnibusque bonis artibus, quod in te esset, ita semper institueris*”.<sup>85</sup>

These are certainly grounds for gratitude to Bernardo; however, it would be naïve to think that this display of emotion does not contribute to the author’s self-presentation. For, by expressing this gratitude and enumerating the ways his father, a successful statesman, had prepared him for public life, he is drawing his readers’ attention to his own education, family background and credentials. Indeed, using gratitude as a pretext to talk about his own qualifications appears almost a textbook case of humblebragging, defined by Sezer et al. as ‘bragging masked by complaint or humility’ to fulfil the often contradictory goals of both being liked and gaining respect.<sup>86</sup> Showcasing the reasons he would be qualified for public service reveals his competence, which is aimed at the creation of respect, while

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<sup>82</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 196.

<sup>83</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 202.

<sup>84</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 196.

<sup>85</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 212.

<sup>86</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 52.

shifting the credit for these qualifications to his father's exemplary parenthood demonstrates humility, sending a prosocial signal to the readers of the dialogue.<sup>87</sup> Thus by exhibiting gratitude in this way, he shows any potential readers who may be able to advance his career that he both has desirable skills and experience and is humble and likeable, someone they might enjoy spending time with in the course of service and who would be suitably grateful for any benefits received.

Indeed, to display this praiseworthy emotion further, Pietro concludes that the benefits that his father has given him as a result of his parenting choices are so great that:

“...ut verear, ne sim prorsus ingratisissimus, ultra haec mihi a te si quid unquam relictum optavero, tum si de iis ipsis tibi non ego semper maiores gratias habuero, quam si mihi magnificas villas construxisses.”<sup>88</sup>

[“... that I am afraid that I would be utterly ungrateful if I ever wished for anything bequeathed to me beyond those things you have given me, and especially if I did not always have greater thanks for you regarding those things than if you had built magnificent villas for me.”]

The valuation of education, experience, skills and good morals as being more worthy of praise than the more tangible assets of showy buildings is evidence of the good morals he has received from his father; his priorities place less emphasis on wealth and worldly concerns and focus instead on how he has been equipped to be a valuable member of the community.

Admittedly, as readers, we do not know to what extent this is a genuine attitude held by the young Pietro or, conversely, to what extent this display of emotion is manufactured because of the social obligation to appear unworldly and express proper family feeling. A cynical reader might well conclude that this gratitude is insincere, a common result of humblebrags; humblebraggers are generally perceived as less sincere than people who do not attempt to conceal their self-promotion by bragging outright.<sup>89</sup> This is deeply problematic for the subject of the humblebrag, since perceived sincerity is crucial in determining the success of an instance of self-presentation and is therefore the reason that humblebragging is not considered effective self-presentation.<sup>90</sup>

Nonetheless, the young Pietro's gratitude towards his father is, at least on the surface, an admirable emotion; similarly, the character of Pietro also reveals a praiseworthy love of learning, expressed emphatically when he states that there has been no time in his life happier than the two years he spent in Sicily learning Greek “*cave tamen putes nobis hic Siciliensi biennio quicquam in vita fuisse iucundius*” (“be sure you don't think that anything in

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<sup>87</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 212.

<sup>89</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton. 52,53.

my life was more pleasant than those two years in Sicily”).<sup>91</sup> Such an attitude is extraordinary when the intense focus on the task of learning Greek is taken into account: as he states later, he worked on his Greek every day for over a year without taking a single day off: “*neque sane adhuc vacuum ullum tempus dederamus nobis laborum atque unum interea integrum remiseramus diem*” (“and indeed we had dedicated no time unoccupied by our labours and had during that period not relaxed for one entire day”).<sup>92</sup> The focus and dedication required to spend a year devoted to the study of an ancient language without a break could very well have been a transferrable skill in a public role; advertising his ability to concentrate on difficult and intellectually demanding tasks may have been intended to make him appear a more viable candidate in his various attempts to secure appointments.

Moving on to the *Prose*, it may initially appear a futile exercise attempting to see emotion in the character of Pietro. However, though Pietro is not a character physically present in the dialogue, we nonetheless see traces of his emotions in the text as filtered through the speakers, and these can be used to provide a sense of his personality and how the author wished himself to be perceived. The most notable example of this is in the anecdote discussed earlier of how Pietro used to respond to the exclusively classically educated scholars, “*dotti e scienziati solamente nelle latine lettere*”, who criticised him severely “*dannare... e rimproverargliele*” for his use of the vernacular language for literary composition. We can see hints of his emotion, or rather lack of it, in that his response is characterised as brief (“*brievemente*”).<sup>93</sup> While the content of his response and its relation to his poem *Ad Sempronium* and the ongoing *questione della lingua* are discussed in the chapter on language, it is worth noting here that his response to attacks from his classically educated peers was not to become overtly angry or deliver a long lecture justifying his decision but to respond with calm wit. Here, lack of overt emotion where he might reasonably display anger or frustration shows a restraint which combines with his intelligence in a way that the courtly society he inhabited would consider admirable.

The next aspect of metonymic characterisation in our taxonomy is the membership of specific groups, for which we see a fairly consistent picture of the character of Pietro in the two dialogues. In the *De Aetna*, his membership of an élite intellectual class is hinted at with his frequent quotations of and references to classical texts. He even apparently translates Homer into Latin verse and makes it appear spontaneous,<sup>94</sup> though this perhaps stretches the bounds of credulity. Indeed, it almost appears an exercise of *sprezzatura*, making a practised translation appear spontaneous and effortless, in the same way that Unico Aretino’s sonnet at the beginning of *Il Cortegiano* is suspected to be the work of previous labour rather than a purely improvised performance.<sup>95</sup> In the *Prose*, he is an absent member of the élite but nonetheless, the core that holds the group together; it is because of Pietro Bembo the author (*per cagion di me*) and through his established relationships with Giuliano

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<sup>91</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 200.

<sup>92</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 204.

<sup>93</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 8.

<sup>94</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 218.

<sup>95</sup> Castiglione, *Il Libro Del Cortegiano*. 22.

de' Medici, Federigo Fregoso and Ercole Strozzi that these three men are invited for dinner by his brother Carlo.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, his intellectual interests extend to poetry in both dialogues. In particular, in the *De Aetna*, Bernardo makes a couple of references to Pietro writing poems about the minor deity Faunus. When he says, "*cum quo te scio libenter etiam carminibus ludere interdum solere*"<sup>97</sup> (I know that you are fond of playing around with him in verse), Bernardo makes it clear that writing such poetry is a habitual pastime for his son, something that he is accustomed to do, *solere*, and that he finds enjoyable and entertaining, *libenter... ludere*; much earlier, he has referred to Faunus as "*Faunum tuum*" (your Faunus),<sup>98</sup> attesting to his son's familiarity with this mythological figure. Indeed, the first six poems in his collection of Latin lyric poetry relate to Faunus; later in the same collection is the poem to Sempronius discussed earlier within this chapter. Incidentally, this poem is referenced in the *Prose* as an example of how Pietro used to respond to criticism of his decision to write the *Asolani* in the vernacular, a key example of Pietro being treated as an authority in a highly-educated social circle. Though these poems were not published until after his death,<sup>99</sup> there is no reason to suppose that their existence was entirely unknown to those close to him, particularly given his habit of writing and editing texts over many years; it is therefore possible that some of the Faunus poems, even in a very embryonic form, already existed in 1496.

His interest in poetry also adds other resonances to his membership of another, even smaller, social group: that of people who have climbed Etna. That few others he knows had experienced the climb personally is revealed in his justification for writing the dialogue, for he had to respond to questions *quotidie fere* (almost every day),<sup>100</sup> a degree of interest that does not make sense unless having climbed Etna is not an experience common among the Venetian gentry. However, writing an account of a mountain ascent recalls a similar journey made by Petrarch, who climbed Mont Ventoux in South-East France in 1336.<sup>101</sup> Burckhardt observes that climbing a mountain just because it was there would have been considered unheard of,<sup>102</sup> but perhaps this could be understood in the context of intentionally suggesting a parallel between himself and the great Trecento poet: both are mountaineers who write about their adventures and also poets. It must be observed that Petrarch was considered in his lifetime 'a kind of living representative of antiquity'<sup>103</sup> due to his Latin works, which could perhaps correspond to the young Bembo's use of a new typeface based on ancient inscriptions to publish a work in a classical form that Petrarch is also known to have used in writing the *Secretum*. Moreover, in 1501, he would publish critical editions of Petrarch's vernacular poems<sup>104</sup> and, in the *Prose*, advocate for an archaising Tuscan solution to the *questione della lingua* in which Petrarch's linguistic usage was to be considered a

<sup>96</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 246.

<sup>98</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 208.

<sup>99</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. xiii.

<sup>100</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 196.

<sup>101</sup> Williams. 95.

<sup>102</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1937). 154.

<sup>103</sup> Burckhardt. 103.

<sup>104</sup> Faini. 31.

model for vernacular verse composition. This Trecento figure thus appears to have exerted an immense influence upon the intellectual development of the young Pietro, and hinting at the similarities between himself and his role model may have been a way to suggest that his future career and literary output would be similarly notable.

To return to de Temmerman's model of metonymic characterisation as seen in ancient rhetoric, let us now consider the action that we see the character of Pietro perform in the dialogues. Once again, Pietro not being physically present for the discussion that he relates in the *Prose* means that he cannot perform actions, though references to him made by the other characters can convey action that took place outside the chronological span of the dialogue, such as references to his writing *Gli Asolani* in a vernacular based on Florentine.<sup>105</sup>

Referring to events that take place outside the dialogue also takes place in *De Aetna*, which is, after all, fundamentally a discussion of an action than Pietro had already taken (climbing Etna). However, a dialogue in which he is present means that the actions that he does over the course of the discussion can be analysed for how they reflect upon him. Yet the mimetic form of the dialogue means that these actions often need to be inferred; in the absence of diegetic description of actions, such as 'we sat down by the river', what the characters say is used to convey what they do, which then can be reinterpreted to indicate their character.

For instance, Pietro is, in the *De Aetna*, the instigator of the discussion, as the conversation begins when he joins his father in the grounds of his villa and addresses him. He does not say why he has done this but, since the first remark he makes to his father is that he has been outside for a long time (*diu* is the first word of the dialogue proper),<sup>106</sup> followed by an expression of concern that the riverbank might be too cold for him, it is reasonable to assume that his action is motivated by concern for his father and a desire to ensure his continued good health and comfort.

After expressing concern that his father may be too cold, Pietro then tries to persuade his father to go to sit in a grove of boxwood, urging him "*sed consurge, si placet, ab hac umbra... atque ad illa buxeta nostra, si tibi videtur, sedesque pergamus.*" ("but get up, if it pleases you, away from this shade... and let us go on to sit, if it seems good to you, in that boxwood grove of ours").<sup>107</sup> While he is clearly attempting to take the lead, motivated by care and concern for his father, he acts with politeness and deference, as evidenced by the formulae *si placet* (if it pleases you) and *si tibi videtur* (if it seems good to you). Yet his father's response is instead to suggest that they have their discussion whilst walking "*propter aquam potius in ripa deambulemus et cum fluvio sermoni reliquo demus operam loquentes*"<sup>108</sup> ("let us rather take a walk near the water on the riverbank and with the river let us pay attention to the discussion in our conversation").

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<sup>105</sup> Bembo, *Prose Della Volgar Lingua*. 32.

<sup>106</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 196.

<sup>107</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 202.

<sup>108</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 202.

The outcome of this brief exchange is revealed later, when Bernardo admits to a need to rest, “*et ego iam deambulando defessus sum*” (“but I am now tired from walking”);<sup>109</sup> we can therefore deduce that the intervening portion of the conversation has taken place while the two men walked. Pietro had therefore yielded to his father’s earlier desire for movement rather than sitting in the boxwood grove, showing a deference to his father that indicates a respect for authority. Moreover, it is also possible that Bernardo’s admission of needing a rest also suggests that Pietro’s understanding of his father’s physical capabilities is now more accurate than Bernardo’s own assessment of them due to Bernardo’s advancing old age. Thus, the young Pietro encourages his father to rest as long as he needs, “*tu vero quiesce, ut libet et quandiu libet*”, but says that he prefers to stand, “*ego autem et stare adhuc possum libentius*”.<sup>110</sup> This remark from Pietro enables us to imagine the relative positions of the two characters — one seated, the other standing— and creates a sense of the conversation taking place in a real, physical space; it also draws a contrast between father and son in terms of their relative strength and energy levels and reinforces the notion that Pietro’s desire to have their discussion while seated in the boxwood grove was not for his own comfort but his father’s.

It is evident that the dialogue seeks to portray a positive and close relationship between father and son, which is emphasised by the alternation of roles that they take in the conversation. Though the discussion in *De Aetna* is, in theory, an account of Pietro’s ascent of Mt Etna, Pietro does not entirely dominate the discussion. Rather, after he has narrated part of his story, he asks his father for an explanation of the science behind the natural phenomena associated with the volcano and, when asked, supplies scientific information of his own.<sup>111</sup> The relationship between them therefore expresses a certain ‘give and take’ indicative of mutual cooperation and edification: as Stefano Guazzo would later remark in his 1574 dialogue, *La Civil Conversatione*, dominating a conversation by wanting to say everything (‘*l voler dir ogni cosa*) but not listen at all (*et non ascoltare niente*) is a form of tyranny (*è una spetie di tirannia*).<sup>112</sup>

To return once more to de Temmerman, the final aspect of ancient metonymical characterisation for discussion is that of setting. Though perhaps little can be extrapolated about the character of Pietro from the setting of the *Prose*, in the *De Aetna*, Bembo appears to use setting and the relative posture of the characters programmatically to hint at the type of dialogue this will be and mark out the distinction between it and its classical forebears. This is not, of course, unique to Bembo, as the previous chapter tracing the reception of the *Phaedrus* has endeavoured to demonstrate; particularly relevant here is the way that the characters in the *De Oratore* use the visual cue of the plane tree to initiate an intellectual discussion modelled on an earlier literary discussion memorialised in text. Indeed, Crassus’ response, that they will be even more comfortable than Socrates and Phaedrus were (“*immo vero commodius etiam*”)<sup>113</sup> due to the addition of cushions may be

<sup>109</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 228.

<sup>110</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 228.

<sup>111</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 234-6.

<sup>112</sup> Stefano Guazzo, *La Civil Conversatione* (Brescia: Tomaso Bozzola, 1574). 72.

<sup>113</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*. 22.



an overt declaration on Cicero's part of *aemulatio*, the desire to compete with and surpass previous literary texts.

With the Ciceronian precedent for this kind of programmatic stage-managing in mind, and given Bembo's known Ciceronian bent as well as the two years that he spent in Sicily learning Greek, the attention that Bernardo and Pietro pay to the relatively trivial detail of the plane trees on the banks of the valley in Sicily appears a kind of metonymic shorthand for philosophy, or the style of dialogue expressed in the *Phaedrus* and *De Oratore*. Such a hypothesis is strengthened by Caruso's work on orange trees in Neo-Latin verse as both a symbol of Neo-Latin poetry and of vernacular competition with antiquity.<sup>114</sup> As a symbolic reading of the surroundings would both contribute towards the setting's metonymical characterisation of the speakers in De Temmerman's framework and potentially suggest an intertextual reference to both the *Phaedrus* and the *De Oratore*, we should carefully consider the references to plane trees made within the *De Aetna*.

When he first mentions that there were plane trees on the banks near Etna, it appears an inconsequential remark, but his father does not seem to quite believe it, which prompts the following response:

“pulcherrimas illas quidem et multissimas, ut non Platonem modo aut Aristotelem, scholasque omnes mitiores suis umbris invitare possint ad philosophandum, sed etiam Gymnosophistas durissimos illos quidem homines et sole admodum delectatos.”<sup>115</sup>

[“Yes, they are very beautiful and very numerous, so that they would be able to entice not only Plato and Aristotle and all the milder schools to philosophise in their shade, but even those most vigorous naked sophists, men who up until this point have enjoyed the sun”]

Not only does this explanatory comment clearly invoke the story of Plato sitting under a tree but it also refers to two other different practitioners of philosophy. Aristotle, a former student of Plato, is considered the founder of the Aristotelian tradition, often considered a rival classical intellectual tradition to Platonism;<sup>116</sup> the gymnosophists, on the other hand, were philosophers from India who practised philosophy naked, lived austere lives and enabled women to practice philosophy with them.<sup>117</sup> The plane trees are seen as uniting these different forms and approaches to philosophy beneath their branches and drawing even those who usually eschew the comfort of the shade to philosophise beneath their spreading branches.

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<sup>114</sup> Carlo Caruso, ‘The Orange and the Bay: Renaissance Symbols of Poetic Excellence’, in *Authority, Innovation and Early Modern Epistemology: Essays in Honour of Hilary Gatti*, ed. by Martin McLaughlin, Ingrid D. Rowland, and Elisabetta Tarantino (Leeds: Legenda, 2015).

<sup>115</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 208.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983). 1.

<sup>117</sup> Christopher Moore, ‘Ancient Greek Philosophia in India as a Way of Life’, *Metaphilosophy*, 51.2–3 (2020), 169–86. 179.

If this is the case, perhaps it is not surprising that Bernardo would gladly exchange all his fruit trees for two or three plane trees “*Quam vellem, ut cum earum duabus possem ego vel tribus arboribus etiam omnes illas fructiferas arbores...commutare,*”<sup>118</sup> (How I would wish to be able to exchange all those fruit-bearing trees for two or three of those [plane] trees). Plane trees are not very economically useful, since their wood is not particularly durable, and are therefore largely ornamental plants;<sup>119</sup> fruit trees on the other hand, produce fruit which can be eaten or sold, making the desire to replace an orchard with a couple of ornamental trees appear illogical unless the plane trees are to be taken metaphorically. I therefore hypothesise that here, the plane trees represent philosophy or, perhaps, by extension, wisdom.

The idea that wisdom is something to be desired is, of course, a concept that would not just have engaged Bembo and his readers from their perspective as humanists, but also as Catholics; the importance of seeking true wisdom is a key theme permeating the Bible, exemplified by *Proverbs* 16:16: ‘How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver’.<sup>120</sup> In asserting the much greater desire for philosophical knowledge, or wisdom, than for pleasant experiences, the literal or metaphorical fruit, Bernardo’s sense of priorities is foregrounded, revealing that he focuses on what is right, wise and just over what is easy or pleasant. This, of course, reflects back on Pietro, because, naturally, as a devoted father, Bernardo tried to instill these values into his son, which he affirms emphatically:

“quid si non tu me saepe monuisses... animi bona esse, quae beatos homines facerent sola ipsa per sese quaeque opis externae non egerent?”<sup>121</sup>

[“What, as if you had not often advised me ... that the goods of the spirit alone are what make men happy by themselves and that no external assistance is needed?”]

Pietro suggests that a better plan than tearing down the orchard to replace it with plane trees would be to plant the trees along the banks of the river; however, he undercuts his own suggestion with an expression of doubt that the trees would flourish there, “*nescio an isto sub coelo provenirent,*”<sup>122</sup> (“I don’t know whether they would do well beneath that sky”). Following on from the reading of the plane trees within the dialogue as representing philosophical wisdom, the sense here is that the young Pietro is unsure whether it is possible to practise the contemplative life and to live according to philosophical ideals in a more worldly context. In other words, while philosophy may have been possible for aristocratic gentlemen in fifth century Athens, and even more recently for Pietro in his two-year trip to Sicily to learn Greek, where he was insulated from practical concerns to be able to devote so much of his time to study, in a more urban context, the demands of the state may well prevent him from having leisure time and mental energy to pursue philosophy

<sup>118</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 208.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Platanus Orientalis - EUFORGEN European Forest Genetic Resources Programme’.

<sup>120</sup> *The Bible, New King James Version*.

<sup>121</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 214.

<sup>122</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 208.

wholeheartedly. In this statement, he taps into an idea already expressed in humanistic dialogues about the difficulty in reconciling the active and contemplative life: particularly relevant here is Cristoforo Landino's dialogue *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, which attempted to reconcile these two contrasting lifestyles in 1473.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, he also reflects a change in Venetian attitudes towards civic humanism, which had been fundamental to Venetian civic identity in the fifteenth century.<sup>124</sup> In showing himself aware of these changes, Pietro reveals himself to value philosophy but to have a keen understanding of the real-world situation.

Finally, the section of the dialogue on plane trees concludes with Pietro's emphatic rhetorical question "*quid enim amplius nobis cum platanis illis?*".<sup>125</sup> While this literally asks what more can be said on the subject of the plane trees that he saw when climbing Etna, in light of the discussion that has previously taken place, it could also indicate that Pietro believes that the case has been made for the validity of philosophy and there is therefore no need to add to it.

Yet philosophy does, however, make one more appearance in the dialogue; when Bernardo explains to his son the (pseudo-)science behind the natural phenomena on Etna, he says "*nunc vero age, philosophemur*" (now, come on, let us philosophise).<sup>126</sup> This is to some extent an expected word choice, as the term *philosophia naturalis* (natural philosophy) was the usual term for such studies from antiquity until the nineteenth century. Yet, as Williams observes, the use of this very specific word choice can also be an oblique acknowledgement of the act of literary memory that this text represents and an allusion to the previous philosophical dialogues that influenced it;<sup>127</sup> it situates the text not only within the contemporary context of Veneto in the late Quattrocento but within a dialogic framework laid out by cultural heroes millennia earlier.

Thus far, using the framework of ancient rhetorical theory outlined by De Temmerman, we have identified a number of differences between Bembo's self-presentation in the *De Aetna* and the *Prose*; the question that remains is *why* the strategies he used changed over time. Rather than considering the *Prose* as an endpoint and imposing a teleological explanation on the changes, the answer appears rather more prosaic: the strategies used by Bembo at these different points in his life respond to different needs. The image of himself that he wanted to present to his reading public as a young man, still wanting to establish his career and obtain political office in Venice would, naturally, be a different image to the one he wanted to project nearly three decades on as a far more established scholar; by 1525 he no longer needed to advertise his humanist credentials to influential Venetian patricians, which Williams suggests was the motivation for his (possibly counterproductive) association with the Aldine press from the late 1490s.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> 'LANDINO, Cristoforo in "Dizionario Biografico"'.  
<sup>124</sup> Williams. 113.

<sup>125</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 216.

<sup>126</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 228.

<sup>127</sup> Williams. 95.

<sup>128</sup> Williams. 162.

In the first dialogue, because he presents it as a discussion in which he was an active participant which he then subsequently recorded, his own oral eloquence is foregrounded. On the other hand, in the *Prose*, published in 1525 though with the fiction that it was finished in 1515 and reporting a conversation that took place before Carlo's death in 1503, Bembo makes it very clear that he was not present. This absence results in the greater necessity of invention, because even if, as readers, we take literally the premise that Carlo reported the conversation to his brother a few days after it had taken place, it is unreasonable to assume that he could literally recall every word of what was said, or that our Bembo could remember every word of the second-hand report of it he received ten or even twenty years later. The significance of this shift is that there is a greater emphasis in the second dialogue on the mature Bembo's written skills.

Another consideration relates to self-promotion and how overtly that could or should be performed, particularly inasmuch as it interacts with the need to appear modest. Though Bembo was a man and therefore not silenced, or at least stifled, by the need to appear suitably modest, feminine and not a sexual deviant,<sup>129</sup> a certain degree of modesty in avoiding excessive arrogance is required in most societies in order to be perceived as likeable. It does, however, need to be balanced by the need to appear competent and worthy of respect, which as Sezer et al. note, is the motivation underlying humblebragging.<sup>130</sup> When writing the *Prose* as an established adult, having made the decision to dedicate the work to the Pope, an immensely authoritative figure in early sixteenth century Italian culture in general but particularly so for a clergyman desiring a cardinalship, it was possible (and almost certainly necessary) for him to appear more modest than was possible for him as a young man needing to distinguish himself from all the other young hopefuls.

This could therefore have resulted in him trying to take a more 'backstage' role in the *Prose*, showing less of himself and his own opinions in the prefaces and not appearing in the dialogue proper, though his presence is nonetheless felt when his views on the vernacular are distributed amongst the speaking characters or when he makes them praise him for his previous literary production in the vernacular. Rabinowitz's narratorial audience, who believe the work of fiction is real,<sup>131</sup> would perceive this praise as more sincere than him characterising himself in this way by other means; as Rui and Stefanone have demonstrated in their study on self-presentation in social media, Other-Provided Information is perceived as less likely to be manipulated and more credible than information that the user of a profile inputs themselves, and therefore has a greater impact on how the owner of the profile is perceived.<sup>132</sup> This is particularly interesting in light of Tannen's observation that, contrary to folk wisdom, which perceives the second speaker in an instance of indirect or reported

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<sup>129</sup> In the Renaissance imagination, there was a distinct and entirely unjustified understanding that public speech by women could be considered a sign of deviant sexual behaviour. The effects of this upon writers of dialogue will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on gender.

<sup>130</sup> Sezer, Gino, and Norton.52.

<sup>131</sup> Rabinowitz. 95.

<sup>132</sup> Jian Rui and Michael A. Stefanone, 'Strategic Self-Presentation Online: A Cross-Cultural Study', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 29.1 (2013), 110–18. 110.

speech as a mere messenger, reported speech is constructed creatively by the second speaker.<sup>133</sup> The implications of Tannen's observation, when read in conjunction with Rui and Stefanone, are that listeners would apparently be more likely to believe praise of Bembo from others, even if the way they access such praise is in a dialogue written and therefore ultimately controlled by Bembo himself. Consequently, in ostensibly removing himself from the dialogue, he has created opportunities to praise himself and reiterate his vernacular credentials in an apparently objective way.

The identity of these other speakers is a final point that must be discussed. Cox describes the speakers in a Ciceronian dialogue as 'godfathers to the truth';<sup>134</sup> while this thesis does not consider the label 'Ciceronian dialogue' an entirely helpful or indeed particularly meaningful term, the notion that the term 'godfathers to the truth' encapsulates, of characters lending their *auctoritas* to support the point of view they are made to espouse, is very germane. She also observes that the use of speakers in a dialogue who have already died can set them up as models to follow and stimulate readers to virtue, which displays the quality of *pietas*, a concept related to dutifulness, conscientiousness and loyalty, on the part of the reader, while the choice of speakers who were still alive was usually motivated by self-interest,<sup>135</sup> such as the desire for patronage. In this way, it is apparent that the choice of speakers in a dialogue not only reflects on the subject matter but also on the writer of the dialogue. Let us therefore conclude the body of this chapter by examining the implications of Bembo's choice of other speakers in the *De Aetna* and the *Prose*.

Considering the *Prose*, it is striking that two of the four characters from the conversation will be familiar to the scholar of dialogue from their appearance in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, as noted in the chapter on language. Since both texts are set decades before their publication date, with the result that Giuliano had actually died before the texts were published, a reasonable explanation would be that the similarities in their choice of cast represent the reality of who the social elite were at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and, certainly in the case of the *Prose*, to showcase the author's connections with such influential people.

However, the possibility that the use of the same speakers is more than mere coincidence must not be overlooked. As previously discussed, Bembo's dialogue was in production for many years before its final publication; the same is true of Castiglione's, which developed over a period of fifteen years, going through one first draft and three main redactions before being published in an (apparently) rushed manner in 1528.<sup>136</sup> The two men appear to have known each other, as we are aware that Bembo approved the speech on Neoplatonic love assigned to him in the fourth book of *Il Cortegiano*,<sup>137</sup> which raises the questions of whether either author had read the other's manuscript prior to the publication of their own. If this is the case, the choice of speakers may also be an intentional attempt to respond to

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<sup>133</sup> Tannen. 105.

<sup>134</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 13.

<sup>135</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 35.

<sup>136</sup> Pugliese. 79.

<sup>137</sup> Kidwell. 111

the other's dialogue, thus putting the two texts in conversation with each other during the years of their composition. Drawing attention to intertextual features of the dialogues and the implied exchange between them can then highlight an author's position as a speaking member of the transnational and transhistorical community of letters.

However, Fregoso and *Il Magnifico* are not, of course, the only two characters in the *Prose*: the other two speakers are Carlo Bembo, brother of the author, and Ercole Strozzi, a Latin poet, and the choice of each has ramifications on how we perceive the author. In the language chapter, we have seen the vital role that Strozzi plays within the dialogue as a representative of Latin culture and how, through the dramatization of his persuasion, he can stand in for not only the reader's journey to supporting the archaising Tuscan vernacular, but also that of the author. Carlo Bembo's presence, on the other hand, suggests dutiful respect for a now-deceased brother, demonstrating affection and loyalty to his brother's memory.

The *De Aetna*, on the other hand, has only two speakers: the young Pietro and his father, Bernardo. His father is in many respects a wise choice of other speaker, both in terms of his career and in his relationship to Pietro. As a statesman, we must remember that Bernardo is politically and socially well-connected, having carried out embassies to the Medici in Florence in 1478,<sup>138</sup> and hosted the scholar Poliziano at his house in 1491;<sup>139</sup> his inclusion as a speaker reminds readers that the young Pietro comes from a background of prominent civic service and can probably also depend on support from that same network of contacts. Moreover, Bernardo's presence, portrayed throughout the dialogue as someone dutiful and preoccupied with civic matters, ensures that the concerns of state are never far from the surface of the dialogue. As a result, readers are more inclined to metonymically relate the way the character of Pietro is presented in the dialogue to their assessment of his character in a more pragmatic context.

But while the author could have used any statesman he was known to be connected with to achieve these aims, additional force is given by the familial relationship between the two men. His own reputation benefits from being seen to honour his father so publicly. For not only is Bernardo given an influential speaking role within the dialogue, which in itself shows filial respect and affection, but a role that is actually reminiscent of Cicero himself, an observation Williams notes based on similarities between the setting of the *De Aetna* and the *De Legibus* and assesses as 'tactful'.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, the implicit hierarchy inherent in the parent-child relationship can be seen in some way to mirror any potential future relationship between Pietro and a patron or social superior. In this, Cox's observations on the literal and symbolic role of female dedicatees as both patrons and 'threshold patrons' to their more powerful husbands appear a noteworthy parallel. She explains that male writers were able to 'cast their courtship of power in the soft-focus guise of a courtly devotion to "the ladies"', which thus reframed behaviour that

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<sup>138</sup> Faini. 16.

<sup>139</sup> Williams. 114.

<sup>140</sup> Williams. 93.

could be seen as servile and obsequious if directed to a higher status man as gallant and chivalric.<sup>141</sup> Analogously, Bernardo as Pietro's beloved and respected father is someone Pietro can reasonably depict himself as showing deference towards without appearing subservient in general.

Lastly, the link between Bernardo as father and Bernardo as statesman plays into the author's unstated desire for political advancement in the blurring of the distinction between father (*pater*) and fatherland (*patria*). During the discussion, Bernardo explicitly draws a parallel between the impossibility of his own abandonment of Venice, their home state, with Pietro abandoning his father: "*eam ipse si deseram nunc ... quid sit aliud quam si tu me iuvenis senem destituas, filius patrem.*" (For if I abandoned it [the state] now... what would it be other than as if you as a young man left me destitute in my old age, a son abandoning his father?).<sup>142</sup> From this, it is not such a leap in deduction to extrapolate the care the young Bembo would take over the state, were he to obtain office, from the concern that he shows for his father, or to wonder if Bernardo's 'test' – "*pertentare te ... volui*" ( I wanted... to test you) —<sup>143</sup> where he tries to elicit from his son explicit evidence of appropriate filial feeling, has the force of an interview question. Pietro, of course, passes his father's test with flying colours, auguring well for his loyalty in other situations.

#### Conclusion

Self-presentation in Renaissance dialogue is an enormous topic and, as such, this chapter has only been able to scratch the surface. Nonetheless, it has drawn some conclusions that it would be salient to reiterate at this juncture. Firstly, determining the extent of an author's self-presentation is more complex than simply assuming that the intention to publish indicates a desire to present themselves to the wider literary public. While the active intent to publish, whether in print or manuscript, would appear to indicate that self-presentation is happening, it is difficult to know whether the text that is ultimately disseminated contains all the material that the author intended (and only the material that the author intended) without material changes that then reflect back on the author. In the same way, authors may use strategies to try to deflect responsibility for the creation and public dissemination of their literary texts onto others. In this, they are following classical precedent; as the chapter has demonstrated, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano's* unusual double preface, in which the first preface stresses the external pressures that forced him to have the work printed, strongly recalls Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.

Nor was this a unique example of an author relating their work to a classical precedent as part of their self-presentation. Indeed, the decision to use the dialogue genre, a classical form made famous by the literary giants, Plato and Cicero, already positions their work in relation to key texts from the revered classical past. Every subsequent authorial decision, for example the cast of characters to be included in the dialogue or whether to appear explicitly in the dialogue as a speaking character, added nuance to this position, drawing the text closer to or further from the origins of its classical form and increasing or decreasing the

<sup>141</sup> Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). 22.

<sup>142</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 200.

<sup>143</sup> Bembo, *Lyric Poetry, Etna*. 214.

importance of the classical with respect to the influence of more recent models and influences.

These authorial decisions were often justified in the paratext of the literary work. Though some paratexts are integrated with the body of the text and others are divided into many sections that are distinct from the beginning of the dialogue, they are nonetheless often key to a full understanding of a dialogue and set forth the position of the writer with respect to their creation.

Lastly, the self-presentation strategies of an author could change over time. Using a framework of De Temmerman's theory of ancient metonymical characterisation, we have identified key differences between two of Bembo's dialogues, published nearly 30 years apart, in terms of their use of emotion, group membership, action and setting, and have compared his depiction of a friendly chat with his father, written in Latin and dedicated to another young man, to his later three-day exposition of the vernacular language. The chapter hypothesises that these changes took place because Bembo's self-presentation needs changed between 1496 and 1525; as a 26-year-old scholar, his need to get his name known by other Venetian patricians meant it seemed appropriate for him to be a speaker in his dialogue, whereas later in life, he could employ a more subtle approach that would nonetheless present him in a positive light. In this adaptation of self-presentation strategies to the needs of the particular situation, Renaissance culture was not very dissimilar to modern life.



## Chapter Four: Gender

In her article on the historical figure of Aspasia of Miletus, Cheryl Glenn sums up the status of women as follows:

For the past 2500 years in Western culture, the ideal woman has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement).<sup>1</sup>

This presents a bleak picture of the rights of women throughout Western history, and we must note that the way these cultural codes operated and the precise prescriptions imposed upon women will have varied according to place, time, race, class, religion, and other socioeconomic factors. Nonetheless, this arresting statement does appear to encapsulate the reality for women in what would become Italy in the sixteenth century; they would usually be married off in their teens to men who were both considerably older than themselves and chosen for them by their male kinsmen, and would subsequently spend the majority of the rest of their lives within the walls of their homes.<sup>2</sup>

Underlying this treatment of women was the deep-rooted belief in female inferiority, coming from two distinct sources: the classical view, encapsulated by the Aristotelian belief that the creation of a female was the result of an imperfect act of generation, making each woman merely a defective man and a monstrosity of nature;<sup>3</sup> and the Judeo-Christian tradition in which the first woman, Eve, was responsible for the Fall of Man.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of this assessment of women's worth, Prospero Farinaccio's monumental and extremely influential 1616 text *Praxis et theorica criminalis*, used the concept of *fragilitas sexus* as the basis for the diminished legal responsibility of women,<sup>5</sup> as Isotta Nogarola had argued in her dialogue *De pari aut impari Evae atque Adae peccato* over a century previously.

Following on from the belief in female inferiority, it has been observed that the social role of women during this time was one where their silence and chastity were foregrounded. Indeed, public speech on the part of a woman was linked conceptually during this period with sexual dishonour,<sup>6</sup> a belief which may originate in the Greek physician Galen's

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<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Glenn, 'Sex, Lies and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric', *College Composition and Communication*, 45.2 (1994), 180–99. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Richardson, "'Amore Maritale': Advice on Love and Marriage in the Second Half of the Cinquecento", in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. by Letizia Panizza (London: Legenda, 2000), pp. 194–208. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., 'The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series', in *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. vii–xxvi. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Wiesner.11.

<sup>5</sup> Marina Graziosi, 'Women and Criminal Law: The Notion of Diminished Responsibility in Prospero Farinaccio (1544-1618) and Other Renaissance Jurists', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. by Letizia Panizza (London: Legenda, 2000), pp. 166–81. 167.

<sup>6</sup> Wiesner. 160.

comparison drawn between the uvula and the clitoris. Though it appears illogical today, the comparison related the uvula's protection of the trachea with the clitoris's protection of the uterus, with the underpinning rationale being that women who opened one of these mouths could be considered to have opened the other as well.<sup>7</sup> Even the perusal of a letter could be considered a sign of unchastity,<sup>8</sup> though it must of course be acknowledged that letters were not considered private in the Renaissance in the same way that they are today and were often considered the best (or the least inappropriate) vehicle through which educated women could demonstrate their learning and literary creativity.<sup>9</sup>

Treatises on education that were produced during the early modern period reflect these conventional norms of gendered behaviour, with authors such as Leonardo Bruni, Juan Luis Vives and Agrippa d'Aubigné advocating for restrictions in what girls should be allowed to learn. Social restrictions that drastically limited female access to the public sphere meant that giving girls the same education as their brothers could be considered pointless, with education for girls principally for the purpose of rendering them chaste, silent and obedient, of strengthening and stabilising their characters, and of preparing them for their primary role of providing the first precepts of social, moral and religious education to their future children.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the vast majority of women at this time did not ever achieve basic literacy, and it was common during this period to teach female students who did receive some formal education to read but not to write, thus enabling them to access texts from authoritative male authors and to absorb their moral teachings but without providing them with the opportunity to express their own, potentially subversive, opinions in any lasting form.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these restrictions and negative perceptions of women who participated in public discourse, it is therefore interesting to note that during the sixteenth century, female speakers began to be included as participants in dialogic literary texts and to participate in the cultural and literary dialogue revolving around the production and dissemination of literary texts.

From a twenty-first century perspective, this new participation, while greater than the previous opportunities afforded to women, is distinctly underwhelming. Even during the most significant periods in the sixteenth century for women's writing, female writers still remained a very small minority presence in the overall literary world,<sup>12</sup> and women who published their writings often claimed that they were only doing so as a result of external forces to mitigate against the stigma of trying to share their works, their written voice, with a wider audience.<sup>13</sup> By the same token, though female speakers began to be included in

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Morales, *Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius' Leucippe and Clitophon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 209.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). 163.

<sup>9</sup> Wiesner. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Gibson. 10,12, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Wiesner. 119, 123.

<sup>12</sup> Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650*. 118.

<sup>13</sup> Wiesner. 160.

dialogues, their participation was restricted. For instance, in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, the role of the few women who are present in the conversation is confined to the occasional interjection; in the third day of the discussion, when talk turns to the court lady and the cultural debate on women known as the *querelle des femmes*, they leave the defence of women to male characters.

However, in observing these limitations, we need to be cautious not to be anachronistic and impose norms from our own century on these dialogues. Accordingly, it would be prudent to note, as Jansen does, that the circumscribed role of these female speakers in the *Cortegiano* would have been perceived as 'Even more shocking' because this extent of female involvement within a dialogue was unprecedented.<sup>14</sup> Cox corroborates this, arguing that, while Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* introduced female participants some twenty years prior to the publication date of Castiglione's text, it 'would scarcely have prepared Castiglione's readers for the novelty of the appearance of women in a dialogue whose style and structure proclaim its affiliation to the hitherto exclusively masculine Ciceronian tradition.'<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the restrictions on female education, such as the scarce numbers of women who were taught Latin and the reluctance to teach women rhetoric and dialectic — which were not only taught through the medium of Latin, but also perceived as useless for female students given the lack of social roles available for women who were educated in this way—<sup>16</sup> meant that it would not have been plausible for a female interlocutor to take an active role in a dialogue that required learning or argumentation.<sup>17</sup> Sanson agrees with this assessment of the limitation of female participation in dialogues on the grounds of verisimilitude.<sup>18</sup>

Cox's chapter on the participation of female speakers in dialogic texts sums up the matter in this way:

To reach any valid conclusions about the unspoken conversational etiquette that regulated sex-roles in dialogue, it would be necessary to undertake a detailed comparative analysis of all dialogues containing women speakers in both their socio-historical and literary contexts.<sup>19</sup>

The following chapter is not, and could not be, such a thorough comparative analysis, but rather seeks to analyse a small selection of dialogues containing female speakers to give an illustration of some of the ways women could be portrayed in a genre that had historically excluded them. These are Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505), Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo*

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<sup>14</sup> Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 84.

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Cox, 'Seen but Not Heard: The Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. by Letizia Panizza (London: Legenda, 2000), pp. 385–400. 386–7.

<sup>16</sup> Gibson.19.

<sup>17</sup> Cox, 'Seen but Not Heard: The Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue'. 388.

<sup>18</sup> Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. 112.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, 'Seen but Not Heard: The Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue'. 391.

*delle bellezze delle donne* (1541) and Tullia d’Aragona’s *Dialogo della infinità di amore* (1547).

In selecting these examples, I have sought variety in a number of different aspects. First of all, there are the gender dynamics at play, with two dialogues written by male authors and one by a female author. Of these, one of the two male-authored dialogues (Bembo’s *Gli Asolani*) contains for much of the dialogue equal numbers of male and female interlocutors, while the other, by Firenzuola, has a group of female interlocutors with a single male speaker; these will be contrasted with the way that d’Aragona portrays the character of Tullia in her dialogue, in which she is the only female character present. The dialogues were produced and published over a period of around 60 years, in diverse social milieux and for different intended audiences.

While this chapter could not be the overarching monograph deemed necessary by Cox, it is intended to be a small contribution towards the study of gender roles in sixteenth century dialogues from what is now called ‘Italy’, drawing conclusions that can apply to these specific instances of dialogic writing, which may then provide a point of departure for future research. In particular, in assessing these dialogues, I will consider not only how these authors negotiate the challenges of including female speakers in their dialogues but also how these female characters interact within them and to what extent this reflects or challenges the stated views of the author or of specific characters within the text on the role and status of women. Additionally, in considering these dialogues as acts of classical reception, including vernacular classicism, I will evaluate the use and adaptation of Plato, as author of one of the best-known classical precursors to these Renaissance dialogues that include female characters.

#### Women in Classical Dialogues

Before focusing on the Renaissance texts, we must first consider the classical tradition that they inherited; it is not true that the inclusion of women in dialogue was entirely unprecedented, though their participation is almost always extremely limited. The main exception to this rule is, of course, Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, which, as discussed in a prior chapter, function as dramatic vignettes in which sex workers speak in their own voices. However, the low socio-economic status of these women and the stigma attached to their profession made them a somewhat problematic model.

More promising an exemplum was provided by Plato in his *Symposium*, in the form of Diotima, who teaches a much younger Socrates about the mysteries of love. She is characterised by Socrates when he relates what he learned from her years later as being from Mantinea “γυναικὸς Μαντινικῆς”, being skilled in love and many other matters “ἢ ταῦτά τε σοφὴ ἦν καὶ ἄλλα πολλά” and having once led the Athenians to offer sacrifices to procure for themselves a ten-year delay in the onset of plague “καὶ Ἀθηναίους ποτὲ θυσασμένοις πρὸ τοῦ λοιμοῦ δέκα ἔτη ἀναβολὴν ἐποίησε τῆς νόσου”.<sup>20</sup> That she is depicted as an authority is, according to Nye, unsurprising, since she was speaking from a tradition of

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. by W.R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, 166 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1925). 172.

female power and, in her (implied) role as a priestess, heiress to the authority of that profession maintained from Minoan and Mycenaean times.<sup>21</sup>

Diotima is not, however, physically present in the *Symposium*, but rather features by way of an elaborate framing device. The dialogue begins *in medias res*, in a situation where Apollodorus has clearly just been asked to recount a conversation that took place at a banquet that took place years previously, while he was only a child; his account of the conversation comes largely from Aristodemus of Cydathenaeum, though he has also corroborated some details with Socrates himself.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore in this retelling of a retelling that Socrates gives his speech that relays the conversation he had with Diotima in his youth; her voice is not heard directly but rather filtered through several layers of male voices.

Partly as an effect of this filtering, scholars continue to debate the significance of Plato's decision to use Diotima to explain such a key part of his philosophy and how Plato intended his readers to understand her role in the *Symposium*. Indeed, according to Leshner, Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, including this reported discussion with the woman from Mantinea, is arguably the fullest expression of Plato's point of view.<sup>23</sup> Plass argues that the use of Diotima as a dialogue in a dialogue concretises the distinction that Plato draws between physical and intellectual eros by way of the contrast drawn between Socrates and the 'erotically self-less and neuter Diotima, an august servant of god and a woman'.<sup>24</sup> Hobbs writes that the figure of Diotima, in conjunction with the image of pregnancy within the speech, has the function of 'liberating men and women alike from inessential bodily and cultural constraints';<sup>25</sup> in a similar vein, Nye's assessment of the interaction is that Diotima demonstrates that the goal of love is the fruitfulness of interaction, the fecundity of dialogue'.<sup>26</sup> When writing on the reception of Diotima in the Italian Renaissance, Clay notes that Christian readers perceived Diotima's speech as 'a faint reflection of Jacob's ladder and a pagan anticipation of the ascent of the mind to God', with the result that there appears to have been no cultural hesitation in translating the Greek *eros* into the (Latin) love of God (*amor dei*).<sup>27</sup>

Underlying some of these assessments is the awareness of Diotima's gender in a genre where women did not usually feature. Chapman is dismissive of the character and refers to

<sup>21</sup> Andrea Nye, 'The Hidden Host: Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium', *Hyphatia*, 3.3 (1989), 45–61.53-4.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 80.82.

<sup>23</sup> J. H. Leshner, 'A Course on the Afterlife of Plato's "Symposium"', *The Classical Journal*, 100.1 (2004), 75–85.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Plass, 'Philosophic Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues', *The American Journal of Philology*, 85.3 (1964), 254–78. 260.

<sup>25</sup> Angela Hobbs, 'Female Imagery in Plato', in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. by James Leshner, Debra Nails, and Frisbee Sheffield, Hellenic Studies Series, 22 (Washington DC: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2007). 77.

<sup>26</sup> Nye. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Diskin Clay, 'The Hangover of Plato's Symposium in the Italian Renaissance from Brunini (1435) to Castiglione (1528)', in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. by James Leshner, Debra Nails, and Frisbee Sheffield, Hellenic Studies Series, 22 (Washington DC: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2007). The online version of the chapter that I read did not indicate page breaks; I have therefore been unable to provide a page number.

her as ‘a man in disguise’,<sup>28</sup> while Kraut uses her gender more positively, suggesting that having a woman expound the doctrine of friendship may be a subtle acknowledgement on the part of Plato that women are capable of this idealised form of friendship.<sup>29</sup> Halperin argues against the conventional views that ultimately reduce down to the notion that Diotima is portrayed as a woman to avoid portraying her as a man,<sup>30</sup> theorising instead that making her character female may be responding to a pre-existing literary tradition which has since been lost;<sup>31</sup> he also contends that her gender highlights the differences between Plato’s erotic theory and those of his contemporaries and the ‘feminine’ aspect of his model of erotic dynamics.<sup>32</sup>

A possibly related female figure in the corpus of classical dialogues is the character of Aspasia of Miletus. While our best-known source for her is Plutarch’s *Lives*,<sup>33</sup> Socrates notably ascribes some of his advice on marriage to her in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*: “συστήσω δέ σοι ἐγὼ καὶ Ἀσπασίαν, ἣ ἐπιστημονέστερον ἐμοῦ σοι ταῦτα πάντα ἐπίδειξει.”<sup>34</sup> (“I will introduce Aspasia to you, and she will show you all these things since she knows more than me”).

Moreover, and most relevantly for our purposes, the *Menexenus* has been described as Plato’s version of Socrates’ version of Aspasia’s version of Pericles’ funeral oration,<sup>35</sup> making Aspasia a highly germane parallel with Diotima. Indeed, just as Diotima is presented in the *Symposium* as having instructed Socrates in the art of love, so Socrates in the *Menexenus* refers to Aspasia as his teacher, διδάσκαλος, in rhetoric, and mentions that she has taught many great orators including Pericles, who is himself described as excelling over all the Greeks διαφέροντα τῶν Ἑλλήνων, Περικλέα.<sup>36</sup> Though their social statuses are rather different, with Aspasia traditionally viewed as ‘a high-class courtesan who attached herself to men of power in the fifth century BCE’,<sup>37</sup> in comparison to Diotima’s religious associations, both women are foreigners associated with Socrates, who are sufficiently skilled to be able to teach men, and who are permitted to speak through layers of male voices within works by Plato.

In fact, so closely were the two women associated throughout antiquity that eventually, their names were used interchangeably,<sup>38</sup> and this conflation of two distinct literary and historical figures in ancient sources will have had consequences for their reception in much later periods. At least one author of dialogue in sixteenth-century Italy, Sperone Speroni,

<sup>28</sup> Chapman. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Kraut. 300.

<sup>30</sup> Halperin. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Halperin. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Halperin. 129.

<sup>33</sup> Glenn. 183.

<sup>34</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology*, trans. by E.C. Marchant, O.J. Todd, and Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, 168 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013). 12.

<sup>35</sup> Glenn. 188.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles.*, trans. by R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library, 234 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1929). 336.

<sup>37</sup> Xin Liu Gale, ‘Historical Studies and Postmodernism: Rereading Aspasia of Miletus’, *College English*, 62.3 (2000), 361–286. 362.

<sup>38</sup> Halperin. 123-4.

makes an explicit reference to Diotima as a courtesan;<sup>39</sup> similarly, when examining Tullia d’Aragona’s dialogue, the modern scholar Campbell notes a comparison made between the character of Tullia and Diotima, referring to the latter as ‘the famous hetaira from Plato’s *Symposium*’.<sup>40</sup> In considering the use of Diotima as a precedent for the inclusion of women, we must therefore also consider the depiction of Aspasia.

Gale’s article on Aspasia reveals a skeptical attitude towards her portrayal in the *Menexenus*, since it was written in 385 BCE, long after her lifetime; it also questions whether a satirical text with fictitious scenes can be treated as historical evidence.<sup>41</sup> I would answer her that yes, it can be considered historical evidence, provided that the limits of the source are acknowledged, and we do not try to read it as a literal embodiment of whatever nebulous concept we believe Truth<sup>42</sup> to be. On the other hand, a contrasting perspective on Aspasia is supplied by Glenn, who notes a gendered double standard in scholarly attitudes. Like Aspasia, she argues, we mainly know about Socrates through secondary sources, but we do not question his teaching or authority to the same extent.<sup>43</sup>

A third possible precedent for the inclusion of women in dialogue is found in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, in which a conversation between Isomachus and his much younger wife is reported by Socrates in his conversation with Critobulus, which is then reported by Xenophon. This therefore repeats the (by now familiar) pattern in which female voices may be present in classical dialogues, but only when their words are repeated by more prominent men.

However, whereas in the *Symposium* and the *Menexenus*, Diotima and Aspasia are credited as having taught Socrates and have their conversations repeated because of their skill, in the *Oeconomicus*, the young wife is placed in a subordinate role. Her intellectual subordination is made very clear by Isomachus, who mentions that when they first married, she was not capable of engaging in rational discussion: “ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι χειροθήτης ἦν καὶ ἐτετιθάσσευτο ὥστε διαλέγεσθαι, ἠρόμην αὐτήν”<sup>44</sup> (“When she was sufficiently submissive to me and had been tamed so that I could have a conversation with her, I spoke to her”). Here, the combination of the verb τιθασεύω (‘I tame, domesticate’) with the adjective χειροθήτης (translated here as ‘submissive’, but also often used of animals to mean ‘accustomed to the hand, manageable, tame’) serves to dehumanise her by implying that she was inherently animalistic and required male domination to be capable of rational discourse.

Furthermore, both Socrates and Isomachus refer to ‘training’ a wife using the verb παιδεύω,<sup>45</sup> etymologically linked with παῖς, the Greek word for ‘child’. The implications behind this choice of word are obvious: the infantilised wife (and we must remember that,

<sup>39</sup> Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1975). 101.

<sup>40</sup> Julie D. Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). 31.

<sup>41</sup> Gale. 373.

<sup>42</sup> The use of the capital is deliberate.

<sup>43</sup> Glenn. 182.

<sup>44</sup> Xenophon. 442.

<sup>45</sup> Xenophon. 440,442.

married at fourteen (“οὐπω πεντεκαίδεκα”)<sup>46</sup> she would still be considered legally a child in most modern societies) cannot be considered the equal of her husband. Instead, she is perceived as ignorant and, to a certain extent, malleable, able to be moulded by her older, more experienced husband, into his conception of a good wife. He does this, in part, through the Socratic questioning we see in the dialogue, where he assumes the more authoritative role.

In Oost’s assessment, ‘the *Oeconomicus*, with all its condescension toward the child wife, treats woman better than any other work of Xenophon, perhaps more than any other work of ancient Greek literature.’<sup>47</sup> He may well here be referring to the argument that men and women are equal in some respects, which is put forward by Isomachus as follows:

“ὅτι δ’ ἀμφοτέρους δεῖ καὶ διδόναι καὶ λαμβάνειν, τὴν μνήμην καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀμφοτέροις κατέθηκεν. ὥστε οὐκ ἂν ἔχοις διελεῖν, πότερα τὸ ἔθνος τὸ θῆλυ ἢ τὸ ἄρρεν τούτων πλεονεκτεῖ. καὶ τὸ ἐγκρατεῖς δὲ εἶναι ὧν δεῖ εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀμφοτέροις κατέθηκε καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός ... διὰ δὲ τὸ τὴν φύσιν μὴ πρὸς πάντα ταῦτ’ ἀμφοτέρων εὖ πεφυκέναι, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ δέονται μᾶλλον ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ ζεῦγος ὠφελιμώτερον ἑαυτῶ γεγένηται, ἃ τὸ ἕτερον ἐλλείπεται τὸ ἕτερον δυνάμενον”.<sup>48</sup>

[“Because it is necessary for both to give and to take, he gave an equal share of memory and focus to both, so that you would not be able to conclude whether the female or male sex had the advantage in these qualities. And it is necessary for both to be masters of themselves; the god gave an equal share to them and gave them the power to do this... But because they have not been made equally well in reference to all matters (because of their natures), on account of this they need each other more and the pairing is more useful to each; the one is deficient where the other is capable”]

In this passage, Isomachus tells his bride that men and women actually have the same ability to remember, to apply their attention to the task in hand and to exercise self-discipline; their differences as regards other attributes, differences which make some tasks more suited to men and some to women, mean that each can play to their own strengths and, in so doing, help and support their spouse. They are different but, in some crucial respects, equal.

This is perhaps an unduly sanguine view of the dialogue, however. It must not be forgotten that, of the characters given speaking roles in the dialogue (whether directly or in relayed conversations), the only female character is the only character not to be given a name. In

<sup>46</sup> Xenophon. 440.

<sup>47</sup> Stewart Irvin Oost, ‘Xenophon’s Attitude toward Women’, *The Classical World*, 71.4 (1977), 225–36. 235.

<sup>48</sup> Xenophon. 448,450.



this, there are distinct echoes of the famous line from Thucydides's rendering of Pericles' funeral oration for the first victims in the Peloponnesian War:

“τῆς τε γὰρ ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως μὴ χείροσι γενέσθαι ὑμῖν μεγάλη ἡ δόξα καὶ ἧς ἂν ἐπ’ ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεσι κλέος ᾖ.”<sup>49</sup>

[“For you [women] will have great honour if you do not become worse than the capability of your nature, and great will be the honour of the woman concerning whom there is the least talk of either praise or blame amongst men”]

Though Aspasia and Diotima, exceptions through their foreignness or their different professions, are allowed to have their words repeated by esteemed gentlemen, the ordinary woman and wife, it is clear, must remain anonymous.

This is the reality of the classical tradition inherited by the sixteenth-century writers of dialogue who will be discussed in the rest of this chapter; having considered what their precedents were and the ways in which female characters could be depicted in ancient dialogues, we can now examine their depiction in selected acts of Renaissance reception of this genre.

#### *Gli Asolani*

We will begin our series of case studies with *Gli Asolani*; of the dialogues listed by Cox in her 2013 list of Italian dialogues incorporating female speakers, only three were written prior to the publication of the *Asolani*, only one of which was in the vernacular.<sup>50</sup> In consequence, this is one of the earliest vernacular dialogues to be written with female characters and can be considered one of the originators of this new tendency in dialogic writing. Leushuis writes that the inclusion of women in the discussion is as a result of the influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron*,<sup>51</sup> which Rigolet also gives as the reason for the inclusion of women in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.<sup>52</sup>

Not only was it one of the first dialogues to be published that included female speakers, but it was wildly popular; Bembo's recent biographer Faini describes it as the equivalent of a bestseller,<sup>53</sup> and in the same way, Russell refers to Bembo in his capacity as the author of this dialogue as a trendsetter.<sup>54</sup> While scholars are united in acknowledging the success of this work, assessments on why it was so successful are somewhat more mixed, with Kidwell arguing that it adapts the medieval courtly discussion of love to the dialogue form,<sup>55</sup> while Faini instead writes that the dialogue rejects the conventions of late medieval and courtly

<sup>49</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. by C.F Smith, Loeb Classical Library, 108 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919). 340.

<sup>50</sup> Virginia Cox, 'Note: Italian Dialogues Incorporating Female Speakers', *MLN*, 128.1 (2013), 79–83.

<sup>51</sup> Leushuis. 230.

<sup>52</sup> François Rigolot, 'Problematising Renaissance Exemplarity: The Inward Turn of Dialogue from Petrarch to Montaigne', in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. by Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 3–24. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Faini. 30

<sup>54</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*.

<sup>55</sup> Kidwell. 129.

love along with the ethical code of Venice, interpreting it as a rejection, rather than an adaptation, of the socio-cultural and literary norms of the world in which the young Bembo had grown up.<sup>56</sup>

Whatever the reasons for its success, *Gli Asolani*'s widespread appeal in literary society, giving it enormous potential for influence, in conjunction with its placement so early in the tradition of dialogues that include female speakers, make it a germinal text for understanding the ways that women became participants in these stylized literary depictions of conversations.

The work consists of three books, each representing a day of discussion held during wedding festivities at the court of Caterina Cornaro — a real, historical figure— at Asolo, hence the title. During these three days, three men (Perottino, Gismondo and Lavinello), take it in turn on successive days to expound their views of love to each other and to the three ladies present (Berenice, Sabinetta and Lisa). Of the three male speakers, Perottino presents a very negative picture of love, while Gismondo portrays love as an entirely joyous phenomenon and Lavinello concludes his speech by relaying a conversation that he had had earlier that day with a hermit in which the philosophy of Neoplatonic love is explained and virtuous, spiritual love is promoted.

Though Caterina Cornaro herself is portrayed as being present in the last day's discussion and was still alive at the time at which Bembo published this work,<sup>57</sup> there are no clear correspondences between the identities of the other characters and identifiable historical characters. Cox's list of Italian dialogues that include female speakers therefore lists *Gli Asolani* under the category of fictional dialogues,<sup>58</sup> a suggestion agreed with by Leushuis;<sup>59</sup> Faini's biography of Bembo partly supports this interpretation, since he suggests that some of the male characters are autobiographical masks but that he cannot be identified with any individual speaker.<sup>60</sup>

In a diegetic dialogue like the *Asolani*, the narratorial voice may also be identified with the author, a fact which provides further insight into the decision to include women. As previously discussed, this work was one of the first literary dialogues to include female speakers and its publication legitimises female presence in this genre;<sup>61</sup> yet in the prefatory section to the third day of the dialogue, the narrator acknowledges the potential criticism he may face from this relatively unusual authorial decision:

Quantunque io stimo che saranno molti, che mi biasimeranno in cio, che io alla parte di queste investigationi le donne chiami, allequali piu sacconvenga ne gli

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<sup>56</sup> Faini. 67.

<sup>57</sup> Daria Perocco, 'Caterina Cornaro: Una Corte, Una Regina e La Creazione Di Un Mito', ed. by Silvia Ross and Chu, *MLN*, 129.3S, (2014), S35–44. S37.

<sup>58</sup> Cox, 'Note: Italian Dialogues Incorporating Female Speakers'. 83.

<sup>59</sup> Leushuis. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Faini. 64,68.

<sup>61</sup> Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650*. 11.

uffici delle donne dimorarsi, che andare di queste cose cercando. De quali tuttavia non mi cale.<sup>62</sup>

[Although I believe that there will be many who will blame me for the fact that I call women to take part in these enquiries, since it is more appropriate for them to remain within womanly offices than to go out exploring these matters, even so their criticism does not affect me.]

Here, it is apparent that the narrator, who is also the author figure within the text, admits the possibility that he will receive significant criticism for the decision to include women in the conversations on love, but that he is not, or will not allow himself to be, swayed by this knowledge. The specific reason he offers up for their criticism relates to the idea of physical space and the social restrictions on women: the verb *dimorare* (to dwell) suggests that *ne gli uffici delle donne* can be read as a physical, indoor, space in addition to the metaphorical sense of their domestic duties, particularly when contrasted with the verb *andare* in the next clause. We should perhaps not be surprised that, in an era preoccupied with female chastity, the possibility of women metaphorically venturing outside on a voyage of intellectual discovery alongside men might be viewed with suspicion.

He then continues:

Percio che essi non niegano, che alle Donne lanimo altresì come a glihomini sia dato, non so io perche piu ad esse, che a noi si disdica il cercare che cosa egli è, che si debba per lui fuggire, che seguitare.<sup>63</sup>

[As those men do not deny that women as well as men have been given minds, I do not know why it should be more prohibited for them than for us to explore what they should avoid or pursue.]

Discernible here is an overt assertion of women's intellectual abilities; since they have minds in the same way that men do, and those minds were given to them by God, just as he gave them to men, why should they not seek out moral improvement the way that men can? This argument in favour of the inclusion of women in the discussion presupposes the idea that this dialogue is a work with a moral end through which readers, including women, will learn appropriate behaviour, an idea which may prefigure the speech of the hermit reported by Lavinello later in this book.

Having affirmed the right of women to participate in these discussions, he concludes this explanatory preface as follows:

Che se esse tuttavolta non togliendo a quegli uffici, che diranno que tali essere di donna, le loro convenevoli dimore, ne gli studi delle lettere & in queste

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<sup>62</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore* (Venice: Gregorio de Gregori, 1522). 93v.

<sup>63</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 93v.

cognitioni degli loro otii ogni altra parte consumeranno, quello, che alquanti huomini di cio ragionnino, non è da curare, ma il mondo non dimeno in loda delle studiose chiare donne ne ragionera quando che sia.<sup>64</sup>

[If they [women] spend all their leisure in the study of literature and in these ideas, not ever detracting from those offices, which people will call womanly, their accustomed seat, what some men may think of them is not to be worried about — but sooner or later the world will nonetheless speak in praise of studious and noble women.]

It becomes apparent on reading this that Bembo's assertion of the intellectual capabilities of women only extends so far. He does not advocate for drastic change to the social order to enable women to enter literary spaces on the same footing as men; instead, he believes that women should remain within their usual domestic spheres and continue to carry out their 'womanly duties', with literary and cerebral pursuits relegated to pastimes.

Even with this cautious statement on women, he acknowledges that he will be unable to satisfy the judgement of some men (*alquanti huomini*) who are particularly opposed to the notion of women reading, but he dismisses their objections: they are not to be worried about (*non è da curare*) because these traditionalists and misogynists will never be satisfied. In contrast to the small numbers of critics, the world (*il mondo*) will speak up for learned women; the verb *ragionare* can mean 'to discuss' but it is also connected with reflection, reasoning and the mind, suggesting that the reasonable reaction to female participation in these discussions is to praise women for their intellectual study and seeking moral growth.

But does Bembo practice what he preaches? As previously noted, during the three days of the conversation, it is the male speakers, Perottino, Gismondo, and Lavinello, who put forward their cases to justify why their assessment of love should be considered the correct one; the women, on the other hand, mostly sit and listen, with female participation dramatically reduced from the equal or near-equal participation of the female speakers in the work's Boccaccian precursor.<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, Williams remarks that the discussion Lavinello reports between himself and the hermit recalls the conversation between Socrates and Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*,<sup>66</sup> but replacing the priestess with a hermit erases the only female presence from Plato's dialogue and transfers her authoritative role in the understanding of love to a man. Indeed, rather than being called to take part in the conversations, perhaps to offer a female perspective on an issue that is relevant to both (binary) genders,<sup>67</sup> women instead appear to be called to be an audience to male pontifications.

<sup>64</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 94r.

<sup>65</sup> Smarr, *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women*. 10.

<sup>66</sup> Williams. 170.

<sup>67</sup> Love can, of course, also be relevant to those who identify as non-binary. However, it seems unlikely that in early sixteenth-century Catholic Italy, Bembo would have been aware of openly gender-nonconforming individuals except possibly as curiosities to be read about. The reference to binary genders is therefore

After considering how the narrator figure addresses the question of female education and participation in the discussion, let us now assess the attitudes to gender expressed by the characters in the dialogue. Strikingly, to support his argument in the second day of the discussion that love is a positive and joyous force, Gismondo recounts a story very familiar to readers of Plato's *Symposium*: the story told there by the comic poet Aristophanes of the division of humanity.

“Percio che non hai tu inteso dire o Perottino, che primieramente gli huomini due faccie haveano, & quattro mani, & quattro piedi, & laltre membra di due de nostri corpi similmente ? Equali poi partiti per lo mezzo da Giove, a cui voleano torre la signoria, furono fatti cotali, che ti hora sono. Ma percio che essi volentieri alla loro interezza di prima sarebbero voluti ritornare, come quegli, che in due cotanti poteano in quella guisa, & di piu per lo doppio sivaleano, che di poi non sono valuti, secondo che essi si levavano in pie, cosi ciascuno alla sua metà sappigliava, ilche poi tutti glialtri huomini hanno sempre fatto di tempo in tempo, & è quello, che noi hoggi Amore & amarsi chiamiamo.”<sup>68</sup>

[“So have you not heard people say, Perottino that in the beginning, humans had two faces and four hands and four feet and two of the other parts of our body in the same way? They were then divided into equal parts down the middle by Jupiter, whose authority they wanted to usurp; they were made such as you see them today. But since they would have gladly wanted to return to their previous undivided state because they could do twice as much in that form and, moreover, were twice as strong as they had become, when they became independent, each one then sought out their other half, which all men since have done from time to time. It is this that we today call Love and loving.”]

The intertextual reference is unmistakable, despite the lack of reference to the tale having originated in a written text or the name of Plato; it must be noted that such omissions are not unusual during the early modern period, in which there appears to have been an unwritten rule that the sources used most extensively are cited far less than other sources owing to the fact that they were considered part of the shared literary tradition.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the way Gismondo questions Perottino as to whether he is aware of this story (*non hai tu inteso dire*,) stresses hearing and oral communication rather than literary transmission, suggesting that the anecdote, and potentially the dialogue it originated in, is common knowledge among men of the court, while possibly also making reference to the communal practice of reading aloud.

The meaning behind the story is apparent: that men and women are two halves of the same whole and that when united in a loving relationship, they can strengthen each other and

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intended as an acknowledgement of the prevailing views on gender in Renaissance Europe, rather than an erasure of non-binary individuals.

<sup>68</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 55r,v.

<sup>69</sup> Cherchi. 59.

achieve much more than they could do individually. This appears very affirming of the role of women in society, stressing the mutual support between both partners in a relationship of equals; it is not a small piece of the proto-human that is missing but a division into two equal parts (*Equali poi partiti per lo mezzo*) and their previous state enabled them to be twice as effective (*in due cotanti poteano, per lo doppio sivaleano*).

The way that this story reflects on women becomes particularly apparent when we consider the most obvious difference between the version of the story related by Gismondo in the *Asolani* and that recounted by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*: namely, that while in the Greek version of the story, there were initially three types of human—male, female and hermaphrodite—<sup>70</sup> which then gave rise to heterosexual and homosexual couples,<sup>71</sup> in Bembo's version, there is only one. He foregrounds the heteronormativity in the story, saying that if any man loves his lady, he is searching for his other half "*se alcuno ama la sua donna, egli cerca la sua metà,*" and the same applies to ladies who love their lords "*& il somegliante fanno le donne, se elle amano gli loro signori*",<sup>72</sup> without making any reference to other possible orientations. This is itself not surprising, since the penalty for sodomy throughout much of Europe at this time was, officially, to be burnt at the stake after being decapitated,<sup>73</sup> but the fact that he is therefore clearly discussing heterosexual relationships means that he is necessarily referring to women when he refers to each adult searching for his other half (*alla sua metà*).

Of course, despite Renaissance Europe's preoccupation with the ancient world, Gismondo cannot claim that this Platonic story is literal, objective truth. Anticipating a response along these lines by Perrottino, Gismondo then says:

"Peraventura quello istesso, che io pur hora dintoro a tuoi miracoli ragionando ti rispondeo, cio è che questi sono giuochide gli huomini, dipinture & favole & loro semplici ritrovamenti piu tosto & pensamenti, che altro... La natura istessa parla & ragiona questo cotanto, che io tho detto, non verun huomo."<sup>74</sup>

[ "Perhaps [you would say in reply] the same thing that I recently replied to you when you were discussing your portents, namely that these are men's games, paintings and fables and their inventions and thoughts rather than anything more substantial ... Nature itself speaks and reasons in this way, which I have told you, not any man"]

Here, it is evident that he wants to ensure that the point of retelling the passage from the *Symposium* is not lost in dismissing his words as just a poetic contrivance. He therefore

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 134.

<sup>71</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 140, 142.

<sup>72</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 55v.

<sup>73</sup> Scarabello. 58. Scarabello does, however, note that, in reality, lesser sentences were generally imposed based on considerations of role in the acts, age, and whether the acts in question were homosexual or heterosexual but not procreative.

<sup>74</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 55v.

implies acknowledgement on some level that he is aware that this is a fiction but justifies the use of this literary device by appeal to a higher force: that of nature. If the natural world operates along broad truths that are communicated in allegories and parables, then Gismondo using such a story to convey one of these truths is difficult for Perottino to challenge.

Considering Gismondo's retelling of the story from the *Symposium* with a decidedly heteronormative slant, in addition to the fact that his role in the discussion is to argue in favour of love, we might reasonably expect him to be pro-woman in his argument. Once again, though, we see in Gismondo an attitude that is more positive towards women in theory than in practice; just as the narrator figure argues in favour of the inclusion of women only to circumscribe their participation, so Gismondo's favourable attitude towards love between men and women does not entirely translate towards speaking respectfully towards the female speakers in the dialogue.

One example of this is the way that he silences Lisa. Lisa, characterised as being full of sweet vivacity, *piena di dolce vezzo*, and motivated by the desire to test Gismondo rather than any other reason, *piu per tentarlo, che per altro*, makes a playful objection to a point that Gismondo has made.<sup>75</sup> He replies to her point briefly but then adds:

“assai essere ti possono bastanti, dove tu peravventura in su lostinarti non ti metessi, ilche suole tuttavia essere alle volte diffetto nelle belle Donne non altrimenti, che soglia essere ne be cavagli il restio.”<sup>76</sup>

[“these reasons will be enough for you, if you by chance don't decide to be stubborn, which is nonetheless a fault commonly found in beautiful women no less than reluctance is in fine horses.”]

It is difficult to know the precise connotations of this remark, since social norms have changed significantly in the five hundred years since the publication of the *Asolani*. From a twenty-first century perspective, the comment seems entirely unnecessary and, moreover, sexist in its tone; comparing women to horses, even fine ones, is, frankly, insulting. When we try to consider the remark in its sixteenth-century context, a vital clue is given in the text when we see how Lisa responds to Gismondo and his equine comparison:

“Se solamente ne be cavagli,” rispose Lisa tutta nel viso divenuta vermiglia, “cadesse Gismondo il restio, io che bella non sono” (& era tuttavia bella, come un bel fiore) “mi crederei poter hora parlare a mio senno, senza che tu per ostina[ta] mhavessi. Ma percio che anchora ne mal fatti questo vitio & piu sovente peravventura, che ne gialtri, suole capere, sicuramente tu hai trovata la via da farmi hoggi tacere, ma io te ne paghero anchora.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 65r.

<sup>76</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 65v.

<sup>77</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 65v.

[“if reluctance only happens in the case of fine horses, Gismondo,” replied Lisa, all red in the face, “I who am not beautiful” (though she was beautiful, like a beautiful flower) “would believe myself able now to speak according to my own judgement without you considering me stubborn. But because that vice tends to occur still more often in those with bad conformation than in others, you have certainly found the way to make me keep quiet today, but I will make you pay for it later.”]

The first clue to how we should read this comment comes with the description of Lisa as she responds. Previously full of sweet vivacity, she turns scarlet, *tutta nel viso divenuta vermiglia*, becomes self-deprecating, “*io che bella non sono*”, and declares that she will not speak again that day, “*tu hai trovata la via da farmi hoggi tacere*”. A blush on its own is a potentially ambiguous reaction, as the centuries of debate on the significance of Lavinia’s blush in the *Aeneid* attest. Yet though a blush on its own could indicate modesty, if we assume that the comparison to well-built horses is a flattering tribute to her beauty or an indication of romantic interest, when it is combined with the sudden change from playfulness to self-deprecation and silence, it appears more likely that the blush indicates her discomfort and embarrassment at the way that Gismondo has spoken to her.

Telling, too, are the words that she uses in her reply. *Mal fatti* is particularly interesting; Gottfried’s translation from the 1950s gives it as ‘ill-favoured’,<sup>78</sup> though the rationale behind this decision is not given. The dictionary definition of *malfatti*, as given by *lo Zingarelli 2021*, indicates that it can be used to indicate that something is misshapen, graceless or awkward, that is it worthy of condemnation or, used as a noun, a misdeed.<sup>79</sup>

In its context as a response to Gismondo’s equine comment, it appears to be referring to horse conformation, or the way a horse’s body structure conforms to a perceived ideal in terms of body proportions, bone structure and musculature. Conformation is relevant to the way a horse can be used but is also perceived as reflecting the character of the horse: for instance, horses with unusually small eyes (called ‘pig eyes’), are often considered more stubborn or nervous than horses with more typically proportioned facial features.<sup>80</sup> Lisa’s response says that, by analogy with the horses that Gismondo has already used in his comment, her lack of beauty means that she is actually more likely to be accused of stubbornness.

Another piece of evidence that points towards Gismondo’s comment being offensive in the sixteenth century as well as today is in the reactions of others. When, shortly after the aforementioned remark comparing beautiful women to fine horses, Berenice wants to interject, the situation is described as follows:

<sup>78</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani*, trans. by Rudolph B. Gottfried (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954). 109.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Malfatto’, *Lo Zingarelli 2021*.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Pig Eyed Horses – What This Tells You about His Personality’, *All Horse Breeds*, 2017 <<https://www.allhorsebreeds.info/54/pig-eye/>> [accessed 16 July 2020].



... con la sua sinistra mano la destra di Lisa, che appresso le sedea, sirocchievolmente prendendo & strignendo, come se aiutare di non so che ne la volesse, a Gismondo si rivolse baldanzosa, et si gli disse. "Poscia che tu Gismondo cosi bene dinanzi ci sapesti mordere, che Lisa hoggiamai piu techo avere affare non vuole (& peraventura che tu a questo fine il facesti, accioche meno di noia ti fusse data da noi) & io pigliare ne la voglio per la mia compagna, come che tuttavia poco maestra battaglia mi sia." <sup>81</sup>

[Taking in her left hand the right hand of Lisa, who was sitting next to her, and squeezing it in a sisterly way as if she wanted to help her with something, she turned to Gismondo boldly and said to him "Seeing that you knew earlier how to bite us so well, Gismondo, that Lisa wants to have nothing more to do with you today ( and perhaps you did it for this reason, so you would get less trouble from us) , I want to pick her to be my ally, however unskilled a fighter she may be to me."]

The supportive gesture, described in terms of affection that indicate a close relationship, suggests that Berenice may be attempting to provide comfort for Lisa: comfort that would only be necessary if Lisa had been upset. Moreover, Berenice refers explicitly to Gismondo's earlier biting remark, attributing to it Lisa's subsequent silence, which makes it evident that Berenice wishes to portray the earlier remark as wounding.

Berenice later ends up falling foul of Gismondo's tongue herself; when she objects to the notion that male lovers take pleasure in seeing their ladies weep, he replies with a reference to the *Decameron* that leaves her gaping with mixed shame and astonishment (*mirando con un tale atto mezzo di vergogna & di maraviglia*).<sup>82</sup> According to *lo Zingarelli*, the use of *vergogna* to indicate modesty, which would infer the comment was interpreted in a positive sense, is rare,<sup>83</sup> making its interpretation as a sign of shame far more likely. The offending remark is as follows:

"certo sono, che se il romitello del Certaldese veduta vhasse, quando egli primieramente della sua celletta usci, egli non harebbe al suo padre chiesto altra Papera da rimenare seco & da imbeccare, che voi."<sup>84</sup>

["I am certain that, if Boccaccio's young hermit had seen you when he left his little cell for the first time, he would not have asked his father for any other gosling to take home with him and to feed up than you."]

The reference is to a story told in the introduction to the fourth day of the *Decameron* in which a son, who has been entirely sheltered from the world, sees a group of women for the first time. Delighted with them, he asks his father what they are and is informed by his overly censorial father that they are goslings, whereupon he asks to take one home and

<sup>81</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 68r.

<sup>82</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 75v.

<sup>83</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, 'Vergogna', *Lo Zingarelli 2021*.

<sup>84</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 75r,v.

offers to feed it, a remark which, though said innocently, is interpreted in an overly sexual way by his father due to his own sexual feelings.<sup>85</sup>

Such a reference initially appears complimentary, suggesting that Berenice is extremely attractive and would have been the 'gosling' selected by the young man, but, as we have previously observed, Berenice's reaction clearly demonstrates that she is more offended than flattered by his words, just as Lisa appeared upset by the comparison with fine horses. Moreover, referring to the *Decameron* in this way appears to have very little to do with the subject that was previously under discussion: namely, whether a lover should take pleasure in seeing his lady weep. From this, then, it becomes evident that Gismondo is invoking the story of the goslings from Boccaccio to draw attention to Berenice as a sexual object rather than engaging with the point that she has made, with the underlying motivation being to silence her and prevent her from making further comments.

Although this interpretation of Gismondo's actions may seem somewhat implausible, it is substantiated by evidence from recent work in social psychology. For instance, a study published in 2010 indicates that objectifying women to make them be quiet is a strategy that is likely to work, since 'when a woman believes that a man is focusing on her body, she narrows her presence in the interaction by spending less time talking'.<sup>86</sup> In addition, when commenting on a case study described in an earlier article by Herring, Poland explicitly states that the men in the case study were using the sexual objectification of the women in the group purposefully to derail their conversation.<sup>87</sup> Thus, men drawing attention to a woman's body in a way that sexualises and dehumanises her with the aim of limiting her participation in the conversation is a documented phenomenon that can, and does, happen in the real world.

Moreover, if we return to Gismondo's earlier dispute with Lisa while bearing this concept in mind, it appears salient that his response to her display of playfulness involves both implying that she is beautiful (thus drawing attention to her physical appearance) while dehumanising her by comparing her to a horse. Lisa's response to the unfolding dispute between Berenice and Gismondo indicates that she has drawn some parallel between his earlier treatment of herself and his present treatment of her friend, providing further evidence for the argument that Gismondo is actively rude to and dismissive of women. Lisa addresses Berenice with these words:

"mi giova molto, che in sul vostro hoggimai passi quella gragniuola, laquale pur hora cade i sul mio. Io non mi debbo piu dolere di Gismondo, poscia che anchor voi non ve sete risparmiata. Ben vi dico io .. che egli ha hoggi rotto lo scilinguagnolo. Di che io viso confortare, che non lo tentiate piu, che egli pugne, come il tribolo, da ogni lato."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Einaudi, Brown University Press, 1992).

<sup>86</sup> Tamar Saguy and others, 'Interacting Like a Body: Objectification Can Lead Women to Narrow Their Presence in Social Interactions', *Psychological Science*, 21.2, 178–82. 181.

<sup>87</sup> Bailey Poland, *Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2016). 39. The reference for Herring's study is as follows: Susan C. Herring, 'The Rhetorical Dynamics of Gender Harassment On-Line', *The Information Society*, 15.3 (1999), 151–67.

<sup>88</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 75v.

[“I am very pleased that that the same hailstorm has happened today on your field which also fell earlier on mine. I no longer need to complain about Gismondo, since even you weren’t spared. Really, I say to you ... that today his tongue has broken free of restraint. For this reason, I advise you for your own good not to try it again, since, like a caltrop, he wounds from every side.”]

There are a number of elements to this passage that must be considered closely to fully understand the impact of what Lisa says. The first is the unusual words, *scilinguagnolo* and *tribolo*, which require more explanation than can be adequately conveyed in a translation alone.

*Romperre lo scilinguagnolo* literally means ‘to break the lingual frenulum’, which is the small fold of tissue beneath the tongue that prevents it from moving too far. Since the lingual frenulum prevents excessive movement of the tongue, the idea of it having broken represents a tongue that is unrestrained; for this reason, *lo Zingarelli* gives the modern expressions *scogliere lo scilinguagnolo* (to untie the lingual frenulum) as indicating speaking at length after a prolonged silence and *avere lo scilinguagnolo sciolto* (to have an untied lingual frenulum) as meaning speaking rapidly and at length.<sup>89</sup> Here, though, the sense is slightly different because the lack of restraint is not a complaint about how much Gismondo speaks or the speed and enthusiasm of his communication, but rather about the aggressiveness, or even violence, of the way that he has spoken to both Berenice and Lisa, seemingly uninhibited by notions of politeness and civility. It is almost certainly not coincidental that, instead of the gentler image of untying or loosening this tissue, Lisa chooses the verb *romperre*, denoting breaking, smashing or bursting with force.

*Il tribolo*, translated above as ‘caltrop’, also requires a note of explanation, since this historic form of weaponry may not be familiar. A caltrop is a device that has been used in warfare for millennia, comprising four spikes, usually made of metal, which are arranged in such a way that it will always land with the one point sticking up. The purpose of this is to slow down the advance of cavalry, or more recently, vehicular, troops, either by wounding the animals and making them lame, or by puncturing tyres.<sup>90</sup>

Why is it significant that Lisa compares Gismondo to a caltrop? There are three main reasons: the first one being that it continues the theme of conversation as warfare that runs through the dialogue. Smarr has noted that from the very beginning of the dialogue, where the disputation on love is set up, martial imagery is already present and serves as part of a broader strategy to exclude women:<sup>91</sup> Perottino refers to Gismondo arming himself against the truth “*prender larme contral vero*”, the ladies laugh at the two knights ready for battle, *Risono le vaghe Donne delle parole di due pronti cavalieri a battaglia*, and Lisa urges Lavinello to participate in the discussion by telling him that it will be shameful to stand with his hands in his belt while his friends fight “*à te fie di vegogna, se tu combattendo e tuoi*

<sup>89</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, ‘Scilinguagnolo’, *Lo Zingarelli* 2021.

<sup>90</sup> ‘The CIA Museum ... Artifacts: The Caltrop — Central Intelligence Agency’ <<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/cia-museum-the-caltrop.html>> [accessed 21 July 2020].

<sup>91</sup> Smarr, *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women*. 11.

*compagni con le mani a cintola ti starai*".<sup>92</sup> When the women present in the group interject, we see a continuation of this violent imagery; as we have already seen, Berenice refers to Lisa as an ally, if a rather unskilled fighter "*la mia compagna, come che tuttavia poco maestra battagliaiera*" and to his previous retort to her as having bitten her "*cosi bene dinanzi ci sapesti mordere, che Lisa hoggiamai piu teco havere affare non vuole*",<sup>93</sup> pointing to the notion of words as causing physical wounds.

Then, we must consider the reason why the caltrop has been chosen as the most apt weapon to describe the effect of Gismondo's words on the women in the group, as the decision of this particular armament does not appear accidental. Caltraps are weapons that are especially effective against cavalry troops; the 'hailstorm' that fell on Lisa's field earlier was, of course, the offensive comparison that he drew between beautiful women and horses. There is therefore a subtle intimation in her response that Gismondo's speech is particularly targeted against women.

The final point relating to the caltrop as a weapon is the way that the shape of the device makes it effective. As early as Vegetius, it has been noted that the distinctive shape of the caltrop means that whichever way it is thrown, it will always land with three spikes on the ground and the last pointing up.<sup>94</sup> Lisa's comment that Gismondo is like a caltrop in that he wounds from every side, "*egli pugne, come il tribolo, da ogni lato*", seems to be hinting that whichever way his comments are interpreted, they still have the power to wound.

Having assessed the significance of the caltrop and the lingual frenulum in Lisa's words, let us now examine the tone with which she utters them. The narrator reports that Lisa makes her comment with laughter, *ridendo*, but the fact that she adds that she need *no longer* complain over the incident earlier, "*Io non mi debbo piu dolere*", seems to suggest that she has, up until this point, been upset by it, particularly as the verb *dolersi* historically shared the meaning of 'hurt, be in pain' with its non-reflexive form. It therefore seems plausible that the laughter is an attempt to cover up the real hurt that she feels in a situation where, as Lavinello will remind the group, quarrelling is forbidden during the wedding festivities.<sup>95</sup>

The final, and perhaps most conclusive piece of evidence that Gismondo's behaviour towards the women was perceived as offensive at the time comes at the end of that day's discussion. There, Berenice states overtly that Gismondo's unchecked speech has caused her discomfort.

"Come che hora il fatto si stia Gismondo del tuo havere ragionato a bastanza, o no, noi sian pure molto ben contente, che di Lavinello habbia ad essere il ragionare di domani, il quale se noi non conoscessimo vie piu temperato nelle sue parole, che tu hoggi nelle tue non sei stato, io per me non so quello che io mi facessi di venirci."<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 10 r,v.

<sup>93</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 68r.

<sup>94</sup> Publius Flavius Vegetius, *De Re Militari*, III <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vegetius3.html>>. xxiii.

<sup>95</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 91v.

<sup>96</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 91r.

[“Whether or not you have discussed this matter sufficiently, Gismondo, we are nonetheless very well content that Lavinello will lead the discussion tomorrow – if we did not know that he was more moderate in his words than you were today, I for my part am not sure whether I would make myself come.”]

Berenice, as the oldest of the women, seems here to have appointed herself their spokesperson, using the feminine plural adjective *contente* to express their shared consternation at the way that they have been spoken to. Though she stops short of attributing her own reluctance to listen to more insulting language to her friends, it is immediately apparent that the conversation that the narrator-figure will, a few pages later, make a point of including women in has actually resulted in marginalisation and exclusion.

Thus far, we have examined *Gli Asolani*, a dialogue first published at the beginning of the sixteenth century and a prominent early example of Renaissance dialogues that included women. Though there are examples from the classical world of women making contributions to conversations depicted in dialogue, this represents a development on the dialogic tradition from antiquity inasmuch as these women are permitted to take place in the dialogue in their own right, rather than being filtered through several layers of male reported speech.

The remainder of this chapter will carry out a similar analysis on two dialogues produced several decades after the *Asolani*; while largely concentrating on the same questions of the use of classical precedent, the depiction of women and the treatment of female characters in relation to the text’s professed position on women, it will also consider Bembo’s dialogue as a precedent that each of the authors discussed must situate themselves in relation to.

#### Firenzuola

The first text to be brought into comparison with *Gli Asolani* is Agnolo Firenzuola’s *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne*. Completed in 1541, more than 25 years after the publication of Bembo’s dialogue, it replicates and develops elements contributing to the (at times, notional) pro-woman stance of the earlier work that are relevant to our questions of gender dynamics and the use of antiquity. Although to a certain extent this can be explained as simply a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* in its preoccupation with antiquity and the close interconnection between love and beauty in Neoplatonic thought, we must not also overlook that the two men were aware of each other’s existence, had common interests, and shared mutual acquaintances.

A prime example of this is their joint interest in the *questione della lingua*. Bembo’s interest in this cultural debate has been discussed extensively in the earlier chapters of this thesis, but Firenzuola also participated in the discussion, objecting to Gian Giorgio Trissino’s proposed orthographic reforms of Tuscan so vociferously that he published a treatise on the subject, the *Discacciamento delle nuove lettere inutilmente aggiunte nella lingua toscana*, in

1524, just a year prior to the publication of Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*.<sup>97</sup> In fact, according to a letter written by Firenzuola's friend Pietro Aretino in 1541, not only had Pope Clement VII, the ultimate dedicatee of the *Prose*, been very interested in Firenzuola's text, but both he and Bembo himself had consequently asked to meet him.<sup>98</sup> In light of this additional connection between them, the relationship between *Gli Asolani* and the *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne* is particularly fascinating.

However, some appreciation of the context and staging of the dialogue is necessary prior to conducting analysis of key passages from Firenzuola's dialogue. The conversation takes place over two days, the first set in the summer of 1533 in a fashionable spot in Prato, the garden of the Abbey of Grignano,<sup>99</sup> while the second takes place at a party held at the house of one of the interlocutors, Mona Lampiada. She is one of four ladies of Prato who take part in the conversations, the other three being Mona Ammorrorisca, Selvaggia, and Verdespina; the final speaker, Celso Selvaggio, is male and described by the author, somewhat unobtrusively, as *un'altro me*.<sup>100</sup>

It is worth dwelling briefly on the establishment of the character of Celso as a reflection of the author. Of course, there is no question that the tendency to identify characters with the author is a reading strategy that has prevailed for millennia, as the analogous distinction between the *poetam ipsum* and his *versiculos* in Catullus' infamous poem attests,<sup>101</sup> but here, the reader is explicitly encouraged to understand Celso as the author's alter ego. This adds an authorial voice to the dialogue, which to a certain extent brings it closer to Bembo's *Gli Asolani* than it might otherwise be; the earlier dialogue is diegetic, with a narrator figure who represents the author of the text, while Firenzuola's dialogue is more mimetic, albeit with a prologue and narrated introduction. On a practical level, the removal of the narrator-figure can limit how the author can comment on their dialogue, but the identification of Celso with Firenzuola legitimises the reading of Celso's statements on women as a reasonable approximation of Firenzuola's.

The women in the dialogue have also been tentatively identified with real, historical women who lived in Prato at this time, a reading strategy again encouraged by Firenzuola, who, in the prologue to the dialogue, says that their real names are covered only by a thin veil, (*sotto un sottil velo*).<sup>102</sup> According to this interpretation, Selvaggia and Mona Lampiada are likenesses of sisters Selvaggia and Clemenza Rocchi, with Verdespina identified with one of their sisters-in-law, Smeralda Buonanici; Mona Ammorrisca may be another sister-in-law of the Rocchi sisters from the Gherardacci-Bocchineri family.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans. by Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). xiv.

<sup>98</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xv.

<sup>99</sup> Jacqueline Murray, 'Agnolo Firenzuola on Female Sexuality and Women's Equality', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22.2 (1991), 199–213. 201.

<sup>100</sup> Agnolo Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne* (Venice: Giovan Griffio, 1552). 8r.

<sup>101</sup> Catullus and Tibullus. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 3v.

<sup>103</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xxii.

Despite this, Cox's list of Italian dialogues that include female speakers places the *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne* firmly within the category of fictional dialogues, though the precise rationale for this is not stated.<sup>104</sup> It may be related to the suggestion noted in Eisenbichler and Murray's introduction in which the five interlocutors in the text may represent the five elements, with Celso representing the fifth element, the ether of the celestial spheres; the same introduction also notes the balance between the female characters with two women who are younger and unmarried (Selvaggia and Verdespina) and two who are older and married (Mona Amorriscia and Mona Lampiada).<sup>105</sup>

Turning now to the question of classical precedent of the treatment of women in the dialogue, we find an obvious Socratic allusion in a brief exchange between Celso and Mona Lampiada. Mona Lampiada wishes to clarify whether Celso is speaking of masculine beauty, feminine beauty, or beauty in a more general sense and frames her request with polite self-deprecation, referring to herself as one of those women who wishes to learn despite their ignorance, "*sono una di quelle, ch'avvenga che sieno ignoranti, havrebbero vegheza d'imparare*". Celso responds very positively to this modest admission of lack of knowledge:

"Gran segno di sapere è il cominciare à conoscere di non sapere, con desiderio di sapere: percioche Socrate che fu giudicato Savio dall'Oracolo di Apolline, non mostrava con tante fatiche, e tanti studii, havere imparato altro se non il conoscere ch'egli non sapeva"<sup>106</sup>

["It is a great sign of knowledge to begin to recognise that you do not know with the desire of knowing: because Socrates, who was judged wise by the Oracle of Apollo, did not pretend to have learned anything with so much labour and study besides the recognition that he did not know."]

In comparing Mona Lampiada to Socrates, a man whose wisdom was affirmed by a spokesperson for the god of prophecy, Celso acknowledges her request for more information in a highly complimentary way, transforming what could be a potentially embarrassing admission of ignorance into an affirmation of the true wisdom to be found in those who seek the knowledge they lack. Yet Celso goes still further:

"... ma voi non lo fate per non sapere, ma per usare una vostra naturale modestia, & domandate, non perciò ch'io insegni à voi, che sapete piu di me, ma à queste altre, che per essere un pochetto piu giovani vengono ad essere men pratiche di voi."<sup>107</sup>

["But you do not do it because you do not know, but to use your natural modesty, and you ask not so that I would teach you, who know more than I do,

<sup>104</sup> Cox, 'Note: Italian Dialogues Incorporating Female Speakers'.83.

<sup>105</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xix, xxi.

<sup>106</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 13r.

<sup>107</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 13r.

but these other women, who, through being a little younger, have come to be less world-wise than you.”]

Here, Celso lays himself open to accusations of flattery; if Socrates were judged wise for not claiming knowledge that he did not have, the *a fortiori* argument implied could be read as elevating his addressee above even the classical philosopher. Certainly, he asserts that she has asked a question to which she already knows the answer, declaring that her knowledge of the subject is more extensive than his own, “*che sapete piu di me*”, and attributing her question not to ignorance but to her natural modesty, “*vostra naturale modestia*”, and the hope that, in answering her question, Celso will provide useful information to the other members of the group “*non perciò ch’io insegni à voi ... ma à queste altre*”. His portrayal of Mona Lampiada in these two extracts is therefore highly complimentary: wise and knowledgeable in a way that compares favourably with at least one man, possessing the quality of modesty, eminently desirable in early modern women, and with a thoughtfulness and concern to help the other women with her in a tactful way.

As is also the case with Berenice in *Gli Asolani*, age appears to confer a social seniority upon Mona Lampiada, but the reference to the other women being younger and having less life experience to draw on may also indicate an attempt by Celso to ingratiate himself with them too. In denying that Mona Lampiada’s question really came from a position of ignorance (whether or not this was the case in reality) and instead attributing it in part to the desire to ensure the other women could learn from his answer, Celso provides a reason for their lack of knowledge which provides an innocuous explanation for the disparity. It also indicates that, for Celso, age and the accompanying life experience that it provides are more significant than gender in questions of what an individual can reasonably be expected to know.

Mona Lampiada’s question and admission of ignorance then paves the way for Celso to introduce another key Platonic allegory, one that had previously been used in *Gli Asolani*: the bisection of humanity. Indeed, in introducing it, Celso pointedly flags up its previous usage in both ancient and contemporary literature:

“Dicovi adunque ...che se voi haveste letta l’oratione d’Aristofane, recitata nel l’allegato convivio di Platone, non accaderebbe che vi dichiarissi adesso questo passo, ò se pure haveste lette certe belle stanze di Monsignor Bembo, in suà gioventù, che quasi mi verrebbe voglia di narrarvi la materia, se non che la sarebbe troppo lunga.”<sup>108</sup>

[“I say to you, therefore... that if you had read the speech of Aristophanes, relayed in the quoted dialogue of Plato, I would not need to explain this passage to you, or even if you had read certain beautiful stanzas by Mr Bembo in his youth. I almost want to narrate the subject to you, if not for the fact that it would take too long.”]

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<sup>108</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 13r,v.



We saw earlier that when Gismondo uses the story in the *Asolani*, he does not cite the Platonic source and refers to oral transmission (“non hai tu inteso dire ... ?”),<sup>109</sup> which is in stark contrast to the way that Celso introduces the story in Firenzuola’s dialogue. Here, on the contrary, we see not only that the tale is found in Plato, but the name of the specific work in which it is relayed and even the name of the character who tells it. Moreover, there are references to reading these truths, emphasised by the repetition of the subjunctive *haveste letta/e*. While for Gismondo, one courtly male talking to another may well take for granted that the other will be familiar enough with Plato to have heard discussion of the stories in the course of everyday life and to have it as a shared element of cultural capital, the same cannot be assumed of a woman in more provincial Prato. For her, therefore, and for the ladies of Prato to whom the dialogue is dedicated, it is necessary to give this information and to signpost where the source can be found, though restrictions on female education would almost certainly mean that she would need to read it in translation.

In a similar vein, after recounting the story, Celso reiterates that it originated in Plato to defend against possible detractors who, like Perottino in the *Asolani*, might try to argue that this story is just that: a story, devoid of any real-life applications. He argues:

“vi voglio avvertire, che se alcuno vi dicesse, che quella cosa del dividere è una favola da veglia, che voi rispondiate loro, che l’ha detto Platone, & che ella è una novella che raccontò un Savio filosofo in su una veglia di Platone. Se e’ saranno huomini d’ingegno, questa risposta la rintuzeraloro, se e’ saranno ignoranti, e’ saranno per forza maligni, de’ quali voi havete à tenere poco conto : percioche l’anima maligna non è capace della sapientia. Il dire che ella è una favola di Platone, denota che ella è piena di misteri alti & divini...”<sup>110</sup>

[“I want to advise you that, if someone says to you that that account of the division is just a dinner party story, you should reply to them that Plato said it and that it is a short story which a wise philosopher recounted during a dinner party in Plato. If they are men of sense, this response will refute them; if they are ignorant, it will be through intractable force and you need take little notice of them, because an intractable soul is not capable of wisdom. Saying that it is a story from Plato denotes that it is full of lofty and divine mysteries...”]

Whereas for Bembo, the source was a given, Firenzuola makes it very clear not just where the story has come from but why this matters. Saying that it is a story found in Plato, he argues, means that despite its simplicity, it contains profound truths worthy of serious reflection; the name of the renowned classical author of philosophy provides a key as to how it should be read, just as hearing that a story is written by Aesop encourages readers to search for moralising interpretations of the story even before the ultimate message of the fable is revealed.

<sup>109</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d’amore*. 55r,v.

<sup>110</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 17r,v.

Moreover, he also refers to Plato as an authority and the reactions to naming that authority as a kind of shibboleth. Faced with the knowledge that the anecdote he was attempting to dismiss comes from Plato, the wise man will cease his opposition, perhaps with some sense of shame at not having recognised the literary reference earlier, as *rintuzzare* has connotations of humiliation;<sup>111</sup> the man who is unaware or dismissive of the authority of such a cultural icon as Plato, on the other hand, is ignorant on purpose, and is therefore not worth the trouble of arguing with.

On the whole, the story is remarkably similar to the version in the *Symposium*, certainly more so than Bembo's version, which, as we have seen, reduces the initial three varieties of human to one to gloss over the homoeroticism in the original Greek dialogue. Firenzuola's retelling adopts no such strategy:

"... erano di tre ragioni, alcuni maschi in tutta due le parti: alcune femine, che furono pochi, il restante ch'era il maggiore numero, erano per l'una parte i maschi, & per l'altra femine."<sup>112</sup>

[ "... they were of three types: some masculine in both parts, others feminine (but there were few of them). Those remaining, who were greater in number, were throughout one part masculine and throughout the other, feminine." ]

This distinction is important both in terms of being closer to the original sense found in Plato and in terms of the ramifications for Firenzuola's conception of gender and sexual orientation. Bembo's heteronormativity is replaced with a subtle acknowledgement of the potential for homosexual orientations, with those who descended from the entirely male proto-humans seeking out their other half, which would also be male ("*quegli che erano, ò discenderono da quegli che erano maschi da tramendue le parti ... cercano la lora metà, ch'era un'altro maschio*"), and those descended from the entirely female adoring each other's beauty ("*Quelle ch'erano femine, o discendono da quele che erano femine in ogni parte, amano la bellezza l'una dell'altra*").

Interestingly, in the case of these homogenously gendered proto-humans, he draws a distinction between different types of love, with the result that Celso's version of the story presents a more nuanced view of homosexuality than might be expected from the Catholic abbot of a monastery in sixteenth-century Italy. Thus, he is able to distinguish between men who loved each other in ways that could be interpreted as compatible with Catholic doctrine ("*virtuosamente*"), even giving Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades as one of the examples, and men whose orientation leads them to carry out homosexual sexual activity, which he condemns, saying that such acts are done shamefully ("*impudicamente*") and by 'wicked men, unworthy of either name or mention' ("*alcuni scelerati, indegni d'ogni nome ò grido ...*"). In the same vein, he distinguishes between women who are drawn to each other's beauty in ways that could be considered pure and holy, ("*puramente &*

<sup>111</sup> Nicola Zingarelli, 'Rintuzzare', *Lo Zingarelli* 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 13v.

*santamente*”) and those who are motivated by lust for each other (“*lascivamente*”), giving the classical poet Sappho as an example of the latter group.<sup>113</sup>

Jacqueline Murray suggests that this more refined attitude towards same-sex orientation is a reflection of the Neoplatonic framework that subordinates love expressed through physical and sexual acts to spiritual love, rather than a condemnation of homosexual acts as such.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, it must be noted that, when Celso moves to discussing the heterogeneously gendered proto-humans, he does not refer to a corresponding base version of their orientation. Instead, he characterises the contemporary women who originated from the original hermaphrodite proto-humans as:

“... furono quelle donde sete discese voi, che havete il marito, & ve lo tenete caro, come Alceste moglie del Re Admeto, & altre che non ricuserebbono di morire per la salute de loro mariti: & finalmente sono tutte quelle che veggiono volentieri la faccia dell’huomo, pubblicamente però, & secondo che permettono le sante leggi.”<sup>115</sup>

[“ [the third type] were those from whom you yourselves were descended, who have husbands and hold them dear, like Alcestis the wife of King Admetus, and others who would not refuse to die for the safety of their husbands, and finally, they are all those women who look gladly upon the face of a man, but ingenuously, and in accordance with the holy laws. ”]

In this passage, it is evident that he considers the women present to be in this category, and that for Celso, the defining characteristic for this classification is their interest in men, which is respectably within the bounds of canon law and prompts wives to carry out acts of selfless love on behalf of their husbands. This is exemplified by his reference to Alcestis, who, in classical mythology, volunteered to die when the Fates allowed her husband to cheat death if someone else would be willing to take his place; interestingly, she was given as an example of women being willing to die for the one they love in the *Symposium*.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, he describes the men who were descended from the original hermaphrodite proto-humans as follows:

“Siamo noi huomini i quali, ò habbiamo moglie, ò ne cerchiamo, & finalmente son coloro, à chi nessuna altro cosa piu piace, che il bel viso di voi altre bellissime donne: che per riunisi alla loro parte, & fruir la lor bellezza non schiferebbono pericolo alcuno, come Orfero per la cara Euridice, & Caio Gracco nobile Romano per l’amata Cornelia: & come farei io... per quella cruda, la quale non si volendo accorgere, ch’ella è la mia metà, & io la sua, mi fugge come s’io fussi una qualche strana cosa.”<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 14r.

<sup>114</sup> Murray. 211.

<sup>115</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 14v.

<sup>116</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 102.

<sup>117</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 14v.

[“We men are those who either have wives, or look for them, and finally, they are those men for whom nothing would be more pleasing than the beautiful faces of you most beautiful women, who would not shrink from any danger to reunite with their other half and to enjoy their beauty, as Orpheus did for his dear Eurydice, and Gaius Gracchus the noble Roman for his beloved Cornelia, and as I would do... ”]

There are a number of parallels between Celso’s depiction of the women descended from the original hermaphrodites and the men. Firstly, just as he identifies the women present with the female half of these proto-humans, so he as the only man in the group identifies himself with the male half. Then, there is the sense that, for men as for women, marriage is their defining feature and ultimate goal; moreover, it is revealed that within the legitimising framework of heterosexual marriage, there is a strong element of mutuality. Both husband and wife enjoy looking at each other (*veggiono volentieri la faccia dell’uomo, fruir la lor bellezza*), and are willing to act in self-sacrificial ways to protect the other; wives who would die for their husbands (*non ricuserebbono di morire per la salute de loro mariti*) find their counterpart in husbands who would brave any danger (*non schiferebbono pericolo alcuno*) and thus risk death to reunite with their other half.

Even Alcestis finds a parallel in the reference to Gaius Gracchus, although, as Eisenbichler and Murray note,<sup>118</sup> it is in fact his father, the elder Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, who was intended. Plutarch, in his lives of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, relates a story that the elder Tiberius Gracchus was ordered by a soothsayer to kill one of the two snakes that were in his bed: either the male, which would result in his own death, or the female, which would result in the death of his wife Cornelia. Motivated by love for his wife and a sense of natural justice, given that he was significantly older than her, he chose to kill the male snake and died shortly afterwards.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the story recounted by Plutarch, in which a man makes an active choice to prevent the death of his wife by sacrificing his own life, is highly analogous to the story of Alcestis, in which a wife makes the decision to sacrifice her own life to ensure that her husband will live.

These correspondences reflect a certain mutuality within the idealised marital relationships Celso describes, a mutuality which is a hallmark of equality. Here, neither partner is systematically subjugated as a result of their gender role, but instead each is able to appreciate the beauty and goodness in the other and is willing to subordinate their own needs to those of their spouse. This mutuality thus also implies equality between men and women.

In case this mutuality inherent in the retelling of this story was insufficiently apparent, Celso takes pains to stress that it is to be interpreted as an argument against misogyny, explicitly telling the group of women how they are to understand the Platonic anecdote (and possibly relay it to others in their conversations):

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<sup>118</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. 75.

<sup>119</sup> Plutarch, *Lives, Volume X: Agis and Cleomenes. Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Philopoemen and Flaminius.*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, 102 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1921). 144,146.

“... & che la vuol significare quello ch’io vi ho detto, cio è che noi siamo una cosa medesima, d’una perfettion medesima : & che voi avete à cercare voi, & amare noi, & noi habbiamo à cercare voi, & amare voi, & voi senza noi niente siate, noi senza voi niente siamo, in voi è la nostra perfettione, in noi e la vostra, senza mille altri bellissimoi misterii .”<sup>120</sup>

[“... and that it is intended to signify what I have said to you, which is that we are the same one thing, of the same one perfection: that you must seek us out and love us, and we must seek you out and love you; you are nothing without us and we are nothing without you; in you is our perfection and in us is yours, not to mention a thousand other beautiful mysteries.”]

This assertion of female equality is not just unusual for the sixteenth century but, as Eisenbichler and Murray observe in their introduction to the work, actually anomalous, his evaluation of gender being ‘neither one of female inferiority nor backhanded compliment’,<sup>121</sup> but a very definite statement that women are, in essence, as good as men.

Thus far, then, we have seen a very positive picture of the depiction of women in this dialogue, yet as in the case of Bembo’s *Asolani*, we see definite instances where the author’s stated commitment to gender equality is less robust in practice than in theory. For all Celso’s assertions, it must not be forgotten that the only male character steps into the discussion to resolve the women’s difficulties and, essentially, lecture them on what beauty is; their discussion on whether or not Mona Amelia dalla Torre Nuova was beautiful needed male intervention to go anywhere.

Further evidence for this more ambivalent view towards women is found on the second day of the discussion. In response to Selvaggia’s referring to women as poor little women (“*donnicciuole*”) who are in need of illustrative examples during sermons due to their being too coarse or dull-witted (“*persone grossolane*”) to grasp the point otherwise, Celso objects to this denigration of female intelligence:

“Grossolano sarei io, se tenessi grossolane voi, & credessi assottigliar voi, che ne ingrossate à noi l’intelletto, piu di quel noi non vorremmo,”<sup>122</sup>

[“I would be dull-witted indeed, if I considered you dull-witted and believed that I could hone you, when you women dull our understanding more than we would like.”]

His words are clearly favourable towards women and their intellectual powers; he denies that they possess less refined intellects than men and says that he would be unrefined if he

<sup>120</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 17v.

<sup>121</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xxxiii.

<sup>122</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 41v.

did hold that opinion and tried to sharpen their minds, but at the same time, he has just spent two books as the only man in the group expounding the theory of beauty to the women. Granted that he was initially asked for his opinion by Mona Lampiada, (*“diteci un poco che cosa è questa bellezza, come ha da essere fatta una bella”*),<sup>123</sup> it is nonetheless striking that, if he truly considers that she knows more than him on at least some elements of the material, he does not ask for her opinion or invite her to speak too, particularly in a historical context where his request would legitimise her to take such a role. This begs the question: were his earlier comments insincere flattery, or is this a Renaissance example of mansplaining?

Incidentally, when requesting that Celso tell the group about what constitutes beauty, Mona Lampiada reveals this is not the first time he has spoken at length to women on the subject, commenting:

“io intesi dire, che insulla veglia che fece la mia sirocchia il Carenaval passato che voi ne parlaste con quelle donne si diffusamente : che M. Agnoletta mia, non hebbe altro che dire per quei parecchi dì.”<sup>124</sup>

[“I have heard it said that during the party that my sister held last Carnival, you spoke with the women there on this subject at such length that my dear Mona Agnoletta could talk of nothing else for some days afterwards.”]

It would perhaps be unfair to conclude from two examples that Celso has exhibited a consistent pattern of lecturing women about what beauty is, but it certainly does not appear an isolated incident. What is more, there is no evidence in the text for him acting in this way in mixed company, or in a group of men, calling into question his statement that he would be dull-witted if he believed that women’s minds were inferior and in need of male refinement. Though he apparently sees no contradiction between what he professes and what he does, a reader may perhaps notice it and question both the sincerity of his conviction and his self-awareness.

There is also the small matter of Selvaggia’s breasts. As part of his explanation of beauty, Celso describes idealised individual female body parts in the abstract, a strategy that recalls the literary *blasons anatomiques du corps féminin* being published around this time in France.<sup>125</sup> When he reaches the breasts of his ideal woman, he makes comments that appear to a twenty-first century reader somewhat inappropriate, though they do not appear to be recognised as such by all of his audience:

Celso: Il quale oltre alla utilità di stillare e il nutrimento a’ piccioli fanciullino, da un certo splendore, con sì nuova vaghezza, che forza ci è fermarvi sù gli occhi à nostro dispetto, anzi con gran piacere, come fo io che guardando il bianchissimo petto di una di voi: eccoci à coprir gli altari: se voi non racconciate quello velo,

<sup>123</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 9v.

<sup>124</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 9v.

<sup>125</sup> Cathy Yandell, ‘Iconography and Iconoclasm: The Female Breast in French Renaissance Literature’, *The French Review*, 83.3 (2010), 540–58. 546.

come si stava, io non seguirò piu oltre.

Mona Lampiada: Deh levalo Selvaggia, che ci hai stracco hormai. O come hai fatto bene à toglielo dal collo : vedi tu, cosi si fa. Horsu Messer Celso, seguitate l'oratione, che le reliquie sono scoperte.<sup>126</sup>

[Celso : Which, other than its utility in distilling and providing nutrition to tiny little children, gives a kind of splendour with such new beauty, that it forces us to fix our eyes there against our will, albeit with great pleasure, as I experience when I look at the pristine white chest of one of you. Look there, covering up the altars – if you don't put that veil back in place as it was before, I won't go on any further.

Mona Lampiada: Go on, lift it up Selvaggia - you've nearly worn us out. Oh, you've really done the right thing in taking it off your neck: see now how it's done. Go on, Celso, carry on with your speech, for the relics have been uncovered.”]

Though, it is not stated explicitly due to the mimetic form of the dialogue, it is clear what is happening in this short passage: Celso, while speaking about breasts in the abstract, has fixed his eyes upon Selvaggia's décolletage. In response to this attention, she moves her veil to cover herself; Celso then refuses to continue speaking unless she removes it, and Mona Lampiada intervenes to urge Selvaggia to comply with Celso's demand.

Aside from the religious imagery in the passage, imagery which refers in part to an earlier exchange between Selvaggia and Mona Ammorrhisca, as well as being a familiar trope in love poetry, what is of particular interest here is Celso's attitude towards this objectification of women, or at least, one specific woman. Not only is he completely open about the fact that he has been admiring Selvaggia's chest, but he portrays himself as almost a victim of forces beyond his control, forced against his will (*à nostro dispetto*), though admittedly with great pleasure (*con gran piacere*) to gaze at her bosom. If this profession of powerlessness in the face of female attractiveness is sincere, we might expect him to move on once Selvaggia covers up and he is free to look around more generally; however, he instead makes a demand that she uncover herself so that he can resume ogling her. Perhaps he is not as unwilling a victim of female beauty as he claims to be.

#### Breasts in Bembo and Firenzuola

At first glance, this short exchange appears to undermine drastically the earlier positivity towards women in presenting the only male character as an unapologetic ogler of women. However, this view can be problematised if we now briefly return to the *Asolani*, as the incident where Celso stares at Selvaggia's breasts is highly reminiscent of a similar

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<sup>126</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 24v.

occurrence in the earlier dialogue. In it, Gismondo, describing the pleasure that a (male) lover feels at each physical feature of his beloved, reaches the lady's chest:

Oltre accio quella parte del candidissimo petto ringuardando & lodando, che alla vista è palese, l'altra, che sta ricoperta, loda molto piu anchora maggiormente con acuto sguardo mirandola & giudicandola, merce del vestimento cortese, il quale non toglie percio sempre a riguardanti la vaghezza de dolci pomi, che resistenti al morbido drappo sogliono ben spesso della lor forma dar fede a mal grado dellusanza, che gli nasconde.

Trassero queste parole ultime giochi della lieta brigata a mirare nelpetto di Sabinetta, ilquale pareva che Gismondopiu che gli altri shavesse tolto a dipignere in maniere peraventura la vaga fanciulla, come quella, che garzonissima era, & si per questo, & si per la calda stagione, dun drappo schietto & sottilissimo vestita, la forma di due popelline tonde & sode & crudette dimostrava per la consentiente veste.

Il perche ella si vergogno veggendosi riguardare, & piu harebbe fatto, senon che Madonna Berenice accortasi di cio subitamente disse. "Questo tuo amante Gismondo per certo molto baldanzosamente guata & per minuto, poi che egli in fino drento al seno, ilquale noi nascondiamo, ci mira. Me non vorrei gia che egli guatasse cosi per sottile."

"Madonna tacete," rispose Gismondo ...

[ "... In addition to gazing at and praising that part of her most fair bosom, which is evident to the sight, the lover praises so much more the other part, which remains covered, admiring it and judging it with a piercing stare thanks to her courtly dress. For it does not always block from those looking on the beauty of those sweet apples, which, resisting the soft fabric which hides them, very often and against custom tend to attest to their shape."

At these words the eyes of the happy group were drawn to admire Sabinetta's bosom, for it seemed that Gismondo had taken it, more than any other, as a model to paint; as it happened, the beautiful young lady, who was very youthful, on account of her age and the hot weather was clothed in a diaphanous and very fine fabric and was displaying through her inviting dress the shape of her two round, firm and unripe breasts.

Because of this, she was embarrassed at seeing herself looked at, and she would have done more if Berenice, perceiving this, had not suddenly said "This lover of yours, Gismondo, stares audaciously and searchingly, seeing as he admires us down to our breasts, which we hide. I would not want him to stare at me so minutely."

"Madam, be quiet," replied Gismondo... ]



The similarities between the two passages are striking, to the extent that Firenzuola could justly be said to have rewritten the incident from Bembo. Both examples feature a man discussing breasts in the abstract before becoming distracted by the real breasts of a young woman in the group before them; in both examples, the attention of the rest of the group is then also drawn to the woman, who then becomes embarrassed at the attention; and in both examples, another, older, woman intervenes in an attempt to resolve the tension and restore a sense of equilibrium to the group. Yet despite these similarities, the different potential resolutions that are implied by the reactions of Berenice and Mona Lampiada suggest that they should be interpreted in different ways, ways that suggest that Firenzuola's pro-woman stance should be understood as more consistent than Bembo's.

A useful question to consider when examining the differences between such scenes is proposed by Helen Morales in her study in vision and narrative in *Achilles Tatius*: who benefits from the way these female characters are put on display?<sup>127</sup> In the case of Gismondo and Sabinetta in *Gli Asolani*, it appears very clear that Gismondo is benefitting from the sight of Sabinetta's décolletage and her clothes appear almost to collude with him; her dress is described as consenting, *consentiente*, in a way that seems in stark contrast to her obvious discomfort.<sup>128</sup>

Our understanding of this discomfort is heightened when we acknowledge that the ancients conceived of vision in ways that are decidedly different to our modern understanding of it. From antiquity to the seventeenth century, Morales writes, sight was understood to be corporeal, with emanations from the eye meaning that what was seen was, in a sense, touched by the seer.<sup>129</sup> In the same vein, she states: 'Part of the gendering of the visual process, then, as now, is to imagine viewing as penetrative.'<sup>130</sup> If we imagine Gismondo's leering as penetrative, this gives a new slant on the anecdote, one in which the narrator suggests that a young woman's clothing choices, made for reasons entirely unrelated to men, to some extent give male viewers a licence to touch women.

Fortunately for Sabinetta, Gismondo's comment does not pass by unremarked: Berenice observes her discomfort and responds on her behalf, indicating that she would prefer not to be observed so minutely ("*Me non vorrei gia che egli guatasse cosi per sottile*"). It is plain that this response is intended as a gentle rebuke, asserting that Gismondo has overstepped the limits of decorum in his ogling — or, at least, in being so indiscreet about it. We can thus reasonably assume that neither Sabinetta nor Berenice gain any obvious advantage from this interaction; the only beneficiaries of this viewing appear to be Gismondo and any readers titillated by the voyeuristic nature of the scene.

Contrasting this now with the same scene in the *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne*, we see a somewhat different picture emerge. Though the lack of narration means that readers are forced to guess at Selvaggia's feelings, we can try to interpret her reactions in two ways: firstly, by considering the way the relationship between Celso and Selvaggia is portrayed

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<sup>127</sup> Morales. 27.

<sup>128</sup> Clothing cannot, of course, provide any form of consent.

<sup>129</sup> Morales. 29.

<sup>130</sup> Morales. 31.

throughout the rest of the text, thereby putting this interaction into a broader context, and in assessing how Mona Lampiada's reaction differs from that of Berenice in the *Asolani*.

To deconstruct the relationship between Selvaggia and Celso, a good starting point would be to consider why Selvaggia covers herself when he ogles her; while it may appear an entirely intuitive response, it is worth questioning whether this is from embarrassment, modesty, because societal convention demands it, or for another reason altogether. In the introduction to their translation of the work, Eisenbichler and Murray write that her underlying motivation is 'partly from modesty and partly to tease him', arguing that the relationship between Selvaggia and Celso is structured within the tradition of courtly love. In support of this argument, they point out that the name Selvaggia was used by the Trecento poet, Cino da Pistoia, for his beloved.<sup>131</sup> In an era with so much emphasis on the related principles of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, using a name that had previously been bestowed on the muse and idol of a love poet would have been a clear allusion to the earlier poet and suggested a similar love interest role.

Moreover, when we return to the earlier discussion of the symbolism of the characters' names, with Celso perhaps representing the ether, we may also observe that Celso's last name is given as 'Selvaggio'. Since we are invited at the beginning of the text to understand the names of the characters as pseudonyms for real people, we know that the decision to give Celso Selvaggio and Selvaggia what is, essentially, the same name was a deliberate authorial decision. In the context of a dialogue in which the Platonic story of humans as divided creatures constantly seeking their other half, it is difficult not to see this as an obvious hint that the two are destined to be romantically involved, though hints dropped by Celso reveal that Selvaggia's reluctance means that they are not a couple. In particular, when he speaks about what men descended from the hermaphrodite proto-humans would do for their wives, he adds a reference to his own situation "... & come farei io per quella cruda, la quale non si volendo accorgere, ch'ella è la mia metà, & io la sua, mi fugge come s'io fussi una qualche strana cosa"<sup>132</sup> ("... and as I would do for that harsh one who, not wanting to realise that she is my other half, and I am hers, flees from me as if I were some strange thing").

Although the characters of Celso and Selvaggia are not in an official romantic relationship, there is nonetheless evidence from their interactions towards each other within the dialogue to indicate that they are interested in each other. To cite two specific examples from her behaviour, we note firstly that she appears jealous when Celso references a woman whom he would consider an ideal model if he were to paint a Venus, asking him who this woman is and making a reference to physical harm befalling him, "*Chi è questa, se Dio vi guardi da tutte le cose che vi posson nuocere?*"<sup>133</sup> Stronger evidence is found on the second day of the discussion when, forming a composite image of perfect beauty from the four women in the group, he discusses the perfect bosom:

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<sup>131</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xxiii.

<sup>132</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 14v.

<sup>133</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 26r.

Celso: Il petto vuol essere bianco sopra tutto: ma che bisogna perder piu tempo, il petto vuol esser come quello della Selvaggia, guardate il suo & vedrete ogni perfettione, ogni proportione, ogni vaghezza, ogni leggiadria, ogni bellezza finalmente... io per me noncredo, ne che Helena, ne che Venere, ne che la Dea della bellezza, lo havesse piu bello, ne piu mirabile.

Selvaggia: Eh andate andate, diteci come egli debbe esser fatto, & come havete costumato di fare dell'altre cose: che io non voglio, che col fingere di havermi voluto far questo favore, ò per voler la baia del fatto mio, che voi lasciate indietro la dichiarazione d'una delle piu importante parti, che secondo il mio poco giuditio, si ritrovano in una bella donna.

Celso: Infine voi mi perdonerete, e non mi basta l'animo di dirne cosa, che non sia molto minore assai che non è il bellissimo, & felicissimo esempio vostro.

Selvaggia: Consentianvi che voi diciate il vero: nondimeno io vi prego che voi dichiariate la sua bellezza, almeno per amor mio, che non mel veggio.

Celso: Almeno la lasciassi tu vedere à gli altri. Orsu adunque poi che io sono vostro prigionero, egli mi è forza fare à vostro modo...<sup>134</sup>

[Celso: The bosom must be, above all, white: but so that we do not lose any more time, the bosom must be like Selvaggia's. Look at hers and you will see every perfection, every right proportion, every gracefulness, every loveliness and, in short, every beauty... I for my own part do not believe that either Helen, nor Venus, not the goddess of beauty had a bosom more beautiful or more to be admired.

Selvaggia: Oh, come, come, tell us how it should be made and as you have been accustomed to do for the other matters. I do not want you to leave off the clarification of one of the most important parts that, in my humble opinion, are found in a beautiful woman, either from the pretence of having wanted to do me this favour, or from wanting to tease me.

Celso: Well, you will pardon me, for I do not have the brains to say anything on the subject that would not be very much less than that most beautiful and most pleasing example of yours.

Selvaggia: Granted that you're telling the truth, nonetheless, I implore you to clarify this beauty of yours, at least for my sake, because I cannot see my own.

Celso: If only you would let others see it! But since I am your prisoner, I am forced to do this your way.]

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<sup>134</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo Delle Bellezze Delle Donne*. 42r,v.

Unlike in the previous discussion, here Selvaggia shows no outward discomfort at being objectified. Indeed, she positively invites Celso to speak more on the subject of the perfect bosom, despite knowing that this will almost certainly involve him looking at, and talking about, a somewhat risqué part of her own body, one which he has already praised in the strongest possible terms.

We also see in the above example evidence of the interactions between Selvaggia and Celso more generally; of the four women, Selvaggia is the most likely to challenge Celso and their exchanges are often marked by a playful intimacy. This appears characteristic of flirting, a somewhat nebulous concept defined in a recent article as a form of communication, often between individuals with little relational history, that directly or indirectly signals attraction. The article also notes that flirting has different possible goals that can combine playfulness, sexual invitation, relational initiation, and that ‘observers or targets of flirting may not be able to accurately detect flirting when it occurs.’<sup>135</sup> Let us consider the element of flirtation in dialogues more closely.

#### Flirting in dialogue

Sexual attraction and flirting in contemporary dialogues was, in the sixteenth century, a novel innovation, but for the genre as a whole, it was nothing new. What is different is that in the classical dialogues which our Renaissance authors absorbed and imitated, the attraction was almost exclusively homoerotic.

To exemplify this, let us turn to Plato’s *Symposium*, perhaps the most famous dialogue dedicated to love from antiquity and one whose impact on Italian Renaissance representations of such discussions was enormous, as its use by Bembo and Firenzuola may suggest. In it, there are marked homoerotic overtones: one member of the party, Aristodemus, is referred to as the chief of Socrates’ lovers, “Σωκράτους ἐραστής ὦν ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα τῶν τότε”;<sup>136</sup> another, Agathon, is advised by Phaedrus that his bickering with Socrates is going to prevent him from taking his turn at giving a speech praising love, particularly so because of his good looks “ἄλλως τε καὶ καλῶ”.<sup>137</sup> Finally, the drunken gatecrasher of the party, Alcibiades, is alleged to have been possessive of Socrates ever since Socrates first fell in love with him “ἀπ’ ἐκείνου γὰρ τοῦ χρόνου, ἀφ’ οὗ τούτου ἠράσθην ... οὐτοσὶ ζηλοτυπῶν”,<sup>138</sup> and, in an attempt to drive a wedge between Socrates and Agathon, reveals his own failed attempts to seduce the older philosopher.<sup>139</sup>

Brisson comments: ‘The amorous language found in Greek literature of a certain level, and in Plato in particular, always remains discreet, but the reader should not be fooled.’<sup>140</sup> This

<sup>135</sup> Jeffrey A. Hall, Chong Xing, and Seth Brooks, ‘Accurately Detecting Flirting: Error Management Theory, the Traditional Sexual Script, and Flirting Base Rate’, *Communication Research*, 42.7 (2015), 939–58. 939-940.

<sup>136</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 82.

<sup>137</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 150.

<sup>138</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 212.

<sup>139</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 230, 240.

<sup>140</sup> Luc Brisson, ‘Agathon, Pausanias and Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*: Páiderastia and Philosophia’, in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. by James Leshner, Debra Nails, and Frisbee Sheffield,

stance is agreed upon by Halperin, who stresses the couching of eros within the *Symposium* in almost exclusively homoerotic terms.<sup>141</sup> Though it was certainly possible to ignore it and some translators and adapters, most notably Marsilio Ficino, appeared rather squeamish about it, the addition of women into dialogues written in sixteenth century Italy did not introduce an entirely new concept. Rather, it enabled this erotic dimension found in the classical dialogues to feature in these much later specimens in a way that would have been considered more acceptable according to contemporary mores.

Returning briefly to the interaction between Gismondo, Sabinetta and Berenice in the *Asolani*, another point relevant to the discussion of flirtation and gender dynamics is that Sabinetta, like the other woman in the group, is already married to someone else. While the figures of the women's husbands are shadowy, their existence is made very explicit by the narrator figure:

essi nondimeno pure con tre di loro similmente belle & vaghe giovani & di gentili costume ornate, percio che prossimani erano loro per sangue, & lunga dimestichezza con esse & con loro mariti haveano, piu ispeso & piu sicuramente si davano, che con altre, volentieri sempre in sollazzevoli ragionamenti dolci, & honeste dimore trahendo.<sup>142</sup>

[They [Perottino, Gismondo and Lavinello] nonetheless gave their time to three young women, equally beautiful and graceful and adorned with refined morals, more often and more confidently than with others, because they were close to them by blood and because they had a longstanding intimacy with both them and with their husbands, always gladly drawing pleasure from sweet and entertaining conversations and wholesome pastimes.]

It becomes therefore very apparent that Bembo intends to underline that the relationships between the speakers in the dialogue are entirely innocent: platonic, in its post-Ficinian and modern sense, indicating a relationship neither romantic nor sexual in nature. For not only does he give the information that the women are married to other people, but he also makes it clear that the three male characters in the dialogue are known to, and have good relationships with, these husbands. Such closeness would be unlikely if there were a discernible undercurrent of sexual tension in the interactions between the three wives and their kinsmen; in an era where female sexual purity was paramount, it is difficult to imagine a dynamic in which husbands would be content with their wives flirting with other men openly. Furthermore, while the conversations are pleasant and lively, they are also *honeste*, a word which connotes integrity, rectitude and, most importantly for our purposes, chastity.

The relationship between Sabinetta and Gismondo is thus totally different to the relationship between Selvaggia and Celso, though the two scenarios are remarkably similar. It makes a certain amount of sense in the context of their relationship that Celso, romantically entangled with Selvaggia, might be distracted thinking about her bosom when

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Hellenic Studies Series, 22 (Washington DC: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2007). The online version of the text that I read does not indicate page breaks, so I have been unable to provide a page reference.

<sup>141</sup> Halperin. 113.

<sup>142</sup> Bembo, *Gli Asolani di messer Pietro Bembo. Con alcune altre sue stanze d'amore*. 5r.

describing breasts in the abstract; the fact that Mona Lampiada sides with him, rather than criticising him as Berenice criticises Gismondo, suggests that she is aware that this is not harassment that she need be concerned about, and that Selvaggia is receiving some benefit from this interaction. On the other hand, in the example in the *Asolani*, where there has been no indication that the relationship between Sabinetta and Gismondo has ever been anything other than that of friends and kin, such overt sexualisation is uncomfortable, disrupting the decorum of the text.

Speculating as to the reasons why the two dialogues present the same scene in such contrasting ways, a likely consideration is the time at which each author was writing. Bembo, whose dialogue was published in 1505, was one of the earliest authors of Renaissance dialogues that include women. We know that he had been educated in Greek and is likely to have read the *Symposium* in the original, and therefore to have been able to appreciate the homoerotic content of the original, explained away allegorically in Marsilio Ficino's Latin and vernacular adaptations.<sup>143</sup> It seems highly plausible that Bembo wished to include some element of romance and flirtation, as found in the *Symposium*, but in a heterosexual form that would have been more acceptable to his readers. However, being earlier in the tradition of dialogues that included female speakers, he was also constrained by a need to be respectable, to show that the women present are respectable married women and therefore, there is a limit to how much flirting he can portray. There is certainly a sense with Gismondo that his ogling of Sabinetta, as with his lewd remark to Berenice and damning-with-faint-praise horse comparison to Lisa, is as much about power as sexual attraction. Firenzuola, on the other hand, writing decades on, is in a context where female speakers are somewhat less of a novelty, enabling him to build on the potential for flirting set up by Bembo and rewrite the scene in a more palatable way.

#### d'Aragona as a Woman Writing Dialogue

Thus far in the discussion of the depiction of gender in sixteenth-century dialogues, we have focused on dialogues that feature female characters but that were, ultimately, written by men. As a counterpoint to this, let us now examine a dialogue written by a female author, examining the way that she depicts the female speaker within her dialogue, her use of classical precedent as part of this strategy, and, crucially, to what extent this is consistent with the portrayal of women in the dialogues by her male counterparts.

The dialogue chosen for examination is Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore* (1547), which depicts a conversation that allegedly took place at the author's house between herself,<sup>144</sup> Benedetto Varchi, and Lattanzio Benucci before an audience of other literarily-minded (and probably male) individuals.

Unlike in Bembo's dialogue, where there is little evidence to support the notion that the conversation really took place, and in Firenzuola's dialogue, where the female characters are allegedly thinly-disguised real individuals, there is less distancing the characters from the real world in D'Aragona's dialogue. Benucci and Varchi were both real, historical figures who

<sup>143</sup> Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance*. 265.

<sup>144</sup> That the character of Tullia represents the author is not as straightforward a point as it might initially appear, a fact revealed by the dialogue's paratext and discussed in the chapter on self-presentation.

are known to have frequently participated in the literary circle d'Aragona had gathered around her, with Varchi actually considered 'the most influential man of letters in Florence' at this time.<sup>145</sup> D'Aragona, on the other hand, was a *cortigiana onesta*, an honourable courtesan, though as Masson notes, the main difference between a courtesan and a common prostitute was money; the label *cortigiana onesta* was a euphemism because 'it would have been awkward to refer to these beautiful, much courted, and often gifted women as whores.'<sup>146</sup>

Admittedly, this was not the first occasion in which Tullia d'Aragona had appeared as a speaking character in a literary dialogue; in 1542, five years prior to the publication of her own dialogue, Sperone Speroni had published a *Dialogo de amore* in which Tullia featured as a speaking character. However, in that dialogue, she fulfils a more traditional role, which Smarr explains as permitting her to 'graciously ask wiser men for their opinions,' while 'her own opinions are considered dangerous, and her attempt to imitate a "real" poet is mocked and halted.'<sup>147</sup> The argument put forward by Smarr that d'Aragona's dialogue was in response to Speroni's earlier dialogue is highly convincing; here we see a female author reacting to her own depiction in a contemporary's writings by producing her own version in which she can portray herself in a more flattering light.

In this, she is exceptional, for while physically present female characters were a recent addition to the subgenre of love dialogues, they were inevitably written by men and responded to the conversations unfolding around them in ways that their male authors felt women would (or should) respond. The parallel with the modern hashtag, #menwritingwomen, is inescapable here, revealing the at times stark differences between how real women depict themselves to how women written by men do. d'Aragona, as a woman, had the ability to write a female participant in the discussion from a perspective genuinely grounded in female experience; the singularity of this contribution to dialogic writings is summed up by Russell, who declares, 'For a woman to enter the ongoing debate on human love was an unprecedented occurrence and, in cultural and social history, would be a unique event for centuries to come'.<sup>148</sup>

D'Aragona was no doubt aware of how anomalous her production of a philosophical dialogue was and Tullia appears no less conscious of her atypical position as a female speaker, which two examples may suggest. First, when Varchi arrives to the gathering after the others have already begun speaking, Tullia welcomes him but expresses doubt whether he will feel welcome when he understands that he is to debate with a woman:

"Ma io per me dubito più tosto che non vi abbia a parer di stare anzi a disagio che no, e per questo vi sapesse male di esser venuto: e massimamente toccando il favellare a me per le cagioni che intenderete; la quale oltra lo esser donna (le quali voi per non so che vostre ragioni filosofiche riputate men degne, e men

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<sup>145</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 25.

<sup>146</sup> Masson. 9,5.

<sup>147</sup> Smarr, 'A Dialogue of Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni'. 207.

<sup>148</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 21.

perfette degli uomini) non ho, come ben sapete, nè dottrina di cose, nè ornamenti di parole.”<sup>149</sup>

[“But I, for my part, am uncertain whether you might feel more uncomfortable being here than not, and for this reason, you might regret having come, most of all because it is my turn to speak, for the reasons you are about to hear. For I, in addition to being a woman (whom for some philosophical reason you consider less worthy and less perfect than men), do not possess, as you well know, either learning in these matters, or verbal ornamentation.”]

Here, the character of Tullia acknowledges the potential discomfort that Varchi (and possibly, indeed, her readers) may feel upon witnessing the highly unusual spectacle of a woman, considered philosophically inferior, entering into a learned debate with a man; she also admits to a lack of formal education and training in rhetoric, which would have been typical of women in her day. The position that she suggests that Varchi might hold is consistent with what we know of his views; he gave a lecture on human nature at the Florentine Academy in early 1547, in which he argued for the passive role of women in procreation and their mental inferiority, comparing the subordination of women in contemporary society to the human treatment of animals.<sup>150</sup>

However, this admission is perhaps less self-effacing than it appears at first glance. For, although the potential for misgivings about having a woman speak are aired, we must also note that the reference to it being Tullia’s turn to speak (*toccando il favellare a me*) indicates that the rest of the group had not allowed her gender to be a barrier to her taking an active role within the discussion; indeed, turn taking is associated with fairness and equality, suggesting that to some extent she is viewed as an equal by the other members of the literary circle. Moreover, the modesty in her declaration of being uneducated and unable to express her opinions eloquently is revealed in the conversation that follows, in which she demonstrates a clear ability to articulate her ideas and extensive reading on the subject; we are reminded of the classical modesty topos, based on an inversion in which ‘the less physical, social or political power one presents oneself as having, the more rhetorical power one has’.<sup>151</sup>

Finally, in admitting that there are reasons that Varchi might feel uncomfortable in debating with her, she provides his character in the dialogue with an opportunity to reject the imputation that he would be unwilling to discuss the limits of love with her and, what is more, to praise her fulsomely:

“Dunque sarò io sì ignorante, sì vile, sì ingrata, che non conoscerò, non gusterò, non loderò quella bellezza, quella virtù, quella cortesia, la quale ama, ammira e

<sup>149</sup> d’Aragona, *Della infinita’ d’amore*. 12.

<sup>150</sup> d’Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 37.

<sup>151</sup> Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authority in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994). 6.



onora chiunque la ha mai o veduta per se medesimo, o udita raccontar da altrui?"<sup>152</sup>

["So will I be so ignorant, so base, so ungrateful, that I will not recognise, not appreciate, not praise that beauty, that virtue, that courtesy, which anyone who has ever either seen it for himself or heard it recounted by others loves, admires and honours?"]

A second example of Tullia's keen appreciation of her gender comes much later in the dialogue, when Varchi attempts to use Petrarch's poems as evidence for women's inferior capacity for love:

"Ma bisognava che madonna Laura avesse avuto a scrivere ella altrettanto di lui, quanto egli scrisse di lei, e avereste veduto, come fosse ita la bisogna."<sup>153</sup>

["But madonna Laura needed to have written herself about him as much as he wrote about her — you'd see then, how necessity would be in that case."]

This assertion of the lack of opportunities granted to women to have their voices and perspectives heard in the literary canon is striking, reminiscent of a similar discussion on male and female romantic constancy in Jane Austen's later novel *Persuasion* (1817), but the rhetorical force is increased by the decided, if somewhat problematic, relationship between the character of Tullia and the historical figure of d'Aragona the author. Not only is Tullia, unlike Austen's Anne Elliot, conversing with a character with whom her real counterpart is known to be romantically involved, raising the dramatic tension, but d'Aragona's literary reputation prior to this dialogue hinged in large measure upon her poetic compositions in the fashionable Petrarchan vein. This means that, unlike Petrarch's Laura, destined to be a silent muse whose real opinions have gone unrecorded, the figure of Tullia d'Aragona is in a position to tell the female side of the story. Indeed, Ita Mac Carthy writes thus:

A clear aim of hers is to offer a gendered perspective on the standard view of love, and Tullia makes it very clear that she speaks as a woman on behalf of all those silent female figures around whom love theories proliferated and flourished across the centuries.<sup>154</sup>

Though it is evident that d'Aragona is conscious of her anomalous status as a lone female author in a male-dominated subgenre, we also see clear evidence of her attempting to situate herself and her work firmly within the tradition, emphasising the continuity between this dialogue, its ancient origins, and the more modern appropriations of the genre flourishing in literary culture. As part of this, she notably casts herself in the role of Diotima, as this short exchange will reveal:

Tul. ... che a dir il vero, non mi par saper nulla, se non ch'io non so cosa alcuna.

<sup>152</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 13.

<sup>153</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 31-32.

<sup>154</sup> Ita Mac Carthy, *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). 99.

Var. Non sarebbe mica poco cotesto; e vi potreste agguagliare a Socrate, che fu il più Savio uomo, e il migliore di tutta Grecia.

Tul. Non lo dissi in cotesto senso io. Voi andate troppo assottigliando le cose. Ma, se egli fu sì buono e sì santo, perchè non andate voi imitando? che, come sapete, conferiva ogni cosa con la sua Diotima, e imparava da lei tante belle cose, e specialmente nei misteri d'amore.

Var. Che fo io tuttavia?

Tul. Fate il contrario di quello che faceva egli: perciocchè egli apparava, e voi insegnate.<sup>155</sup>

[Tul: But to tell the truth, I don't seem to know anything, except that I don't know anything at all.

Var: That would be no small thing, and you would be able to compare yourself to Socrates, who was the wisest and best man in all of Greece.

Tul: I did not mean it in that sense; you're putting too fine a point on things. But if he was so good and so holy, why don't you imitate him? For he, as you know, discussed everything with his dear Diotima and learned from her so many splendid things, especially about the mysteries of love.

Varchi: Isn't that what I'm doing even now?

Tullia: You're doing the opposite to what he did; for he used to learn from her, and you are teaching.]

The Socratic reference here is twofold; d'Aragona has Tullia both allude to and then modestly reject the Socratic paradox, a classical allusion also featured in *Firenzuola*, but then undercuts her profession of ignorance, urging Varchi to follow the example of Socrates and to learn from a woman — who is, of course, herself. She therefore dismisses the parallel that Varchi draws between herself and Socrates only to unselfconsciously assume the role of Socrates' teacher.

In the previous dialogues that include women that we have seen, the women have been much demurer, allowing the male characters in the group to speak at length and only offering the occasional comment. This subordinate role, particularly when detailed expositions are necessary, is in many respects unsurprising; as Cox observes, during this period, women were often considered stand-ins for an unlearned audience, because the restrictions placed on female education meant that they could reasonably be expected to be ignorant on a variety of topics.<sup>156</sup> Yet the convention that female characters are comparatively (and decorously) ignorant and, for the most part, listen to the protracted

<sup>155</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 27.

<sup>156</sup> Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*. 45.

speeches of men only draws into sharper focus how powerful Tullia's appropriation of Diotima's role is.

Diotima is, of course, as we have established, one of the few precedents from antiquity of a woman in a dialogic text, and one with the authority to correct a young Socrates with a philosophical interpretation of love that is still central to his thinking many years later. But this is not the only reason that Diotima is a fitting parallel for d'Aragona to invoke; there is also the matter of her social role. For Diotima is never actually called a priestess directly within the *Symposium*, though the detail of her using prayer to avert a plague strongly suggests this; her conflation in antiquity with the historical courtesan Aspasia, also associated with Socrates, appears to have continued into the sixteenth century. The ambiguity over Diotima's career thus enables her to become a precedent for d'Aragona: an exemplum of a respectable courtesan who, through her conversation with a leading intellectual, made a significant contribution to philosophy. What is more, the perception of Diotima as a courtesan legitimises the use of practical experience as an argument against thoughtlessly accepting the words of authorities, including the ancients themselves, as automatically and objectively true.

Legitimising real-world experience as a form of discourse reduces the advantage that Varchi has over Tullia in the discussion: for, while a woman could not be seriously expected to challenge the leading Florentine scholar on purely academic grounds due to the disparities in education, it is not unreasonable to expect a courtesan to be able to contribute something more practical on a subject highly relevant to her profession. Tullia therefore can confidently reject the authority of centuries of male philosophical writings when she asserts that she places her observations and insights on love above them in coming to a conclusion about what love is, "alla speriienza, alla quale sola credo molto più che a tutte le ragioni di tutti i filosofi",<sup>157</sup> ("to experience, whom alone I believe much more than all the reasons of all the philosophers").

Leushuis comments on the alternating authoritative voice between the two principal speakers,<sup>158</sup> and it is interesting to note that, in the discussion of literary works on love, Tullia's overt preference for more contemporary and grounded information has exerted a significant influence on Varchi. For the leading Florentine intellectual is made, in the dialogue, to express an unequivocal preference for a modern work, Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*, above all writings on love both current, and from antiquity, saying "*Tra tutti quelli che ho letti io, così antichi come moderni, che abbiano scritto di amore in qualunque lingua, a me piace più Filone che niuno... molti hanno scritto di amore... ma io prepongo Filone a tutti*",<sup>159</sup> ("Among all the works that I have read, both ancient and modern, that men have written on love in whatever language, I like Filone more than any other... Many have written on love ... but I place Filone above them all.") It was not uncommon during this period for dialogues to be referred to by a subtitle drawn from the name of the principal speaker in the dialogue,<sup>160</sup> so readers would have understood that the reference is to Ebreo's dialogue

<sup>157</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 35.

<sup>158</sup> Leushuis. 121.

<sup>159</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 63, 64.

<sup>160</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. xxxvii.

between Filone and Sofia. In real life, Varchi is known to have appreciated Ebreo's writing but rather more equivocally.<sup>161</sup>

A point of continuity between d'Aragona's dialogue and previous examples of the genre is, of course, the element of flirtation. This is most apparent when Tullia and Varchi, lovers in real life,<sup>162</sup> debate, with Masson characterising Benucci's role in the text as *tertium quid*,<sup>163</sup> though the relationship between the two main characters is never openly declared within the dialogue, Leushuis comments that 'a certain degree of intimate innuendo dominates this exchange'.<sup>164</sup> As in Firenzuola's dialogue, we see rapid-fire, back-and-forth exchanges, but we also see what appears to be a fascinating allusion to (sexual) bondage. Exulting in having lured Varchi into her Socratic trap, Tullia declares, "*che vi ho saputo anch'io carruolare questa volta tanto, che non vi è rimaso gretola alcuna da poterne uscire.*"<sup>165</sup> ("that I too have learned how to reel you in so much this time that there is no gap left for you to escape.") The image is somewhat convoluted, with *gretola* literally meaning a bar of a cage and *carruolare* often used for winding up wool into a tight ball; though the conceit is clearly metaphorical, the imagery of imprisonment and bondage is striking, particularly taking into account the possible gendered undertones behind the language of wool production.

The image of a woman trapping her male lover and binding him also plays into a trope from classical love elegy, the *servitium amoris* trope, in which male writers of love poetry claim to be captured by and enslaved to their mistresses. Lyne dates this tendency to the poetry of Propertius,<sup>166</sup> which begins with the famous line *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis*<sup>167</sup> (Cynthia first captured wretched me with her eyes), indicating entrapment if not outright slavery; the poem later includes a direct mention of her using chains, *dulcia vincla*, on him.<sup>168</sup> Here, though, it is not Tullia's eyes, or other corporeal features that capture Varchi, but her intellect in using his own words to trap him. This presents a rather different view of women's attractions than was seen in the other two case studies, parallel to the larger and more assertive role that Tullia is allowed to play in her text.

The spectres of previous dialogic discussions of love are also confronted head-on, with Tullia directly addressing the romantic and sexual elements present in dialogues from antiquity:

Tul. 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.

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<sup>161</sup> Delfina Giovannozzi, 'Leone Ebreo in Tullia D'Aragona's *Dialogo*. Between Varchi's Legacy and Philosophical Autonomy', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2019, 1–16. 5.

<sup>162</sup> Curtis-Wendlandt. 85.

<sup>163</sup> Masson. 122.

<sup>164</sup> Leushuis. 115.

<sup>165</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 42.

<sup>166</sup> R.O.A.M Lyne, 'Servitium Amoris', *The Classical Quarterly*, 29.1 (1979), 117–30.

<sup>167</sup> Propertius, *Elegies*, trans. by G.P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library, 18 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press). 38.

<sup>168</sup> Propertius. 274.

Varchi. Io non dico che Socrate e Platone non amassero i gioveni 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.<sup>169</sup>

[Tullia: I had understood that Socrates and Plato not only loved young men publicly, but gloried in it, and wrote dialogues about it, as we see even now in Alcibiades and Phaedrus, where they speak of love in a very amorous way.

Varchi: I do not say that Socrates and Plato did not love young men publicly and didn't glory in it and that they didn't write dialogues discussing love in a very amorous way, but I do say that they did not love them to that end which the common herd thinks of, and which it appears that you yourself mean.]

It is apparent here that Varchi is mounting a typical defence of the homosexual love discussed in Plato's dialogues by denying that this love included a sexual component; it is probably not coincidental that in real life, the historical Varchi was obliged on more than one occasion to affirm that his love for his younger, male, students was purely philosophical.<sup>170</sup> In justifying this more elevated form of love, he repeats arguments highly familiar to readers of the *Symposium*, specifically the speech of Diotima:

“Che so pure che voi sapete che come i corpi, che sono pregni desiderano di generare, così anzi molto più fanno gli animi gravidi; onde Socrate e Platone, i quali avevano gli animi pieni di ogni bontà, colmi d'ogni dottrina, carichi d'ogni virtù, e finalmente pregni di tutte le maniere di begli e santissimi costume, non desideravano altro che partorire e generare cosa simigliante a sè... E questo è il vero e proprio amor virtuoso, il quale è tanto più degno dell'altro, quanto il corpo è men perfetto dell'anima: e tanto meritano lode maggiore questi amanti, quanto è più lodevole un generare un bell'animo, che fare un bel corpo.”<sup>171</sup>

[For I know too that you know that just as bodies which are pregnant long to give birth, so pregnant minds want this even more. Hence Socrates and Plato, who had minds full of every goodness, replete with every doctrine, rich in every virtue, and, in short, pregnant with all types of beautiful and most holy morals, longed for nothing other than to give birth and to create something similar to themselves. And this is the right and proper virtuous love, which is as much more worthy than the other as the body is less perfect than the soul; these lovers deserve just as much greater praise as it is more praiseworthy to give birth to a fine mind than to make a beautiful body.]

<sup>169</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 70.

<sup>170</sup> d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. 35.

<sup>171</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 71.

The image of pregnant souls is one of the most striking ones from Diotima's speech, for it transforms a categorically female, embodied experience into a more metaphorical phenomenon that can be experienced by men; she declares emphatically that all men are pregnant in body and soul, "κυοῦσι γάρ ... πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν".<sup>172</sup> Here, Varchi appropriates the pregnancy metaphor from Plato's *Symposium*, anchoring this part of the discussion firmly within the classical tradition.

A possible feminist reading of the pregnancy metaphor we might consider today is whether the subordination of literal to metaphorical generation is a consequence of the fact that men cannot give birth, and, since they are excluded from this form of reproduction, seek to denigrate it.<sup>173</sup> This is not, however, what Tullia takes from it; her concern is whether women can be loved in this philosophical way or whether their gender and the perception of them as innately inferior automatically precludes them from this kind of intimacy. She therefore challenges him to say that they can, arguing "*chè 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 dire a certi*" ("Because I do not yet think that you want to say that women do not have the same intellectual spirit as men, and that they are not of the same species, as I have heard certain men say").

Varchi's response is to agree, affirming, "*io dico che non solo si possono amar le donne di amore onesto e virtuoso, ma che si dee.*"<sup>174</sup> ("I say not only that women can be loved with an honest and virtuous love, but that they must be"). In this exchange between them, the questioning of the concept of love as discussed in an enormously influential, male-centred text is used to support a rather different view, one that rejects the perception of philosophy as an entirely masculine domain and legitimises the participation of both Tullia, in the dialogic text, and d'Aragona, in the wider cultural discussion.

It is also vital to note that what Varchi agrees to is that women have the intellectual capacity to participate in theoretical and philosophical discussions on the nature of love, rather than that they have sufficient willpower and self-control to prevent discussions on love with men becoming sexual. The focus is therefore not on the conventional expectation of women that they will be chaste and on the sexual double standard, but on their ability to use their minds in the same way that men do. In this way, through the character of Varchi, d'Aragona can make a confident statement about women's intellectual equality and their right to participate in the social and literary culture that already existed.

## Conclusion

<sup>172</sup> Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. 190.

<sup>173</sup> Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). 132-33.

<sup>174</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinita' d'amore*. 72.

Smarr's article comparing the use of the dialogue genre in two later dialogues on women raises a salutary point with which to begin a conclusion to this chapter:<sup>175</sup> we must be careful not to generalise based on a couple of examples. For this reason, though it is certainly possible to highlight commonalities between the case studies assessed here, and to extrapolate more generally, it would be foolish to pronounce that, from these three examples, all male authored dialogues differ from all female authored dialogues in one or a number of ways.

Despite these limitations, there are nonetheless ideas that merit restating and emphasising at the present time. Firstly, it is evident that all three dialogues have made explicit reference to Plato's *Symposium*. Whilst to a certain extent this is expected, since the themes of love and beauty, so prominent in all three, are discussed at length in the earlier Platonic text, it may also point to a certain discomfort in giving women a speaking role in a previously male-dominated genre. Especially when the social role of women in sixteenth-century Italy is taken into account, we can appreciate the perceived need for a legitimising classical precedent that includes a woman in an authoritative, if contained, role to justify including women within Renaissance dialogues, where their role is often simultaneously less contained but also less authoritative.

Through his justification of female participation in dialogue at the start of book 3 and the assertion of equality with men in retelling the Platonic story of the division of humanity, Bembo sets up a model for dialogists of a way to include women in their idealised conversations in a socially acceptable way. The invocation of the precedent of the *Symposium* in Aristophanes' story and in the conversation with the hermit reported by Lavinello firmly situates the *Asolani* within the respectable classical tradition, despite being written in the vernacular. Moreover, the female roles throughout the dialogue are decorously small, reflecting the implausibility of expecting even comparatively well-educated women to have the education necessary to debate with men, as well as the wider social norm expecting women to be chaste, obedient and, crucially, silent.

Yet in addition to reflecting the social reality of the era in which he was writing, the limits placed on the participation of Berenice, Lisa and Sabinetta make Bembo's assertions that women have the right to participate in these discussions ring oddly hollow. There is no authoritative female role permitted in this dialogue, no space for an overtly feminine Diotima figure to explain the higher purpose of love. Finally, the criticism, objectification and dehumanisation the women within the dialogue face when they attempt to express criticism or challenge the men dominating the discussion suggests a certain cultural ambivalence towards women in dialogue, particularly if we consider the character of the main offender, Gismondo, as partly an autobiographical mask for the author.

Firenzuola's later dialogue builds on the *Asolani*, including rewriting a scene of objectification in a way that foregrounds the erotic, rather than the power, dimensions of the interaction, but his alter ego Celso is unable to recognise the limitations of his professions of female equality. Here, it is tempting to ascribe differences in the presentation

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<sup>175</sup> Janet Levarie Smarr, 'The Uses of Conversation: Moderata Fonte and Edmund Tilney', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 32.1 (1995), 1–25.

of women in this classically-derived genre to the gender of their respective authors, with the educated (and not entirely respectable) female author Tullia d'Aragona better able to envisage women as able to surpass their prescribed social role to spar intellectually with men than her male counterparts. However, to make a definitive statement for all female-authored dialogues is beyond the scope of this thesis; studies of a wider range of dialogues that include female speakers, including dialogues on subjects other than love and beauty, could provide more categorical answers to the questions raised by the inclusion of women in Renaissance dialogues.

Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of d'Aragona's approach must not be overlooked. In the examples by Bembo and Firenzuola, female characters may be physically present, unlike Diotima, but they may not speak on equal terms as the men and are primarily content to sit and listen to the male speakers. By contrast, d'Aragona's Tullia is able to hold her own in debate with Varchi, with the alternation of the authoritative role suggesting equality between them. In a similar vein, while the presence of female characters enables all three dialogues to include the erotic dimension that is conspicuous in Plato's *Symposium*, Bembo and Firenzuola's female characters are overtly objectified, whether willingly or unwillingly, while the sexual attraction between Tullia and Varchi operates on a more cerebral level. Whether through her gender, her profession or another aspect of her identity entirely, it is only d'Aragona who can be understood as an heir to Diotima.



## Conclusion

Dialogue, like conversation, flows, meanders, and converges, which can obscure the conclusions to individual lines of argumentation. Imagine how boring and didactic our interactions with others would be if, at the end of each one, we always summed up the key points we had made. Moreover, if a discussion were somewhat heated or did not end with a clear resolution, there is a reasonable chance the participants would disagree over which key points should be taken from the exchange, and the argument might well break out afresh.

Academic writing is different: more structured, signposted, its monologic nature enabling a greater sense of directedness. If my conclusions have not become clear with each successive chapter, I have failed at conveying the message of my research. Nonetheless, there is within scholarly convention the custom of the conclusion, in which the writer and researcher can recapitulate their findings and draw together any threads not fully woven into the body of their text to provide a satisfying ending to their thesis. What follows will be my attempt to do just that.

The first salient point that bears restating is that 'antiquity' covers an enormous chronological span. Periodisation is, of course, necessary for anyone who wishes to talk about the past in any but the most general terms, but the circumscription of 'classical literature' and its separation from more recent creations obscures the timespans involved, which makes it harder to see that already in the ancient world, writers such as Cicero, and Lucian were producing acts of reception of Platonic texts that had, for centuries, been canonical. Corollary to this is the precept that immediately follows: that if the dialogues of Cicero and Lucian are already Platonic reception, then subsequent dialogues based on them must also be Platonic reception, filtered through their more recent embodiments. Consequently, the tripartite division of Renaissance dialogues into ones influenced by Plato, Cicero and Lucian in the most general terms is not entirely valid; instead, we should look to the specific Platonic, Ciceronian, Lucianic (and, indeed, Plutarchan, Tacitean, Xenophontic...) resonances within each work to explore where and how they engage with any and each of their predecessors and the lengthy history of the genre.

A motif central to this research has been the concept of precedent. While to an extent this is self-evident, an inevitable finding in a reception project, it bears stating because the relationship between Renaissance culture and the ancient world was so different to our relationship to it. While today, classicists may struggle to explain why their research is relevant in a society where the cultural history of the ancient Mediterranean is just one of a plurality of former civilisations and mythologies, for an early modern scholar, this same cultural history represented the mainstay of their education and their membership of elite, intellectual or sophisticated society. In addition, in an era of change, antiquity was considered an apex of culture, an example of how a real Western society had achieved remarkable things in military, linguistic and artistic spheres. Consequently, when writers sought to justify themselves in potentially contentious statements or present themselves in

the best possible light, the example of the ancient world could be invoked to align themselves with predecessors who were beyond reproach; we have seen this in the invocation of Diotima in dialogues that included female speakers, as well as in the polyvalent usage of antiquity to support differing solutions to the *questione della lingua*.

Yet it was more than simply the prestige of the genre's connection with both the ancient world and with its culturally elevated philosophers that led Bembo to use it to present his archaising Tuscan solution in his *Prose della volgar lingua*; significant, too, was its status as a form that explicitly stages the act of communication. Although dialogue is not, perhaps, the most intuitive way to explain morphology, the genre has the advantage of enabling the persuasion of Strozzi to add rhetorical force to the arguments put forward in favour of the vernacular by the other speakers. Furthermore, by showing these other speakers agreeing enthusiastically to lines of reasoning that have not been explored to their fullest potential, Bembo can conceal or skate over inconsistencies that diminish the overall case that he puts forward.

In terms of self-presentation, more can be added, for the *Prose* (1525) also marks a departure from the self-presentation strategies used in his earlier dialogue, the *De Aetna* (1496). Language, narrative framework, and the presence or absence of the author afford various options which can play into (or, in the case of the *De Aetna*, possibly detract from) the creation of self that Bembo puts forward in these dialogues. The chapter also explored issues of authorial control, refuting the notion that intention to publish is entirely synonymous with self-presentation intent, as well as scrutinising the metaliterature around two Renaissance dialogues to explore how this could be used to position the author in relation to their text and wider examples of the genre.

The final theme covered in the thesis is that of gender, evaluating the presentation and inclusion of women in Cinquecento dialogues both in relation to the contemporary society of the author and the authorising precedent of antiquity. In this, we see both development and regression: development in that Renaissance dialogues built upon the works of their ancient predecessors to enable women to appear within the relayed conversations in their own right, but regression in that the social realities for women meant that their participation was often more restricted than the reported speech in ancient examples. Although Diotima and the *Symposium* more generally were invoked in all three of the case studies, only Tullia d'Aragona, a courtesan of literary repute, was able to depict a female speaker with the decisive presence and intellectual clout to live up to this model, with the professions of female equality made by male authors of dialogue often sounding hollow.

As for possibilities for future research, there are two potential directions that appear to follow logically on from this work. Firstly, further research could take a broader approach and usefully explore dialogues produced outside the Italian peninsula and the islands, outside the chronological span of the sixteenth century, or both, comparing traditions and developments of dialogic writing over a wider extent of space and time. Alternatively, a future scholar could take a deeper approach and explore one of these immensely weighty facets of the Cinquecento dialogue as classical reception in a depth that has not been possible within the scope of a PhD thesis.

Yet these are not the only options: just as conversations can digress when one speaker takes a small detail and develops it, so too does academia. Indeed, though today's readers of this thesis might not have received a humanist education focused so acutely on the pursuit of eloquence and the importance of conversation as a means to the truth, there is nonetheless a certain dialogicity implicit within twenty-first century academia, with new contributions of knowledge building on, responding to, and at times correcting previous works of scholarship.

Perhaps the scholarly discourse might be more akin to a Twitter thread for its asynchronicity than a face-to-face conversation in real time, but such asynchronous interactions are still a form of discussion, with the same potential for detours, digressions, and unexpected tangents. Thus, I send my thesis out into the wider world with suggestions as to where the conversation about Renaissance reception of classical dialogues might go next, but with an awareness that I am not a narrator or author-figure; I am merely a speaking character. Ultimately, any discussion that is begun, or reignited, as a result of this thesis will be, itself, part of a wider critical dialogue about the discipline of Classics, how it is relevant to today's culture, and how the ancient Mediterranean has been received in societies from the Fall of Rome onwards.

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