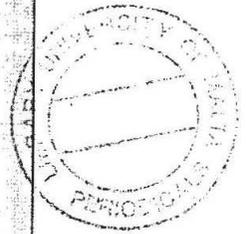


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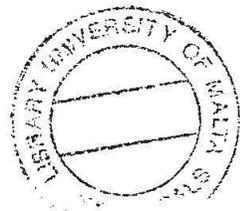
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SHAKESPEARE'S DEBT TO BERNI

Roger Prior

The extent of Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian has long been a disputed question, but there is now compelling evidence that he read Ariosto in the original. Recent research shows that he used a passage of eight stanzas from the latter's romantic epic *Orlando Furioso* as a source for both *Love's Labour's Lost* (V.ii.638–659) and *Othello* (III.iv.62–75).¹

Ariosto was not his only Italian source for *Othello*. He almost certainly read the source-story for that play, Cinthio's tale of the Moor in the *Hecatommithi*, in the original language.² In this article I shall show that he had at hand a third Italian work as he wrote *Othello* – Francesco Berni's *Orlando Innamorato* – and that he also made use of it when writing *Love's Labour's*, just as he did with Ariosto.

Berni's *Orlando Innamorato* (1541) is not a wholly original creation. It is essentially a re-working, or *rifacimento*, of Boiardo's epic of the same name. Boiardo's poem had the disadvantage of being written in the dialect of his native Ferrara, and was therefore less accessible to readers. In 1541 Berni published his version, rewritten in the better known Tuscan dialect, and in the process added many stanzas of his own. From this time onwards the *Orlando Innamorato*

1. R. Prior, "Shakespeare's debt to Ariosta", *N&Q*, ccxlvii (2001), 289–92. References are to the Arden editions of *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (1996) and *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (1998). All italics are mine.

2. Arden *Othello*, 368–87.

was usually read either in Berni's *rifacimento* or in that of Lodovico Domenichi (1545).³

In the passage from which Shakespeare borrows – canto 51, stanzas 1–16 – the first five stanzas and the preceding “Argomento” are Berni's invention. The remaining eleven are his version of Boiardo's original, comprising stanzas 3–13 of Book II, canto 22. Berni omitted the first two stanzas of Boiardo's canto, but there is evidence that Shakespeare borrowed from them as well. It seems clear that both Boiardo's original and Berni's re-working were available to him.⁴

The most obvious example of Berni's influence on *Othello* is the close parallel between his first stanza and lines 159–164 of *Othello* III.iii. The similarity was noticed as long ago as 1823 by William Stewart Rose in his supposed “translation” of Berni.⁵ It was later pointed out by George Brandes, who quoted the first six lines of the canto in his *William Shakespeare*.⁶ But neither author explored the parallels in detail, nor did they realise that Shakespeare's borrowing extends for at least another fifteen stanzas.

Berni's theme in the first five stanzas of canto 51 is the theft of reputation, and in particular of a soldier's reputation. This theme is so important in *Othello* that it may have been what drew Shakespeare's attention to the Berni passage in the first place, and it is worth quoting the first stanza in full.⁷

3. See H.H. Blanchard, “Spenser and Boiardo”, *PMLA*, 40 (1925), 828–51.

4. To give two brief examples among many, the conqueror “Alessandro” is mentioned in Boiardo's stanza 1. Compare “Alisander” in *LLL*, with six occurrences in the scene of the Worthies (v.ii) compared to three of “Alexander”. At *LLL* III.i.180 we find Shakespeare's sole use of the word “imperator”. It also occurs in Boiardo's stanza 2. Since Shakespeare is already borrowing from Boiardo, *via* Berni's version, these parallels are not likely to be coincidental.

5. *The Orlando Innamorato. Translated into prose from the Italian of F. Berni* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1823), xxix. This “translation” is in fact an abridgement. So far as I know, there is no English translation of Berni's *Innamorato*. There is a 16th century French translation of Boiardo (Paris, 1549) by J.V. Du Crest Arnaud, recorded in *Catalogue Général de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1903), 14: 1143. Robert Tofte published a translation of the first three cantos in 1598.

6. (London, 1914), 444–45.

7. Quotations from Berni's *Innamorato* are from *Raccolta dei più celebri Poemi Eroici Italiani*, 3 vols (Firenze, 1841–42), I, 651–52; italics mine.

*Chi ruba un corno, un cavallo, un anello
 E simil cose, ha qualche discrezione,
 E potrebbe chiamarsi ladroncello;
 Ma quel che ruba la riputazione,
 E dell'atruì fatiche si fa bello,
 Si può chiamare assassino e ladrone,
 E di tanto più odio e pena è degno,
 Quanto più del dover trapassa il segno.*

("Who steals a horn, horse, a ring, or something similar, he has some discretion, and can be called a petty thief. But he who steals a reputation, and makes himself look good with the labours of another, he can be called both a real thief and an assassin; and the more he crosses that line, the more worthy he is of hatred and punishment").

Lines 1-4 of stanza 1 are closely paralleled by Iago's words to Othello in III.iii.

*Iago. Who steals my purse steals trash – 'tis something-
 nothing.
 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands –
 But he that filches from me my good name
 Robs me of that which not enriches him
 And makes me poor indeed.*

(III.iii.159-164)

Iago's first two lines reproduce the sense of Berni's first three. "Who steals" translates "Chi ruba", both phrases stand at the beginning of a line and start the same train of thought. "Something" echoes "cose" and "qualche cosa" (st. 2, line 1). Iago's third line ("But he that filches from me my good name") is an accurate translation of Berni's fourth: "Ma quel che ruba la riputazione". The first word of Iago's next line, "Robs" echoes the first word of stanza 2, "Rubare". Iago's "poor" (164) may reflect "carestia" ("death"), also in stanza 2, line 3.

After line 164 Shakespeare ceases to echo Berni's actual words so exactly, but he continues to follow his train of thought. In stanza 3 Berni introduces the concepts of *thought* ("pensi") *secrecy* ("segreto") *revealing* ("rivelar") and the *deity* ("Dio"). Shakespeare now brings in the same ideas:

Othello. By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!
 Iago You cannot, if my heart were in your hand,
 Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody.
 (III.iii.164-66)

The next three lines contain "*beware*" ("Guardati", st. 7), "*mock*" ("*gran riso*" and "*scorno*", st. 4) and "*cuckold*" ("*corno*", st. 1 and 5).

Shakespeare had already exploited Berni's stanzas on the loss of reputation in an earlier scene, II,iii, in which Cassio laments his drunkenness and his consequent dismissal by Othello. Shakespeare borrowed much more here than he did in III.iii. In a passage of some 50 lines he first echoes Berni's point in stanza 1 that the loss of reputation is a kind of death ("*assassino*"):

Iago. What, are you hurt, lieutenant?
 Cassio. Ay, past all surgery.
 (II.iii.255-56)

Berni uses the word *danno* ("loss; damage; hurt") twice in stanza 2, as here:

Ma quel danno più preme e più si sente.
 E dà dispetto e dispiacer maggiore,

("But that loss [of reputation] touches you more and is felt more, and causes greater vexation and grief").

Cassio's next speech echoes Berni's emphasis on *danno* and *riputazione*, and his later use of *bestia* ("beast", st. 9).

Cassio. Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have
 lost my reputation, I have lost the immortal part of
 myself - and what remains is *bestial*.

(II.iii.258-60).

"What remains is *bestial*" may also have been suggested by Berni's stanza 4, which tells the story of the bird who wore the peacock's feathers and the ass who put on the lion's skin. In the end both beasts "*remained naked*".

For Iago's reply Shakespeare looked back to "*pensi*" (st. 3) and "*più si sente*" (st. 2): "I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is *more of sense* in that than in *reputation*" (262-64). Here Iago,

who is himself a thief of reputation, says the opposite of Berni and of his own words to Othello in III.iii.

As he continued Iago's speech, Shakespeare took from Berni the themes of *deserving* ("degno", st. 1 and 5), *recovering* ("si riacquisti", st. 2) and a *way* or *means* ("via", st. 2).

*Iago. . . Reputation is . . . lost without deserving.
You have no reputation . . . There are ways to
recover the general again.*

(III.iii.264–68)

In stanza 7 "imperadore" (imperator) means "Emperor", referring to Charlemagne, but it can also mean "a general, or commander", and it has this meaning in Boiardo's stanza 2.

Shakespeare now turned his attention to Berni's stanzas 4 to 7, where he found *lion* ("lione", st. 4), *malice* ("malizia" st. 5), *punishment* ("pena", st. 6) and *emperor* ("imperadore", st. 7). He included these words, or their derivatives, in the last four lines of Iago's speech: "a *punishment* more in policy than in *malice* . . . an *imperious lion*" (269–71). Note that Boiardo's alternative for "imperadore" – "imperiero" (st. 4) – is closer to Shakespeare's "imperious", and he may well have had it in mind.

Cassio's reply includes "*despised*" ("dispetto", st. 2); "*indiscreet*" ("discrezione", st. 1); "*speak parrot*" (st. 4, "parlar" followed by "pavone" – "peacock"); "*call*" ("chiamarsi"; st. 1); "*devil*" ("Il diavol", st. 6).

In stanza 5 Berni writes "per quello/Ch'aveva fatto con tanta malizia/ Della spada ("for what he had done with so much malice with the sword"). Shakespeare has the same conjunction of *sword* and *he had done*:

Iago . . . followed with your sword? What had he done to you?
(II.iii.280–81)

In Cassio's next speech the following words have parallels in Berni: *things*, *God*, *steal*, *pleasance*, and *beasts*. Stanza 2 contains within four lines the words "*riacquisti*" (recovered), "*dispiacer*" (displeasure) and "*dispetto*" ("despight, also despised"⁸). Two lines

8. Quoted from John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (1611), "dispetto".

later we find "nè l'un nè l'altro" ("neither one nor the other"). Shakespeare also places these words close together.

Iago. . . how came you thus *recovered*?

Cassio. It hath *pleased the devil* drunkenness to give place to *the devil* wrath; *one* unperfectness shows me *another*, to *make* me frankly *despise* myself.

(II.iii.289–293)

Finally, at lines 301–02, Iago's "a beast! O strange!" exactly reproduces the order of "un[a] . . . bestia strana" (st. 9).

Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of reputation was thus deeply indebted to Berni. But he had begun borrowing from the *Innamorato* long before II.iii, since he used it extensively in the first scene of the play. In the middle of stanza 6 Berni ends his digression on the theft of reputation and returns to Boiardo's narrative, which now begins the review of the pagan hordes who have gathered to invade France under the leadership of Agramante. Following Boiardo, he describes each pagan tribe in order, and names their leaders. Of particular interest to Shakespeare was the first king on the list, Drudinasso, since he and his people are North Africans from Libya, or Barbary ("di Libicana", st. 8), and are "black . . . from head to foot" ("Nera . . . dal capo alle piante"). The second tribe is also black, and has "I labbri grossi", a description which Roderigo applies directly to Othello: "What a full fortune does *the thick lips* owe" (I.i.65).

For the next twenty lines Shakespeare borrowed little, although "house" and "within" both occur in Berni ("casa", st. 10; "dentro", st. 6). But between lines 85 and 116 he made full use of his source, beginning with Iago's first lying outcry to Brabantio: "Zounds, sir, you're *robbed*, for *shame* put on your gown! / Your heart . . . lost / . . . an old *black ram*" (85–7). "Shame" ("vergogna") and "put on" ("si vesti") both occur in stanza 4 to describe the ridiculous ass and jay, appropriate animals for Brabantio. For the next ten lines Shakespeare used Berni intermittently, but in stanza 5 he noticed the word "malizia" applied to the stealer of reputation, and in line 99 he applied it overtly to Roderigo, but implicitly to his own thief of reputation, Iago: "Upon *malicious bravery* dost thou come . . ." (99). "Venuto è" ("is come") are the first words of stanza 8. "Bravery",

the reading of Q, may echo "*si vanta*" ("boasts", st. 6), or it may recall the stolen disguises of the ass and the jay. But the source also supports the Folio reading, "*knaverie*", since Berni's thief is a "*knave*" ("*malandrino*", st. 6; cf. "*ruffians*" and "*villain*" in lines 109 and 116).

For seventeen lines Shakespeare continued to use Berni freely. The "*Argomento*" of canto 51 provided "*fanno*" and "*amare*" (l. 103, "*make this bitter*"), and from stanza 10 he took *sure* ("*certo*"), *tell* ("*dir*"), and *house nor country house* ("*casa nè villa*").

Brabantio. What tell'st thou me of robbing? This is Venice:
My house is not a grange.

(I.i.104-5)

Stanza 9 provided "*pure*" (suggested by the Italian "*pure*" = "as well"), and "*come*" ("*viengli*"): "In simple and *pure* soul I *come* to you" (106).

In stanzas 8 and 9 Berni portrays the black soldiers from Barbary, other black men with thick lips and the third pagan commander who is "*a strange beast*" ("*bestia strana*"). He also describes the horses which the two black commanders ride. Each is astride an "*alfana*", a large shire horse, and Drudinasso's mount is "*a heavy shire horse in bad array*" ("*una grossa e sconcia alfana*", st. 8). This description may have had obvious sexual overtones for Shakespeare. Not only could *grosso* mean "*obscene*" as *gross* often does in his work, but *sconcio* commonly means "*indecent, licentious, immoral*", and is regularly applied to prostitutes.⁹

Through a natural association of ideas, therefore, Shakespeare has Iago describe Othello, also a black general, as a "*Barbary horse*" who "*covers*" Desdemona. "*Covered*" in a non-sexual sense occurs in stanzas 6 and 16 ("*coperta*"), and "*uncovered*" ("*scoperto*") in stanza 10. Berni's influence on the following lines is extensive:

Iago. . . serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come
to do you service, and you think we are *ruffians*, you'll have
your daughter *covered* with a *Barbary horse*;

(II.i.108-110)

9. *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (henceforth *GDLI*), ed. Salvatore Battaglia (Torino: UTET, 1961-); "*grosso*", 36; "*sconcio*", 3.

As he continued with Iago's obscene invention, Shakespeare's mind turned to the military leader who is a "*beast*" ("*bestia*", closely following "*labbri grossi*" and "*alfana*", st. 9), and possibly to the other two beasts, the ass and the bird, who are "*both naked*" ("*ambedue nudi*", st. 4). He may also have noticed "*back*" ("*dosso*") in the same line as "*covered*" ("*coperta*", st. 16). He had also almost certainly read Boiardo's stanza 4 where we find the word "*adosso*". Iago, then, is one "*that comes to tell you, your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs*" (114-15).

After Cinthio, the Berni stanzas are by a long way the most influential source for *Othello*. The importance that Shakespeare placed on them may be seen in the fact that he turned to them when he began to write Othello's first speech of the play (I.ii.17-28). These twelve lines, and no others nearby, contain eleven words which have parallels with Berni: *spite* ("*dispetto*", st. 2), *signory* ("*signoreggia*", st. 9: "*signor*", st. 10), *know, boasting, honour* ("*onore*", st. 2), *life, royal* ("*re*", several examples, including st. 6 and 7), *speak, unhoused* ("*Non ha . . . casa*", st. 10), *seas* ("*mare*", st. 6), *look* (imperative: "*Guardati*", st. 7).

In I.i Shakespeare associates the black general Othello with the two black leaders of pagan nations, Drudinasso and Sorridan. From I.ii.53 onwards he maintains this identification, since he now shows Othello as the leader of a "*troop*" of his own armed supporters (82, "*you of my inclining*"), just like the pagan leaders. He is met by Brabantio, backed by a similar armed troop of "*my people*" (I.i.139; cf. "*la gente sua*", st. 8). From this point until the end of the scene Shakespeare made continuous use of Berni's vocabulary, including the "*pagans*" (99) who were of such interest to him ("*Pagani*", *Argomento*). Between lines 57 and 64 the words *thief, come, swords, weapons, damned, things* and *sense* all have their counterparts in Berni: *cose, ladrone* (st. 1); *cosa, danno, si sente* (st. 2); *spada* (st. 5); *Venuto, arme* (st. 8).

Brabantio's speech at this point (62-81) expresses his disgust at the idea of Othello as a son-in-law. To convey this, Shakespeare turned again to the description of the black pagan leaders in stanzas 8-9. "*Sooty bosom*" and "*gross*" were both suggested by stanza 8, of which lines 3-5 read:

*Arme non ha la gente sua villana,
Nera e ricciuta dal capo alle piante:
Cavalca egli una grossa e sconcia alfana,*

("His uncouth people do not have weapons; they are black and curly from head to foot. He [Drudinasso] rides a large dishevelled shire horse").

*Brabantio . . .
The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou? To fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense.
II.ii.68-72)*

"T'incur a general mock" is paralleled by "*gran riso fassi*" in stanza 4 ("much laughter is caused"). "Guardage" echoes "*Guardati*" ("watch, guard": st. 7). "Nation", "sooty", "gross" and "sense" parallel "*gente*", "*nera*", "*grossa*" (st. 8) and "*si sente*" (st. 2).

Within this stanza Shakespeare also found material to describe Desdemona's more conventional suitors – the "wealthy, curled darlings". "Curled" is a literal translation of "*ricciuta*", and "wealthy" echoes "*ricco*" ("rich") which "*ricciuta*" contains. "Darlings" is a plural translation of a word in the last line of stanza 8 – "*fanciulletto*" (literally, "little boy"). *Fanciulletto* resembles *darling*, since it is a diminutive, and can be a term of endearment. *Fanciullo* can also mean "a young man", as "darling" does in its *Othello* context.¹⁰

Berni's poem furnished Shakespeare with another element which was central to this scene and to the play as a whole. This was the association between Othello and witchcraft which Shakespeare would also take from Ariosto. In stanza 9 the black and thick-lipped leader Sorridan is said to be "like the Befana" ("par la Befania"). "La Befana" is the ugly old witch who brings presents to Italian children, and Brabantio accuses Othello of witchcraft (as well as ugliness) throughout the speech: "thou hast enchanted her" (63); "practised on her with foul charms" (73), and so on. Sorridan is also said to be "out of the world" ("fuor del mondo"), and Shakespeare applies this anti-social

10. *GDLI*, "fanciullo", 8.

slur to Othello, whom Brabantio calls "an abuser of the world, a practiser/Of arts inhibited, and out of warrant" (78–9).

Shakespeare ended his borrowing in this scene by turning to the "Argomento", a verse stanza at the head of the canto. He may have been drawn to it by the presence of the word "Pagani". Berni includes a word beginning with "p" in each of the eight lines of this stanza, and Shakespeare now follows this alliterative game by reproducing five of the "p" words between lines 83 and 99: "pugnano" ("fight", 1. 83), "prigion" and "prigion", ("prison", 1. 85), "passare" ("passage", 1. 98), "Pagani" ("pagans", 1. 99). In Joycean spirit he adds two of his own to this passage ("prompter" and "present"), and a few lines earlier "probable", "palpable", "practiser" and "peril" (76–81). Since Berni's stanzas are also a source for *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is interesting that Shakespeare similarly "affected the letter" in the first line of Holofernes' rhyme in that play: "The preyful Princess pierced and pricked . . ." (IV.ii.56).

In the next scene Othello makes his peace with Brabantio. In his despair at losing Desdemona, Roderigo offers to drown himself: "It is silliness to live when to live is torment" (I.iii.309). Roderigo's faint-heartedness reflects the character of the pagan nation described in stanzas 10–11, "who are all without daring and without heart" ("Chè senza ardir son tutti e senza core", st. 10). Like Roderigo, they are "silly" ("cosa stolta", st. 11), and lack the will to live: "It is as if they are made on purpose for the sword, because their life is so quickly taken away."

È par che a *posta* sien fatti pel brando,
Perchè *la vita* sia lor tosto *tolta*,
(stanza 11.5–6)

Iago dissuades Roderigo from suicide with a long tirade in which he constantly returns to the concepts of *drowning*, *money* and *putting in a purse*: "Drown thyself? . . . Put money in thy purse" (336–340). *Drown*, with its variants, occurs nine times; *money*, eleven times; *put in thy purse*, six times. Shakespeare found all three concepts in Berni: *money* ("denar") is in stanza 12, *drowning* ("sommersa") in stanza 14, and *put in a purse* ("metterlo a bottino") in stanza 6. The principal meaning of *bottino* is "booty", and in stanza 6 "metterlo a bottino" has its usual sense of "put him [Charlemagne] to the sack", which Shakespeare would surely have known. But *bottino*

can also mean "a soldier's bag or pouch", so that "metterlo a bottino" might easily suggest "to put in a purse".¹¹

In stanza 13 Shakespeare found the idea of *feeding on locusts* ("vivon di locuste"), and he added this to Iago's speech: "The food that to him now is as luscious as *locusts*" (348–49). All recent editors explain "locusts" as referring to the fruit of the carob tree. But since Shakespeare is here following Berni, and elsewhere frequently likens Othello to the pagan tribes, it is more likely that he meant Iago's words to be taken in their more obvious sense. Othello enjoys eating insects. To quote Berni in full, this tribe "feeds on grass, and I do not know if they enjoy anything else. Turpin writes that they live on locusts".

*Si pasce d'erba, e non so ch'altro guste;
Scrive Turpin che vivon di locuste.
(stanza 13.7–8)*

Both the assonance and meaning of *guste/locuste* are echoed in Iago's *luscious / locusts*. "Guste" may also have suggested "enjoy" in "all the tribe of hell, thou shalt *enjoy* her" (358). The description of the people of Fersa in stanza 14 may have given rise to "the *tribe of hell*", since this people "curse themselves, and the heaven, and their own creator". This line may also lie behind "thou wilt needs *damn myself*" (353–54) in the same speech.

As well as the desire for death, drowning and money, Shakespeare took from these later stanzas yet another concept which was important to this scene between Iago and Roderigo – the theme that each is tied to the other. Iago claims that he is "*Knit to thy deserving with cables*" (338).

Roderigo. Wilt thou be *fast* to my hopes, if I *depend* on the issue?
Iago. Thou art *sure* of me – go . . . *Let us be conjunctive* . . .
(I.iii.363–68)

Shakespeare came across this theme in the last two lines of stanza 14, the stanza which had already given him *drowning*: "But let her [France] be *allied with us*; and every Christian will have a hundred of them [the pagans] on his rope".

11. *GDLI*, "bottino".

Ma lascia che co' nostri ella si stringa,
 Ogni cristian n'arà cento per stringa.
 (stanza 14. 7-8)

The key verb here is *stringere*, which can mean "to make an alliance", but more commonly means "to tie, or knot", hence "knit to". It can also mean "to join", like *congiungere*, which led Shakespeare to "conjunctive".¹² As the Arden editor points out in his note on lines 363-64, "both *fast* and *depend*. . . imply tying".¹³ So does "hanged" (360).

Iago's "sure of me - go" reflects stanza 13, where "va" ("go") and "sicuro" ("safe, sure") are also together. "Wars" (341), "out of the way" (360) and "told" (366) are paralleled by "guerra", "lontano" (both st. 13) and "detto" (st. 11).

There is ample evidence that Shakespeare also consulted Berni for the next scene between Iago and Roderigo (II.i.212-310). Most of his borrowings are found, as before, in Iago's long speeches. The following words, taken in order from two speeches totalling thirty-four lines (212-246), all have counterparts in Berni: *harbour* ("porto", Argomento), *come*, *valiant* ("valore", st. 7), *watches* ("osservi", st. 3), *guard*, *tell*, *bragging*, *discreet*, *heart* ("core", st. 10), *eye* ("occhi", st. 3), *fed* ("si pasce", st. 13), *devil*, *loveliness*, "beauties: all" ("bellezza . . . Ognun", st. 7), *want* ("carestia", st. 2) *find* ("trovato", st. 7), "disrelish . . . second choice" ("altro gusto", st. 13), *knave* ("malandrino", st. 6), *putting on* ("si vesti", st. 4), "counterfeit . . . true . . . devilish" ("contra 'l vero. / Il diavol", st. 5-6), *finder*, *folly* ("stolta", st. 11), *found*.

In some of these examples we see Shakespeare echoing Berni's verbal juxtapositions. Another example of this habit is "bragging and telling" (221), which simply reverses "diciam" and "si vanta" in line 5 of stanza 6.

Shakespeare continued to borrow intermittently from Berni until 273, where "mutiny" is close to "the displanting of Ca'ssio". Berni has the line "Di *disfar* Carlo e metterlo a *bottino*" (st. 6), in which *disfare* means "to destroy, dismantle". "Plants" ("piante")

12. GDLI, "stringere", 2.

13. Arden *Othello*, 158.

occurs two lines later. "*Bottino*" has the alternative meaning of "*mutiny*" in Florio's dictionary.¹⁴

We have already seen how Shakespeare used the *Innamorato* in II.iii and III.iii. In the following scene, III.iv.30–80, Othello tells Desdemona the history of the embroidered handkerchief, and warns her not to lose it. We now know that several key elements of this scene were derived from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, canto 46, stanzas 78–85, which tell the story of the magic tent that the seer Cassandra embroidered for Hector. Since Cassandra did not fit into Othello's history, Shakespeare replaced her with another female prophet, a Sibyl, whom he found in Berni's stanza 10. "S'io fussi dotto come la Sibilla / In profezia" ("If I was as learned in prophecy as the Sibyl"). The Sibyl's skill in "*profezia*" agreed neatly with the "*furor profetico*" of Cassandra in Ariosto, and Shakespeare simply combined the two passages: "A sibyl . . . In her prophetic fury" (72, 74).

Berni influenced other elements of this scene. From the preceding stanza 9, for example, came "*eye*" ("*occhi*") and "*out of the way*" ("*tanto in là*"); "*darling*" ("*fanciullete*") is from the last line of stanza 8. Shakespeare's debt to Berni in *Othello* may end here; in Acts IV and V he would make greater use of Cinthio than he had done in Acts I–III.

It is clear, then, that Shakespeare had at least three Italian works (or extracts from them) in front of him as he wrote *Othello* – Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Berni's *Orlando Innamorato*. We also know that he used the same stanzas of Ariosto's *Furioso* as he wrote some twenty lines of *Love's Labour's Lost*, that is V.ii.638–659, in which Armado appears as Hector.

We shall see that Shakespeare followed a similar course in his use of Berni's poem. He used the same stanzas of the *Innamorato* as a source for both *Othello* and Act V scene ii of *Love's Labour's*, just as he had done with the *Furioso*. The only difference is that he used Berni much more extensively than Ariosto.

We have seen that there were specific reasons why Shakespeare chose to consult Berni's canto 51 as he wrote *Othello*. Was this also true of *Love's Labour's*? His borrowings in V.ii begin with the entry of the first Worthy, Costard the clown, at line 543, and end at line 719, "Exeunt Worthies", or soon after. It appears that he consulted

14. Florio, "*bottino*".

his Italian sources while writing the whole of the Worthies scene, and rarely, if ever elsewhere.¹⁵ There are several reasons why he might turn to the Italian epics while he had this scene in mind. In the first place, the stories of Orlando would naturally remind him of the Worthies, since Charlemagne was one of the original Nine, and he is in fact mentioned in Berni's stanza 7. Secondly, Berni introduced his pagan kings one by one, much as Shakespeare brings on his Worthies. The brief description of each king (and occasionally his coat of arms) to some extent resembles Shakespeare's treatment of the Worthies. The comic grotesqueness of the Worthies also recalls that of the pagans. Thirdly, by a chance similarity which must have amused Shakespeare, the pagans are about to invade France. "They must pass into *France*" ("in Francia devono passare", Argomento). Two of Shakespeare's Worthies, he implies, desire to invade "France", or the Princess, sexually: Pompey, who wishes to "lay my arms before the legs of this sweet lass of France" (551), and Hector, who "loves her by the foot" (664).

Berni's first pagan king, Drudinasso, enters in stanza 8, and Shakespeare turned to this stanza for the entry of his first Worthy, Pompey (also a pagan). Here he found "*is come*" ("Venuto è"), *arms* ("Arme"), *great* ("grossa"), *before* ("d'avante"), "*shield*" ("scudo") and "*in field*" ("In campo"). He reproduced these words in Pompey's quatrain: "... Pompey surnamed the *Great*, / That oft *in field* with targe and *shield* . . . / . . . *am come* by chance, / And lay my *arms before* the legs . . . *France*" (548-551). We expect Costard to say "*before the feet*" of the Princess, and the phrase was probably suggested to Shakespeare by the presence of "*feet*" ("piante", rhyming with "*avante*") as well as "*arms*" in this stanza.

For the next sixty lines, Shakespeare took little or nothing from Berni,¹⁶ but at the end of Holofernes' appearance as Judas Maccabaeus he needed an excuse to divide "*Judas*" into "*ass*", and to find it he turned to Berni's stanza 4. This stanza alludes to Aesop's fable of the ass who put on the lion's skin. Shakespeare borrows this allusion, and from now on he pays much attention to stanza 4.

15. There are signs of possible borrowing towards the end of V.i, where the Worthies discuss their show. Berowne's soliloquy at III.ii.169 is almost certainly dependent on Boiardo/Berni. See n. 4.

16. He may have used Boiardo for the speeches of Alexander. See n. 4.

Stanza 4

*Parla la terra, la polvere è sassi.
 Quando parlar non posson le persone;
 Chi dell'onore altrui coprendo vassi,
 Somiglia quell'uccel, che del pavone,
 E l'asino, onde ancor gran riso fassi,
 Che si vesti le spoglie del lione:
 E con tanta vergogna loro e scorno
 Alla fine ambedue nudi restorno.*

("The earth speaks, the dust and the rocks, when people cannot speak. He who goes about covered with the honour of someone else resembles that bird which wore the peacock's feathers, and the ass that put on the lion's skin, which is still the source of much laughter. And in the end both of them remained naked, though covered with so much shame and ridicule".)

Shakespeare used the lion/ass fable merely as a device to create the pun on "Jud-as". Holofernes is no "lion", but he is an "ass" (618–622). The following lines confirm the debt to Berni beyond doubt, since *stay* ("restorno") and *end* ("fine") both occur in the last line of stanza 4.

Boyet. . . . Nay, why dost thou *stay*?
Dumaine. For the latter *end* of his name.
 (V.ii.620–21)

Five lines later Shakespeare continued to use stanza 4, together with stanza 8.

Berowne. *Hide thy head*, Achilles! Here comes Hector *in arms*.
Dunmaine. Though my *mocks* come home . . .
 (V.ii.627–29)

In stanza 4 we find "hide" ("coprendo") and "mocks" ("gran riso", "scorno"), and in stanza 8 "head" ("capo"), "come" and "in arms" ("armato").

One trio of words from Berni evidently stuck in Shakespeare's mind. In the above passage he uses *arms*, *mocks* and *come* in close proximity. He had already used this combination earlier in the scene: *mock*, *come*, *arms* (545–551). He also used it in a Berni passage in *Othello*: *come*, *weapons*, *mock* (I.ii.58–69).

For Armado's appearance as Hector (631–659), Shakespeare confined his borrowings almost entirely to Ariosto, but at line 657 he turned again to Berni, since "*war-man*" is a literal translation of "*guerriero*" (st. 7). "I will forward with my device", continues Armado (659–60). "Device" here probably means his dramatic "show", but it may also refer to his heraldic shield. If so, it corresponds to "gonfalone" (Argomento), which can mean "an emblem" (DDLI, 4). "Re" ("king", st. 8) parallels Armado's "*royalty*" (660). "Speak" (662) and "foot" (664) echo "*parlar*" (st. 4) and "*piante*" (st. 8).

There are no definite borrowings from either Ariosto or Berni between lines 665 and 682, but at line 683 Shakespeare probably returned to the *Innamorato* for Pompey's "challenge" to the Braggart, Armado. This would be an appropriate point to consult Berni, since his references to Charlemagne and the paladins suggest chivalrous tournaments and challenges. Berni also refers to *bragging* (st. 6), and Armado is "Braggart" in speech prefixes throughout this scene. At line 698 we find a clear reminder of Berni and *Othello*. "You will lose your reputation", Moth warns Armado, which echoes both Iago's warning to the "bragging" Moor and Cassio's "I have lost my reputation" (II.iii.258–59). Earlier, Costard's *fight, sword and arms* (690–92) are paralleled by "*pugnano*" (Argomento), "*spada*" (st. 5) and "*Arme*" (st. 8).

Costard now starts to undress: "Pompey is *uncasing* for the combat" (697). But Armado refuses to remove his "outer garments",¹⁷ which would reveal "*the naked truth . . . I go woolward for penance*" (705–06). This episode was surely inspired by "*disfar*" ("undo", st. 6) and "*sopravesta*" (st. 8) – Berni's word for "outer garments" or "surcoat". In Berni "*the truth*" ("il vero", st. 5) is separated from "*penance*" ("Pena", st. 6) by only six words, and "*naked*" ("nudi", st. 4) occurs nine lines earlier. "I go woolward" may also owe something to "*they go naked*" ("vanno nudi") from stanza 11, especially as the line continues with the apt "like a foolish thing" ("come cosa stolta").

In Moth's following speech the words "*True*", "*want*", "*he wore*" and "*heart*" echo "*vero*" (st. 5), "*carestia*" (st. 2), "*si vesti*" (st. 4) and "*core*" (st. 9).

The Quarto stage direction now reads "Enter a Messenger". The Italian word for "*messenger*", *posta*, occurs in the line after "*vanno*

17. See the Oxford Shakespeare edition, ed. G.R. Hibbard (1994), note to line 691.

nudi" (st. 11). The poem continues: "They are made for death [literally, "the sword"], because their *life* is immediately taken away" ("fatti pel brando/Perchè la vita sia lor tosto tolta"). This fusion of life and death is repeated in the Princess's reaction to Marcadé's entrance: "*Dead, for my life!*" (715).

Shakespeare also echoes Berni in Marcadé's similarly self-cancelling reply: "*my tale is told*" (715). The last line of stanza 11 begins with "*Detto*", which literally means "told". But *detto* can also be a noun, meaning "tale, story". So Marcadé's statement is contained in the one word "*detto*". Shakespeare also follows Berni's order of words in this passage. *Go woolward (naked), Messenger, life and tale/told* appear in the same order in stanza 11.

Armado's final speech contains "*For mine own part*" ("parmi", st. 7), "*day*" ("giorno", st. 13), "*wrong*" ("error", st. 5), "*discretion*" ("discrezione", st. 1) and "*soldier*" ("guerriero", st. 7). Here, or possibly two lines later, Shakespeare's borrowing from Berni ends.

What preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this new evidence? First, it is clear that Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian was much greater than has been supposed. There is no doubt, for instance, that he was reading Berni in the original Italian, and not in translation, as he wrote *Othello*, I-III and *Love's Labour's Lost*, Vi.ii. We can tell this from several pieces of evidence: for example, the play on *ricco/ricciuta*, his awareness of the three separate meanings of *bottino*, and his translation of *posta* as "messenger" (in the original "a posta" means "on purpose"). The evidence, however, does not suggest that he was fluent in Italian, nor that he had read much of the *Furioso* or *Innamorato*. His borrowing seems to have been strictly confined to two comparatively short passages, both of which were chosen with *Othello* in mind. This limited access implies that he was unable to read Italian with ease. If so, the extracts were probably chosen for him by someone who knew both works much better than he did.

Secondly, the pattern of his borrowing in *Love's Labour's Lost* supports the theory of a later revision in that play. With two possible exceptions¹⁸ he borrows only when the Worthies are on stage. Such limited use is plausibly explained by revision at a later date. Moreover, the distribution of borrowings within the scene

18. See n. 15.

also suggests revision. They are not spread evenly through it, but occur in a series of short bursts, as if Shakespeare is retouching the scene as he reads it through.

This theory would explain several other anomalies. The remarkable "Silence of the Ladies", for example, who all, except the Princess, sit through the entire pageant without uttering a word, suggests that they were not on stage during an earlier version of the scene. Again, the exchanges between Marcadé and the Princess both contain Berni material and are wrongly printed as prose in Q and F. It looks as if Marcadé was a later addition, and that previously the Princess was told of her father's death offstage.

Finally, the new information changes our view of Shakespeare's position among his fellow-writers. In particular, it brings him close to Spenser, since they are the only writers that we know of who used both Ariosto and Boiardo (Berni) as sources.¹⁹ We can be sure that Shakespeare knew of Spenser's devotion to the Romantic epic, and was imitating him deliberately. But it is also possible that Spenser took an active interest in Shakespeare's study of the Italian writers, and gave him encouragement and advice. This is the more likely since both men had the same generous patrons – the fifth Earl of Derby and his wife. Spenser's description of the poet Aetion in *Colin Clout's Come Again* (1595), who is sometimes thought to be Shakespeare, certainly fits a writer whom he knows to be influenced by epic poetry.

Whose Muse, full of high thoughts invention,
Doth like himself Heroically sound.²⁰

If Aetion is Shakespeare, the revision of *Love's Labour's Lost* must have taken place by 1595.²¹

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19. A.L. Sells, *The Italian Influence in English Poetry* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), 162–75.

20. *The shorter poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (Yale, 1989), 543.

21. For information and advice I would like to thank Phil Cooke, John and Michael Cronin, David Farley-Hills, Lynne Press and especially Peter Brand and Maura Favretto.

Verba versus *Res* in Shakespeare's Reversal of Petrarchan Epideictic Rhetoric

Gloria Lauri Lucente

One of the crucial strategies underlying Shakespeare's sonnet sequence is the paradox of praise, or the reversal of Petrarchan epideictic rhetoric. This strategy is deeply intertwined with an equally significant issue regarding the relationship between *verba* and *res*, a relationship that has to do with the referential meaning of words. Shakespeare's paradox of praise will be studied in light of the Petrarchan model, particularly with regard to questions of negation and celebration as well as absence and desire. The analysis, carried out along the thematic paths I have sketched, will proceed by way of special attention to the Dark Lady sequence, in particular Sonnet 138. Questions concerning the treachery *and* the truth of desire together with notions of linguistic duplicity will also be studied within the specific framework of epideictic rhetoric, with particular reference to Sonnet 5 of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

We may begin our investigation by examining the way in which Shakespeare at one and the same time celebrates and fully exploits the capacity of words while expressing a deep mistrust toward the faulty medium of language. The virtuosity of language, whose duplicitous nature Shakespeare recognizes, embraces, dramatizes,

and also frequently condemns, places the poet in a new, self-reflexive rapport with the medium through which he creates himself and his world. Shakespeare's unabashed verbal sophistication destabilizes the fixed meaning of words and breaks the referential connection between *verba* and *res* to the extent that the focus of attention moves from the object being represented to the process and the medium of its representation. By attracting attention to itself and conjuring a world of words that is disconnected from the world of things, Shakespeare's wordplay dissolves any reliable correspondence between the sign and the meaning, thereby undermining the mimetic theory of language which had prevailed since Plato.

Shakespeare's reconsideration of language calls for a more self-reflexive reader who does not assume that a word is necessarily linked to a certain thing, or that such a linkage is a simple operation.¹ For centuries, such a reconsideration has been transformed into a critical problem with strong moralistic overtones. Take, for example, Samuel Johnson's aversion to Shakespeare's quibbling, which he perceived as a grave stylistic and moral flaw: "A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth."² Take also Edward Hubler's criticism of Shakespeare who "liked to play with words, sometimes with wretched effect," and who was always against "the subordination of the thought to the word."³

The underlying moralistic assumptions which characterize the ongoing debate over *res* and *verba* are often perceptible even in the reader who views with fascination rather than suspicion Shakespeare's verbal sophistication. To wit, Kirby Farrell and Margreta De Grazia, whose analyses concentrate on the conflict between falsehood and truth, artifice and sincerity, linguistic deterioration and moral corruption. According to Farrell,

1. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: McGraw Hill, 1966), p. 65.

2. Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare", cited in Martin Green's epigraph to *The Labyrinth of Shakespeare's Language* (London: Charles Skilton, 1974).

3. Edward Hubler, *The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), p. 13, p. 21.

Shakespeare resorted to a series of homonyms through which he subverted and reached beyond the restrictions of conventional language to make the truth readily accessible to him.⁴ De Grazia takes issue with Farrell and writes that "Will's idiosyncrasies exclude him from truth altogether. Having given the name 'fair' to 'black,' he ceases to experience both 'fair' and the positive values associated with it."⁵ De Grazia goes on to say that Shakespeare calls black "fair" not to express truthfully his passion as Farrell would have it, but rather to seduce his mistress through linguistic flattery. She concludes that the poet's attempts to gratify his lust through his false oaths falsify his being, thereby reducing him to the state of a "perjur'd eye."⁶

The critical debate is inconclusive. So are the questions regarding the referential meaning of words raised by Shakespeare's unabashed verbal sophistication. Do words represent themselves or something other than themselves? Is *verba* subordinated to *res* or vice versa? The same self-conscious appeal to interpretation, whether clearly pointed or subtly expressed, is also constant throughout Petrarch's verse, and again, this process, rather than being concluded by answers, reinforces the lyrics' intriguing ambiguity in the form of ongoing questions. In many respects, Shakespeare's profound fascination with the word as an entity which does not merely reflect or refer to something other than itself but which becomes the object of obsessive linguistic self-display and refinement is foreshadowed in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Indeed, the principal subject matter of the *Canzoniere*, which shows Petrarch first in pursuit of Laura as a worldly being and then as a transposed ideal, is referential only to an extent. The repeatedly intermixed signifiers, "Laura" (the beloved), "lauro" (the laurel), "l'aura" (the breeze), "l'oro" (gold), "l'aurora" (dawn), and so on do not suggest distinct and incompatible signifieds but rather signifieds that can merge or alternate insofar as they all invariably and obsessively make up the same referent, the unattainable object

4. Kirby Farrell, *Shakespeare's Criticism: The Language of Magic and Play* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), pp. 6-34.

5. Margreta De Grazia, "Shakespeare's View of Language: An Historical Perspective", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, No. 3 (1978), p. 387.

6. De Grazia, p. 387.

of desire. Laura, the multivalent, polysemic name which dominates the *Canzoniere*, weaves around it an equivocal web of signifieds in which both the poetic persona and the reader are inexorably caught in their quest for the uncapturable locus of meaning.

The phantasmatic, furtive quality of the semantic and phonetic interweavings created by the play on Laura/lauro underscores the ambiguity of language itself, an ambiguity which is enhanced and at the same time made the very matter of lyric poetry.⁷ Even while language retains a measure of its representational function in Petrarch, even while it is still marshalled in service of the story the poet has to tell in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarchan representation is at once mitigated and refocused. Indeed, Petrarch decreases the referential value of language in proportion to its increasing self-referentiality. As Peter Hainsworth writes: "Petrarch diminishes the representative force of his language until it becomes no more than emblematic, and simultaneously he increases its identity and its power of suggestion."⁸

Hainsworth's comments on the "power of suggestion" of Petrarch's wordplay seem to imply that intricate sound patterns add to the aesthetic value of the *Canzoniere*, even if they do not necessarily generate a precise or stable meaning. Interestingly enough, Hainsworth's comments can be linked to the debate between Stephen Booth and De Grazia as to whether or not Shakespeare's homophonic interweavings are signifying or non-signifying patterns.⁹ In fact, the same questions raised by these two critics could constitute an interesting topic for inquiry with regard to the network of relationships between homonyms in Shakespeare *and* in Petrarch. Booth claims that while Shakespeare's network of sound patterns can "give both incidental extra coherence and a 'feel' of philosophical profundity",¹⁰ it is "substantively

7. On Petrarch's homophonic interweavings see Peter Hainsworth, "The Myth of Daphne in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*", *Italian Studies*, 34 (1979), pp. 28-44.

8. Hainsworth, p. 38.

9. See Stephen Booth, "Exit, Pursued by a Gentleman Born", *Shakespeare's Art from a Comparative Perspective. Proceedings: Comparative Literature Symposium* (Texas: Texas Tech. Univ. 1981), pp. 51-66 and Margreta De Grazia, "Homonyms Before and After Lexical Standardization", *Deutsche Shakespeare: Gesellschaft west* (1990), pp. 143-56.

10. Booth, p. 51.

gratuitous",¹¹ and therefore *referentially* insignificant and irrelevant. De Grazia takes to task Booth who, on the one hand, "activates these homonymic clusters by pointing them out", but on the other "resolutely refrains from and sternly warns against making them purposeful or meaningful."¹² As opposed to Booth, De Grazia asserts that by "directing and encouraging associations that made sense", Shakespeare's homonyms "literally made sense . . . they also made non-sense".¹³

In my reading of both Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 as well as Sonnet 5 of the *Canzoniere*, I will demonstrate how the aura of philosophical profundity created by the poet's intricate wordplay actually generates meaning, as ambiguous, multi-layered, and paradoxical as this meaning might be. I will concentrate in particular on the pun, or to use Johnson's term, the "quibble", the master trope in both Petrarch's *Canzoniere* as well as Shakespeare's sonnet sequence. By way of an introduction to my reading of these two sonnets, I would like to refer to Giuseppe Mazzotta's insightful remarks concerning the play on the name Laura in Sonnet 5 of the *Canzoniere*, since they are particularly useful in linking Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and Shakespeare's sonnet sequence through consideration of the "falseness" of names, a "falseness" which can be placed within the broader framework of language and referentiality.¹⁴ According to Mazzotta, the play on the name Laura implies that words are no longer fixed, distinct, and self-containedly referential and that the voice of love is no longer bound to a univocal, stable sign.¹⁵ Mazzotta goes on to say that "this Petrarchan conceit (which is multiplied in other variants such as 'l'aura', 'aurora', and so on) shows that desire is always cloaked under false names, that each name is a mask for the restless instability of desire."¹⁶

The cloaking of desire under false names constitutes the inspirational basis of Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnet sequence to which

11. Booth, p. 63.

12. De Grazia, "Homonyms", p. 146.

13. De Grazia, "Homonyms", p. 155-56.

14. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham and London: Duke U.P., 1993), p. 78.

15. Mazzotta, p. 78.

16. Mazzotta, p. 78.

we will now be turning. As an aside, it may be noted here that unlike the relatively stable object of desire in Petrarch's poetry, Shakespeare's verse, in what often becomes a situation of triangulated desire, is addressed to two very different beloveds, the Young Man and the Dark Lady, both of whom recur at various points or even simultaneously, as though in multiple metamorphoses of one fundamental figure, in the sort of gender switch that occurs in a great deal of Mediaeval and Renaissance literature. In Sonnet 318, which is addressed to the Dark Lady, rather than the beloved herself, the focus of attention becomes the deceitful rhetorical strategies and linguistic self-display which enable the two lovers to sexually conquer each other:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.

Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she know my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.

But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
O love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.

Therefore I lie with her, and she with me.
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.¹⁷

The fulcrum of Sonnet 138 is the pun on the word "lie" through which the interplay between *res* and *verba* is placed within a treacherous erotic environment.¹⁸ By paradoxically linking love-

17. All quotations from Shakespeare are from *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. with analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977).

18. I am indebted to Adena Rosmarin's article on the relationship between *res* and *verba* in my reading of Sonnet 138.

making and false-speaking, any attempt to give a univocal, referential meaning to the word "lie" is constantly thwarted. The subversive effect of the pun "lie", through which the referential connection between language and reality is broken, is reinforced by a series of peripheral puns: "vainly" could mean in vain, conceitedly, or foolishly; "simply" could mean naively as in "untutored", or absolutely and unconditionally; "simple truth" could indicate either the unvarnished truth, or the truth without complexities or subtleties.¹⁹ The semantic ambiguity generated by these puns provokes new meanings by forcing the reader to adopt less "untutored" and more novel ways to interpret old words. Thus to lie means to love and vice versa, truth becomes falsehood, and false seemingness becomes reality. As De Grazia writes, Shakespeare's "semantic juggling" confuses not only such adjectives as "black" and "fair" which are used to describe the Dark Lady but "a whole nexus of contingent substantives as well – virtue-sin, love-hate, truth-falsehood."²⁰

Together with punning, the repetition of the words "she" (eight times) and "I" (six times), through which a paradoxical dyad between the lover and the beloved is established, reinforces the disjunction between language and reality. The tension of the paradoxical dyad increases as the conflict keeps shifting from one set of images (love-making) to another (false-speaking). The dualism is momentarily resolved in the final scene, since *both* the lover and the beloved fulfill their sexual desires through linguistic deceit.²¹

Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

The final couplet reaches its own chiasmic version of dual unity by bringing together what was actually already paradoxically fused

19. Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 478–79.

20. Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare's View of Language", p. 387.

21. On the dyad between the "I" and the "thou" in the Young Man sonnets as opposed to the same dyad in the Dark Lady sequence, see Marianne Sanders Regan, *Love Words. The Self and the Text in Medieval and Renaissance Poetry* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U.P., 1982), pp. 223–52.

not only at the beginning but indeed throughout the sonnet, which is to say, love-making and false-speaking. We could thus apply Timothy Bahti's stimulating reading of the end and the ends of the lyric to Sonnet 138, insofar as the final couplet direct us to "the middle and means of its lines' unfolding," thereby making us understand that "lyric poems do not end but return to and retrope their means . . ." ²²

Shakespeare's privileging of *verba* over *res*, as expressed in Sonnet 138, constitutes the basis of the poet's paradox of praise. Undoubtedly, the most inspiring and inspired analysis of this crucial theme in Shakespeare's sonnets is Joel Fineman's *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, to which I will be referring in my discussion of the Dark Lady Sonnets. Before getting into Fineman's study of Shakespeare's epideictic rhetoric, it is worth mentioning that perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects in reading *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* is that while discussing Shakespeare, Fineman notes not only Shakespeare's delight in unorthodoxy and subversion but also participates himself in that process both in the content and in the style of his own writing and in his critical views. As Fineman's criticism gets going, he engages in the same sort of rhetorical style and embellishment within his own prose that he finds in Shakespeare, so much so that the dialectic *verba / res* which is at the basis of so many of Shakespeare's sonnets is reproduced in Fineman's critical work. This not only makes for fascinating reading but also links Fineman in an infectious way to his author.

Fineman discusses the paradox of praise in light of the subtle complexities within the subgenre of the mock encomium: "Shakespeare rewrites the poetry of praise by employing (implicitly in the sonnets addressed to the young man, explicitly in the sonnets addressed to the dark lady) in an unprecedentedly serious way the equally antique genre of the mock encomium, or what I call, following the traditional rhetorical terminology, the paradox of praise."²³ What Fineman sees as novel in Shakespeare's use of the genre of

22. Timothy Bahti, *Ends of the Lyric. Direction and Consequence in Western Poetry* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 40.

23. Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye. The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986).

the mock encomium is thus the serious way in which it is handled. Consequently, mockery in Shakespeare is not just mockery but rather that *and* something else. I construe that "something else" as the combination of serious philosophical thought (*res*) and a self-reflexive style with erotic overtones (*verba*) through which the poet ostentatiously displays the infidelity of words with respect to the object being praised. Rather than 'straightforward praise'²⁴ or at least an apparently straightforward rhetoric of compliment, Fineman argues that Shakespeare employs a more complexly rhetorical device than epideictic poetry or the mock encomium in that "poetry presents itself as simultaneously true *and* false precisely because and not in spite of the fact that its object is duplicitous."²⁵

Shakespeare's handling of the theme of praise is decisively anti-Petrarchan or, to use Fineman's term, para-Petrarchan.²⁶ Sonnet 5 of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* is extraordinarily compelling in illustrating this "anti" or "para" Petrarchism in Shakespeare's strategy of praise. In this sonnet, the identification of the missing object of desire is asserted most clearly and most pointedly through the play on the name Laura, which is introduced within the specific framework of epideictic rhetoric:

Quando io movo i sospiri a chiamar voi,
e 'l nome che nel cor mi scrisse Amore,
LAUdando s'incomina udir di fore
il suon de' primi dolci accenti suoi.

Vostro stato Real, che 'ncontro poi,
raddoppia a l'alta impresa il mio valore;
ma: TAcì, grida li fin, chè farle honore
è d'altri homeri soma che da' tuoi.

24. Fineman, p. 65.

25. Fineman, pp. 62-4. Fineman discusses at length the tradition of praising that which should not be praised, a tradition which he describes as "the paradox of praise, i.e. the mock encomium, traditionally a comic mode that offers ironic praise to an object that by orthodox propriety should receive invective" (29). On more than one occasion, Finemann quotes famous examples from antiquity in which unorthodoxy or unworthy objects such as lice, fleas, and so forth, are praised (see, for example, p. 33).

26. Fineman, p. 29.

Così LAUdare et REVerire insegna
 la voce stessa, pur ch'altri vi chiami,
 o d'ogni reverenza et d'onor degna:

se non che forse Apollo si disdegna
 ch'a parlar de' suoi sempre verdi rami
 lingua mortal presumptuosa vegna.

Sonnet 5 firmly establishes the nexus that connects subject matter and language by breaking up Laura's name into syllables which are then hidden among the verses only to be phonically revealed by the reader. Moreover, the fact that both the beloved's name as well as the Ovidian myth of Apollo and Daphne make their initial appearance in the same sonnet introduces the inextricable link that paranomastically unites Lauro to the lauro, so that the name of the beloved evokes the name of Apollo who becomes entwined with Daphne as she is metamorphosed into the laurel, the full-fledged symbol of poetic fame and immortality.²⁷ By transforming Laura into lauro, Petrarch compensates for the lack of erotic fulfillment with poetic fame and immortality. The homophonic play Lauro/lauro thus points to an elusive identity which is never fixed but rather always in the making, so much so that what the reader momentarily perceives as Laura can suddenly be metamorphosed into the laurel, or vice versa.

In terms of the *Canzoniere* in its entirety, it is Sonnet 5 which inaugurates the theme of praise through the play on the name Laura. Every syllable of the beloved's name furnishes an occasion for praise: "Così LAUdare et REVerire insegna / la voce stessa" (5: 9–10). At the same time, the name itself contains within its syllables not only celebration and reverence but also interdiction: "Taci". Praise and refusal, celebration and negation, are thus all tied together in a love story in which the desiring subject, or the potential transgressor, is silenced by Laura, who is not only the interdictor but also the object of interdiction. Viewed in this perspective, the underlying pessimism of the Petrarchan love

27. On the nexus Laura / lauro in Sonnet 5, see Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the "Rime sparse"* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 18–19.

narrative in which the object of desire is irremediably deferred is masked by the poetics of praise. The laudatory posture assumed by the desiring subject can also be construed as a strategy of compensation through which the poet can at least maintain a relationship with a negating alterity, rather than renouncing it altogether. As Laura becomes increasingly identified with the divine world Petrarch is craving for, as she becomes his agent of transcendence who will aid him in his ascent to heaven, and finally, as the poet's awareness that his erotic desire will never be fulfilled becomes stronger, the sublimation and idealization of Laura increases, thereby making her even more worthy of praise. By eventually transporting her to a celestial and therefore barred realm, the poet paradoxically gains a measure of solace in that the object of desire becomes so thoroughly removed from any possibility of attainment that this very distance results in consolation.

Since there is no such possibility of transcendence in the Dark Lady sonnets, the poet is unable to resort to any comforting abstractions which would compensate for his disillusionment. As opposed to Laura, who is present only as absence, as phantasm or hallucination, as an object found in its authenticity in the kingdom of the dead, or as a recollection inscribed in the poet's memory, the Dark Lady is construed exclusively as a worldly woman signifying earthly pleasures. Being neither the resplendent receptacle nor the speculum of divine beauty, the female beloved in Shakespeare is a quintessentially negative figure incapable of functioning as a vehicle for Neoplatonic love theory or of granting the poetic persona meaning, knowledge, and truth because of her duplicitous nature.

The word "duplicitous" is key to our understanding of Shakespeare's novelty vis à vis Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and the more broadly conceived tradition of epideictic rhetoric. Indeed, what makes Shakespeare's rhetoric of praise breathtakingly novel is his treatment of the duplicitous nature of the beloved through the combined themes of language and vision and their paradoxical interrelationship. Language is duplicitous in that it does not reflect what vision sees. Rather than being "ideally specular" or "singly visual", it is "corruptingly linguistic" and "duplicitously verbal".²⁸

28. Fineman, p. 15.

The "false" or "duplicitous" nature of Shakespeare's epideictic verse and also its originality are therefore the result of the disjunction between the discourse of language and that of the images of vision, a disjunction through which the eye is "perjur'd". By believing his own duplicitous tongue as well as that of his beloved, the poet desires a presence which his vision tells him is treacherous and deceptive. To wit, a few examples:

Thou blind fool love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold and see not what they see?
(No. 137)

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note;
But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.
(No. 141)

O me! what eyes hath love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight!
Or if they have, where is my judgment fled,
That censures falsely what they see aright?
(No. 147)

For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
To swear against the truth so foul a lie.
(No. 152)

At this juncture, it would be useful to examine, albeit briefly, the trope of vision, which has a lengthy history in the lyric tradition, running from the classics through the *scuola siciliana*, the *dolce stil novo*, Dante, and Petrarch. In Petrarch, the topos of the eyes indicates not only the multiple power of sight but also, eventually, the absence to which the first glance of – or at times by – the beloved regularly leads. Whereas in Sonnet 3, the beautiful eyes of the beloved tie the lover to her ("I be' vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro"), in Sonnet 39 the beautiful eyes suggest the means of attack which triggers not only the poet's passion but also his death: "Io temo sì de' begli occhi l'assalto ne' quali Amore et la mia morte alberga." The "dolce lume" or "sweet light" emanating from

the eyes of Laura, who is a mirror in which the divine archetype may be glimpsed, can lead to heaven: "mostra la via ch'al ciel conduce" (72). At the same time, the presumption to look at the beloved can also lead to bodily fragmentation or to transformation into stone: "L'ombra sua sola fa 'l mio cor un ghiaccio / et di bianca paura il viso tinge; ma li occhi / anno vertu di farne un marmo" (197). The movement traced by this trope in Petrarch's verse is thus the fatal first glance which throws the poet into the world of fragmentation and the reality of absence and which triggers a desire for unity and presence. However, once viewed, the object remains out of reach, and this lack of fulfilment condemns the poet / lover to the seemingly oxymoronic state in which both love *and* death reside, that is to say, to the continual workings of the "icy fire" that consumes, but does not exhaust, the desiring subject.

The same trope of the eyes in Shakespeare clearly has much more complex ramifications as it relates to questions of perception and to the constitution of the perceiving subject in terms of both desire and will. Furthermore, Shakespeare's conception of the gaze as a trope becomes intertwined not only with themes related to the isolated individual's desire and will, to self-reflexivity, introspection, and unresolved doubt, but also to the interplay of absence and desire. Though the Dark Lady, unlike Laura, can be possessed physically, the moment of sexual conquest actually reminds the poet of what she lacks within her, thereby reinforcing his yearning for the *ideal* object of desire. Through a fascinating reversal of the interplay between absence and presence, in Shakespeare it is precisely this lack evoked by the *presence* rather than the *absence* of the beloved which triggers desire for an unattainable ideal which the Dark Lady is incapable of representing. As Fineman comments, the problem of sight in Shakespeare's love sonnets is that "the lady, from the very beginning of the sonnets addressed to her, is an image that calls forth what is not, a signifier of an absence rather than a signified of itself."²⁹ Noting the difference between the poet's "now" and "then" as well as the difference within the tradition between "black" and "fair", Fineman

29. Fineman, p. 6.

goes on to describe the "thematic compact" implicit in Shakespeare's notion of the "perjur'd eye", a notion which draws a clear distinction between the image seen and the always deceitful, or "perjur'd" representation of the image in and through language:

Representation carries with it its regretting difference from that which it presents, provoking a desire for that which, as representation, it necessarily absents. Looking at the lady the poet therefore discovers the loss of a visual ideal, but at the same time this inspires a guilty desire to recover what is lost. As erotic object the lady thus determines an erotic project, for her very presence will elicit a desire that her very presence at the same time will frustrate.³⁰

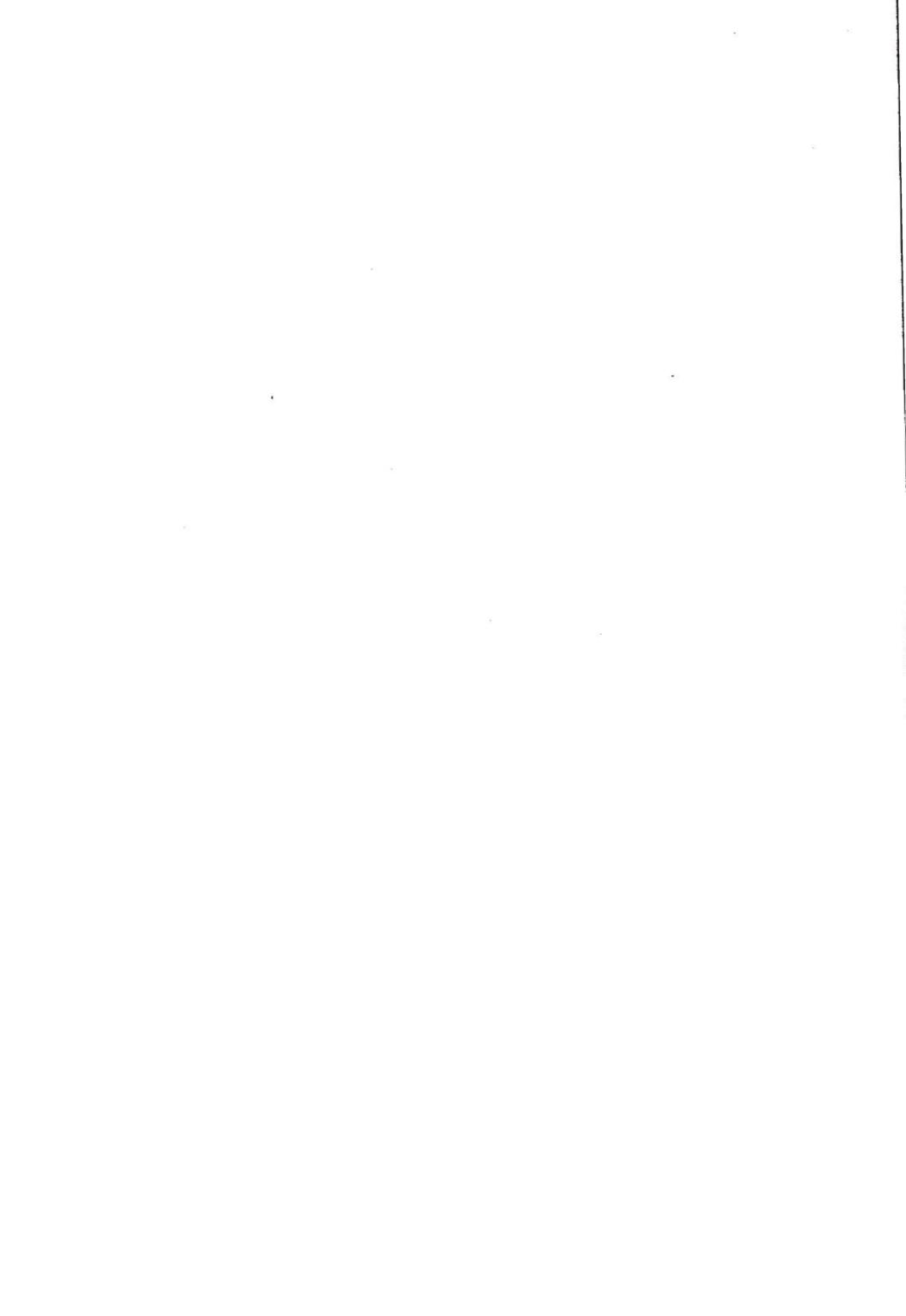
Although the rhetoric of praise remains important more or less constantly throughout the genre of the lyric, it demonstrates remarkable shifts in focus and in meaning as the genre progresses and as this theme intermingles with such issues as absence and desire or referential plenitude both within the ongoing work of individual poets and across the boundaries of differing poetic oeuvres and differing historical periods. Already in Petrarch, the usual movement of representation, from *verba* to *res*, from language to the linguistic construction or reconstruction of something outside of language (in this case Laura and the love she inspires), is far less straightforward than in Dante, who adopts the mediaeval dictum according to which names are the consequences of the things they are designating: "Nomina sunt consequentia rerum" (*Vita Nuova*, XIII). Therefore, Dante's Beatrice designates the essence of beatitude, and Petrarch's Laura (*laus*, *laudare*, *the laurel*) that of praise and glory. But if in Dante the name Beatrice leads to God, in Petrarch this cratylism does not function in such a straightforward fashion, since the wordplay on the name Laura vitiates the immediacy of the relationship between words and things. To put this in other terms, Dante's uncertainty aims towards certainty while Petrarch's uncertainty aims towards further uncertainty, despite the "Canzone alla Vergine", the last poem of the *Canzoniere*

30. Fineman, p. 24.

in which the poet disavows his earthly desire and expresses his longing for reunion with the deity through the finally ineffable mystery of Christian grace.

Despite his uncertainty, Petrarch still attempts to restore a lost whole, albeit momentarily, through the beloved. Such referential plenitude can, instead, never be attained by Shakespeare through praise of the Dark Lady. Indeed, his relationship with the undeserving female object of desire urges him to redefine the entire tradition of social / poetic values as expressed in language and, through the use of misnomers and homonyms in conjunction with the interplay of "self" and "other", or "I" and "thou", Shakespeare refashions that tradition into something new through the reversal of supposedly established symbolic values. And yet, in closing one should add that even in his most disillusioned moments, when thoughts of the world's decay lead the poet to see himself reduced to the state of a perjured eye, when the beloved is paradoxically praised for being the signifier of an absent ideal, or when *verba* appears to be duplicitous with respect to *res*, Shakespeare, like Petrarch, never loses sight of the metamorphic power of eternizing verse which can defy time through poetic triumph. As deeply sceptical of the rightness and the truth of words as names as Shakespeare might seem to be, this scepticism is balanced by his belief in the connotative power of poetry.

University of Malta



Henry Francis Cary and
John Taaffe Junior:
The Translator of Dante and a
Comment on the Divine Comedy

Antonella Braidà

Else that 9th book is the finest in the volume, an exquisite combination of the ludicrous & the terrible, – I have never read either even in translation, but such I conceive to be the manner of Dante & Ariosto.¹

Charles Lamb's letter to Coleridge on *Joan of Ark*, Book IX expresses so well the English approach to Dante in 1796. When Lamb was writing to Coleridge no complete translation of the poem existed in English. Contrary to what has often been claimed, the *Divine Comedy* had already received considerable attention in the English literary world by the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1792 Samuel Rogers published the first English translation of the *Inferno*, followed in 1795 by Henry Boyd's *Inferno* and in 1802 by his

1. *The letters of Charles and Mary Ann Lamb*, ed. by Edwin W. Morris Jr., 3 vols, Ithaca & London, 1975, Vol. I, 16.

complete translation of the *Divine Comedy*.² Lamb's letter expresses a need of the times: the desire to understand the foreign poet by way of known categories, and, eventually to "anglicise" him. Henry Francis Cary's blank verse translation best fulfilled these expectations by creating an "English" Dante, soon dutifully compared and studied together with the English Milton and the English Homer, the latter translated by Chapman, Pope and, more recently, Cowper.

By the 1820s, Italian critics, too, reappropriated Dante in a political and nationalistic way as well as in a literary way: Dante was progressively revalued by the Romantics in their quarrel with the classicists. John Taaffe Jr occupies a minor yet interesting role in the study of the *Divine Comedy* in Italy and England. His *Comment on the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, published by Murray in 1822, was reviewed in both countries and, significantly, Taaffe's English reviewer was Henry Francis Cary, the English translator of Dante.³

This study will be concerned with two aspects of Taaffe's work: his criticism of Cary's translation and his critical study of the *Divine Comedy*. It will be shown how in both fields Taaffe, although an amateur critic, was able to make interesting contributions which went unheeded for reasons beyond his imagination: his critical challenge to the contemporary approach to Dante.

A brief biography of Taaffe will help us understand his literary ambitions. The critic C.L. Cline has been the only one to work on the Taaffe's manuscripts so far and my account will be based on his research.⁴ Born in Ireland in a prominent Catholic family, he received a good education at Stonyhurst and Ulverstone, where he was encouraged to compose poetry. He then spent three happy

2. *Inferno of Dante Translated*, London, 1782; Henry Boyd, trans. *A Translation of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri in English Verse with Historical Notes, and the Life of Dante, to Which is Added, A Specimen of a New Translation of the Orlando Furioso of Ariosto*, Dublin, 1785– , trans. *The Divine Commedia od Dante Alighieri: consisting of the Inferno, Purgatorio, translated into English verse, with preliminary essays, notes, and illustrations*, 3 vols, London, 1802.

3. John Taaffe, *A Comment on the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, London, 1822; *London Magazine* 7, 1823, 317–24; 396–404.

4. C. L. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and their Pisan Circle*, London, 1952.

years at the family castle in Smarmore till his literary ambitions drove him to Scotland. A confused love affair with a Mrs Colebrooke resulted in his voluntary exile in order to escape any possible legal proceedings against himself. His travels began in 1812 and brought him to Portugal, North Africa and Spain to end in 1815 in Italy where he was to stay for most of his life. Cline does not find any significant reason for Taaffe's interest in the *Divine Comedy*. Byron and Shelley's company acted as a stimulant to his literary ambitions. "His study of Italian having led him to Dante" Cline states "he laboured on his translation of the *Divine Comedy*, which Byron and Shelley jested about".⁵ However, it is easy to find the origin of this interest in his friendship with Mme. Regny, Artemisia Castellini, a painter and member of the Florentine Academy, and of the literary circles of Tuscany which included noblemen and amateur intellectuals.

Apart from *A Comment*, Taaffe wrote *Padilla, A tale of Palestine, Adalais* (1821-1841) a poem suggested by Mme. de Stael, *a History of the Order of St John of the Cross* in four volumes, suggested by a visit to Malta in 1848.⁶ Between 1856 and 1862 he compiled an Arabic Grammar.

John Taaffe's main claim to fame rests on his having met the Shelleys in Pisa in November 1820. As the journals of Claire Clairmont and Mary Shelley document, after his introduction to the Shelleys on 28 November 1820, Taaffe was a frequent visitor in the household until the end of March.⁷ While Mary was the most reticent about the new guest, initially Shelley took to him warmly. Within a month of their meeting the two were discussing *The Cenci*, and Shelley thanked him warmly:

You have gratified my literary vanity, & if I dared to trust myself I should say a purer feeling, in a manner, which never has before fallen to my lot; & you must bear the burthen of my thanks.⁸

5. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and their Pisan Circle*, p. 22.

6. John Taaffe, *Adalais*, 2 vols, London, 1852; *The History of the Holy, Military, Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem*, 4 vols, London, 1852.

7. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols, OUP, 1987, Vol. I, 348-65; 368-73; 381-85; 392-94; 397; Claire Clairmont, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. by Marion Kingston Stocking, Cambridge, Mass., 1968.

8. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by F. L. Jones 2, vols, OUP, 1964, Vol. II, 253.

Taaffe's strict Catholicism must soon have become a barrier to a deeper understanding between the two. A letter of February 1821 shows that Taaffe was trying to convince Shelley of the reality of eternal damnation. Shelley's reply is ironically compliant:

Remember that I am predestined to everlasting damnation, merely because I doubt whether either I or any one else will ever be damned, and therefore if I arrive in Hell before you do in Heaven I will endeavour to inform you how far I desire to be punished everlastingly.⁹

Nevertheless, in his autobiography Taaffe rejects in a patronizing way Shelley's own claim of being an atheist:

Shelley once (ridiculously enough) called himself what he was not; and he had ceased calling himself so a long time before I made his acquaintance.¹⁰

To Byron, on the contrary, Taaffe's Catholicism was both a matter of curiosity and a proof of his upright character. In his letters to Murray he usually introduces him as "a good fellow", "a very good man". Byron could also see through Taaffe's pretentious literary ambitions. To Thomas Moore he would add:

Now what shall we do for him? He says he will risk part of the expense with the publisher. He will never rest till he is published and abused – for he has a high opinion of himself.¹¹

A few months after their first meeting Taaffe had engaged both Byron and Shelley to plead with their publishers for the publication of his commentary. While Shelley soon declared his defeat with Ollier and sent back the proofs by 5 June 1821, Murray easily complied, more easily so since Taaffe undertook the expense of

9. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. II, 260.

10. Cited in Cline, *Byron, Shelley and their Pisan Circle*, p. 23.

11. Byron, *Letters and Journals*, Vol. IX, 64.

printing and mailing 400 copies of the *Comment*.¹² Byron predicted a disastrous impact for the book. In the same letter quoted above, he ventured the following advice to Thomas Moore:

You must write, then, to Jeffrey to beg him *not* to review him, and I will do the same to Gifford, through Murray. Perhaps they might notice the *Comment* without touching the text. But I doubt the dogs – the text is too tempting.¹³

To Murray, however, his tone was necessarily more positive;

I can only say that the work appears a desideratum in literature – (especially in English literature) and with a lift in the *Quarterly* would be likely to go off well.¹⁴

Cline's publication of Taaffe's correspondence with Murray shows how the publisher was lax in advertising and distributing the book. Some gift copies sent by Taaffe did not reach their addressees. As his letter of 25 February 1823 reveals, Sir Walter Scott was one of the recipients.¹⁵ A later one to Murray mentions Ugo Foscolo and John Cam Hobhouse.¹⁶ But neither Foscolo's correspondence nor Hobhouse's diaries mention Taaffe's name.¹⁷ A letter to Byron of 26 June 1822 shows that Scott did not receive the book either.¹⁸

12. Shelley, *Letters*, II, 293; for the relationship between Taaffe and Murray, see Appendix C in Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle*.

13. Byron, *Letters and Journals*, Vol. IX, 64.

14. Byron, *Letters and Journals*, Vol. IX, 90.

15. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle*, pp. 219–220.

16. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle*, pp. 221–222.

17. See Ugo Foscolo, *Epistolario*, ed. by Mario Scotti, Edizione Nazionale, 9 vols, Firenze, 1949–94; *Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse) with Additional extracts from his Private Diaries*, ed. by Lady Dorchester, 6 vols, London, 1909.

18. Scott writes: "he meditates a work in English upon Dante but I should fear the original is too little known amongst us to make the commentary however valuable to Italian scholars a matter of great interest with the general reader." Sir Walter Scott, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols, London, 1932–1937, Vol. VII 197–98.

The transaction between Taaffe and Murray ended around April 1823 when the publisher sent him a statement for more than £50 due to him and some information about the unsatisfactory sale of the book. Taaffe's reply shows his understandable surprise and disappointment:

Sir,

Your letter of March 18th which I this moment receive really astonishes me – I mean not with regard to the sale or rather *non-sale* of my book, but to the preremptory manner with which you request me to remit to you *immediately* the balance in your favour on the state of our account [. . .].¹⁹

True to his character, Taaffe concludes by declaring his final decision not to continue the work and his offer to Murray of *Adelais*, a poem of about 1400 verses.

Despite its short period of circulation – six months – the *Commentary* received four reviews. Of the two Italian ones, one was published in *Antologia*; the second one appeared in the *Memoriale dell'Accademia di Lucca*, a publication of smaller circulation.²⁰ In England the work was reviewed by the *London Magazine* in March and April 1823 and by the *Monthly Review* as late as November 1823.²¹ The reaction to Taaffe's *Comment* will now be set alongside the Italian and English used and study of Dante.

Dante in Italy in 1822

As Mario Fubini states the word "Romanticism" in Italy functioned as a banner embracing different positions.²² The movement evoked a European-minded attitude initially shared by the so-called "classicists" as well. However, it soon became clear that Europe represented the new nation-states and among them, a unified Italy. For Italian patriots,

19. Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle*, 221.

20. See Taaffe's letter of 25 February 1825, Cline, *Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle*, 219–220; *Antologia* 7, 1822, 103–4.

21. *Monthly Review* 102, 1823, 225–42. A note of praise accompanied by an informative footnote on Taaffe's *Comment* appeared also in *Liberal* 1, 1822, 111.

22. Mario Fubini, *Romanticismo italiano*, Bari, 1971, 17.

from a literary point of view, Dante Alighieri was the poet who marked the existence of an Italian culture from as early as the XIII c. What need then to study Latin and Greek or to imitate their literature? As Pietro Borsieri wrote in the journal *Conciliatore*, "L'Italia è come la patria della storia moderna" [Italy is in a way the fatherland of modern history].²³

That Taaffe was reviewed in G.P. Vieusseux's *Antologia* is not surprising; the journal, in imitation of the French journal *Revue Encyclopédique*, intended to offer a selection of articles translated from foreign reviews and among the foreign authors translated there were Schiller, Byron, Stendhal, Chateaubriand and Scott.²⁴ In the 1820s the journal was progressively acquiring a stronger political bias and this led to its suppression by the Austrian authorities in 1833. Benci's review in number 19 of the journal of July 1822, consists of two pages of praise for Taaffe's work. However, he limits his reference to a eulogy of the commentary. Significantly, Benci uses Taaffe's introductory statements as a worthy example of foreign appreciation of Dante:

Tanto è famoso il nome di Dante Alighieri, e tanto meritevoli sono le opere sue, che anche gli stranieri vi attendono con sommo studio. In Germania e in Francia erano già commentate: ora un inglese le commenta a' suoi concittadini. Questi dimora da molti anni in Toscana, e da Pisa manda il nuovo dono alla patria.

[Dante Alighieri is so famous, and his works are so worthy of praise that even foreigners devote to him considerable attention, in Germany and France his works have already been commented; now an Englishman writes a comment for his countrymen. He has been living in Tuscany for many years, and from Pisa he sends his gift to his country.]²⁵

Benci quotes Taaffe to show how the Italian controversy between "lombardi and toscani" is of no consequence to foreigners, the so-

23. *Conciliatore* 70(1819), ed. by vittore Branca, 3 vols, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1948, 1953, 1954, Vol. II, 519.

24. Compared to similar other Italian ventures the journal stands out for its moderate character: it is not rare to find articles of literary opponents of the new "movement" such as Mario Pieri and Urbano Lampredi, staunch "puristi" opposed to Monti.

25. *Antologia* 7, 103.

called "oltremontani". Of the commentary itself he simply adds "l'opera inglese ci è sembrata giudiziosa".²⁶ In the same issue of the journal Benci contributed two articles on Dante: these show a sincere appreciation of the *Divine Comedy* and that he is clearly siding for the "Romantics".²⁷ For Benci, Dante's poem proves the existence of a single Italian nation in the XIII century: "Vogliono forse i moderni filologi far nascere gl'idiomi, prima che la nazioni?" [Is the intention of modern philologist to have languages born before their nations?].²⁸ His purpose is thus a political one: to emphasize the maturity of the Italian tradition and therefore the Italian right to independence.

The equation Dante equals Italian independence in England finds its first great expression in Byron's *The Prophecy of Dante*. In Byron's dramatic monologue, supposed to take place "in the interval between the conclusion of the *Divina Commedia* and his death, and shortly before the latter event",²⁹ Dante's suffering for his exile gives way to nationalistic feelings as he reproaches the modern Italians:

Oh! my own beauteous land! so long laid low,
So long the grave of thy own children's hopes,
When there is but required a single blow
To break the chain, yet – yet the Avenger stops,
...
What is there wanting then to set thee free,
And show thy beauty in its fullest light?
To make the Alps impassable; and we,
Her sons, may do this with *one* deed! – Unite!
(136–9; 142–5)³⁰

26. *Antologia* 7, 104.

27. A. Benci, "Discorso intorno alla Cantica di Dante"; "Elogio di Giulio Perticari", *Antologia* 7, 1822, 105–129; 130–46.

28. A. Benci, "Discorso intorno alla Cantica di Dante", 121.

29. George Gordon Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols, OUP, 1980–1993, Vol. IV, 214.

30. Byron, *Poetical Works*, Vol. IV, 226–27.

31. Like Ugo Foscolo, Gabriele Rossetti and Antonio Panizzi, many Italian refugees succeeded in earning their living as authors. Among the second wave of Italian exiles of particular interest are the brothers Agostino and Giovanni Ruffini, who had accompanied Giuseppe Mazzini into his exile in Switzerland and in

The English reading public, however, took a few years more to become involved in the question of Italian independence.³¹ Taaffe's *Comment* was thus reviewed with reference to Cary's translation. Of the two English reviews, one, in fact, is Cary's own reply, point by point, to the translator's criticism. The second one, published in the *Monthly*, is clearly inspired by Cary's, but takes a more moderate view towards the *Comment*.

It will now be shown how Taaffe emphasized the weaknesses of Cary's translation thus provoking such scathing treatment from its translator.

The treatment of *The Vision* in the *Comment* is an afterthought: Taaffe claims to have suppressed his own translation after reading Cary's, since such an enterprise was no longer a desideratum in the language. Having dismissed Boyd's paraphrastic translation, he writes of Cary's:

Its fidelity is exemplary: and though somewhat of a paraphrase, it is far from loose. But whatever be its *literal* merits, it does not give, nor pretend to give any of the melody of its Original. Dante writes in rhyme and in a metre whose chief characteristics are pliancy and concision. Mr Cary in blank verse imitative of the stateliness and occasional prolixity of Milton.³²

Taaffe's comment identifies the two main qualities of the translation: the accuracy and the Miltonic aspect of its blank verse. Taaffe finds Cary's choice of blank verse inadequate in the light of Byron's masterful use of *terza rima*: "If we are to argue from analogy, it will not follow that because he prefer'd rhyme in his native tongue, he would blank verse in ours."³³

Yet Cary himself showed his personal awareness, indeed, his acute consciousness of the merits and dangers of his choice of blank verse. His notes on the *Inferno* show that he was aware of

England. They contributed to increase the English interest in the Italian "Risorgimento". See Harry W. Rudman, *Italian Nationalism and English Letters*, London, 1940.

32. John Taaffe Jr., *A Comment on the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, London, 1822, xix-xx.

33. Taaffe, *A Comment*, xxi.

Hayley's version in the original metre and had reservations about it.³⁴ It is clear that he chose blank verse believing that in a long translation it would be more faithful to the original as he replies to Taaffe in his review:

An original writer is master of what he shall say next, and has sometimes a happy thought suggested to him by the rhyme itself. The translator has no such advantage and will be apt to employ the metre that will leave him most at liberty to make choice of such words as shall best convey the sense of his original.³⁵

Cary's syntax, like Milton's, is close to the Italian with a generous use of caesuras, inversions and postponement of the subject. Furthermore, following eighteenth century aesthetics of the sublime, Cary's introduction aims at endowing the *Divine Comedy* with the required qualities of "vagueness" and "obscurity":

Some have termed it an epic; and others, a satire: but it matters little by what name it is called. It suffices that the poem seizes on the heart by its two great holds, terror and pity.³⁶

Where Dante does not fit these categories, he is criticized by the English commentators for being grotesque. Cary is the first to express this dissatisfaction. In his introductory "Life of Dante" he writes:

His solicitude [. . .] to define all his images in such a manner as to bring them distinctly within the circle of our vision, and to subject them to the power of the pencil, sometimes renders him little better than grotesque, where Milton has since taught us to expect sublimity.³⁷

Cary's concept of the sublime is clearly a lay rather than a Christian one: the failure of language does not refer to the Godhead, but to

34. Henry Francis Cary, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, 2 vols, London, 1805, vol. I, 166n.

35. *London Magazine* 7, 319.

36. *The Vision*, xxxiv.

37. *The Vision*, xxxvi.

the human play of emotions (the Aristotelian notions of "pity and fear").

Cary's choice of a different title for the poem is clearly part of the same intention. Cary did not invent the title but found it in one of the manuscripts of the poem: the Italian tradition, however, settled on the present title "Divine Comedy" since the Venice edition of 1555 edited by Ludovico Dolce. Taaffe thus criticizes Cary's choice quoting the Dantean critic Gelli:

I cannot but object to the very title, *Vision*, instead of that chosen by the author; and the more so, because Italians enumerate among the many reasons which induced him to call his book *Comedy*, the desire to avoid precisely such 'low common-place, as *Journey, Vision, or the like*'— non volendo chiamare la sua opera *Cammino, o Visione, o con altro simile nome basso*".³⁸

For Taaffe Cary's translation of Dante's celebration of Beatrice is also unsatisfactory, as can be seen from the last Purgatorial cantos. Cary twice translates "donna" as "virgin" (*The Vision*, XXX: 32 XXXIII: 3) maintaining thus the reverential distance that the poet here wishes to eliminate.³⁹ Similarly, the three theological virtues, in Dante "tre donne" (XXIX: 121) in *The Vision* are "three nymphs" (line 116). The same inadequacy can be found in *Inferno* II, as Taaffe points out: "Mr Cary calls the 'three maids' *Divine Mercy, Lucia, and Beatrice*; an odd jumble of fact and allegory".⁴⁰ Not only does he question his translator's skills; Taaffe is here questioning Cary's role as critic. Concerning his explanation of the allegorical meaning of the three beasts, Taaffe writes: "This, to be sure, is rather to be attributed to the commentators than to him."⁴¹ While Cary protested his reliance on Dante's commentators

38. *A Comment*, xxvi. Cary stubbornly defends his choice quoting the different titles given to Dante's poem in its different edition: "Capitola", "Terze Rime", "Rime" "Lo Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso", "Commedia, or Comedia", "Visione". *London Magazine* 7, 320.

39. The word "donna" here acquires central importance: after chiding Dante, Beatrice now invites him to abandon all fear and reverence "sì che non parli più com'om che sogna" [that thou mayst no longer speak like one that dreams] (XXXIII: 32).

40. *A Comment*, xxix-xxx.

41. *A Comment*, xxvii.

denying his role as interpreter, his later editions of *The Vision* show an increasing use of notes to explain Dante's allegorical meanings or the historical background: he was now clearly seeing himself in the new role of critic as well as translator. As the modern editor of *The Vision* points out, "Cary's scholarship becomes perhaps more distracting than illuminating [. . .] By keeping the notes in the background, [the 1814 edition] furthers [. . .] some elements in Dante's project".⁴²

How did Cary react to Taaffe's criticism? The article he published in two parts in the *British Magazine* has the tone of a riposte to a personal attack. As Byron had predicted, Cary based his answer on Taaffe's translation. The opening of the first article will illustrate his method:

"Percotevansi incontro" Dante inf. c. 7, v. 28.

"Both smote together" – Cary

"Ho! Charge, hurra, jolt, bound, rebound". Commentator's translation, p. 430.

"From the last of these lines, which we have selected as our motto, some of our readers will perhaps conclude that this book is a jocular performance, or, as it has been reviewed of late years, a hoax. But it was put into our hands very seriously, with a desire that we should review it, and it is our intention to treat it with all due gravity".⁴³

In his consistently sustained tone Cary then rejects even the justifiable criticism that the Irishman had written of the translation.

The *Monthly Review* published a more moderate study of the *Comment*. The reviewer devotes considerable attention to Taaffe's translation, which he qualifies as "wild and whimsical" "much more loose and paraphrastical than Cary's" and his *terze rime* "rude and unmeasured".⁴⁴ However, the reviewer then declares his "attempt to dismiss from our mind the idea of his [Taaffe's] poetical character [. . .] and proceed with our remarks on his commentary".⁴⁵

42. *Dante: The Divine Comedy: The Vision of Dante*, trans. by Henry F. Cary, ed. by Ralph Pite, Everyman, London, 1994, xxiii.

43. *London Magazine* 7, 317.

44. *Monthly Review* 102, 227, 229.

45. *Monthly Review* 102, 232.

Taaffe's chief merit as stated consists "chiefly in this light, as a general comment on the more obscure portions of the *Divina Commedia*".⁴⁶ The reviewer welcomes two of Taaffe's most original views: the identification of the three beasts of Canto I with Florence, the King of France and Boniface VIII, and his interpretation of Dante's nonsensical line "Pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe!" (*Inferno*, VII: 1) as a Hebrew quotation. The reviewer ends emphasizing "the various advantages which, we think English *literati* and English literature might derive from such an accession to its strength in a department of criticism but little explored".⁴⁷

What is Taaffe's contribution to Romantic Ideology? Taaffe's 499 pages cover the first eight cantos of the *Inferno* in the form of notes to chosen verses: it is clear that even by modern standards the *Comment* is long.

Taaffe's study is characterized by its emphasis on historical interpretation on the one hand and on his orthodox Catholicism on the other. He is interested in Dante "as a man of science, a politician, and a theologian" as well as a poet.⁴⁸ Consistently he attempts to reduce the importance of the allegorical framework of the *Divine Comedy*. Significant is his interpretation of the three beasts. Of the Panther he claims:

In considering the Panther as a personification of Florence, I am, in at least a slight degree, at variance with the Commentators; for these say it personifies either the vice of Voluptuousness in the abstract, or the voluptuousness of Dante. [...] For if Dante meant voluptuousness in the abstract, yet, to injure and plague him, it must have been such as immediately was round him; but he was then in Florence; he must then have meant the voluptuousness of Florence. As to the making of Dante accuse himself of that vice, it is in contradiction with every thing that has come down to us of his life and manners; which his enemies decried as stoically severe, while his friends contended they were only of a very laudable gravity.⁴⁹

46. *Monthly Review* 102, 240.

47. *Monthly Review* 102, 242.

48. *A Comment*, xii.

49. *A Comment*, pp. 16-17.

A similar view would be embraced by Gabriele Rossetti who would develop it to other extremes in his *Comento analitico*.⁵⁰ He certainly heard of Taaffe's *Comment* by February 1828, as a letter to Charles Lyell shows.⁵¹ Rossetti's disparagement of the work shows that he was unlikely to consider it a worthy source of information; the striking similarity between Taaffe's and Rossetti's interpretation of Dante's three beasts testifies a common source, or, more likely, common contemporary sources sharing the emphasis on Dante's use of contemporary history.⁵²

Taaffe's *Comment* will now be analyzed in order to understand his insight into Dante's poem. His analysis opens with an invitation to appreciate the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, usually neglected by English readers. Taaffe was probably led to this opinion by Shelley, who proof-read the comment in the Spring of 1821.⁵³ In the *Defence of Poetry* Shelley similarly shows his preference for the last two *cantiche*:

The acutest critics have justly reversed the judgment of the vulgar, and the order of the great acts of the "Divine Drama", the measure of the admiration they accord to the Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. The latter is a perpetual hymn of everlasting Love.⁵⁴

Taaffe's reliance on fact turns out satisfactory in the treatment of Beatrice: in this case he is occasionally praiseworthy for being able to avoid the traps of traditional "hagiographic" criticism. For instance, while following Boccaccio in believing that Dante was convinced to marry in order to forget Beatrice, he does not consider her a Xantippe:

50. *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri con Comento Analitico di Gabriele Rossetti in 6 volumi*, 2 vols, London, 1826, Vol. I, lvi-lxviii.

51. Gabriele Rossetti, *Carteggi*, 4 vols, Napoli, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, Vol. II, ed. by P.R. Horne, Tobia R. Toscano and J. R. Woodhouse, 140.

52. The same interpretation can be found in the popular commentary by Paolo Costa first published in Bologna in 1819-1821. *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri con le note di Paolo Costa e gli argomenti dell'Ab. G. Borghi*, 3 vols, Bologna, 1826, Vol. I, 1; 4-5.

53. See *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilwert, OUP, 1987, 368-73.

His wife seems to have been to him a faithful partner. [. . .] As to her having been a Xantippe, chasing all domestic peace from Dante's household, nothing of the kind is fairly to be drawn from Boccaccio or any ancient commentator.⁵⁵

The emphasis on history, while being a tendency of the times, leads Taaffe to assert Dante's meeting with Marco Polo and his knowledge of Greek and of Homer, rightfully denied by eighteenth-century commentators.⁵⁶

This same emphasis on historical fact can be found in one of Taaffe's chief sources: the Abate A. M. Lanci's *Dissertazione* [. . .] *su i Versi di Nembrotte e di Pluto nella Divina Commedia di Dante*.⁵⁷ From this work Taaffe derived in fact one of the most original contributions of the *Comment*: Dante's use of Hebrew and Arabic in the *Comedy*. Lanci originally interpreted *Inferno* VII 1 and XXXI 67 as respectively Hebrew and Islamic verses. Although already Pietro di Dante could find a Hebrew element in Pluto's words, Lanci's interpretation was influential; it is quoted in the commentaries by Costa (1819), Scartazzini (1900), Siena (1867), Berthier (1892) and Casini/Barbi (1921).⁵⁸ Lanci writes:

Dante studiò tanto la Bibbia, che molte sue locuzioni, e forse le più poetiche non tolte dalla espressione orientale[. . .]. Egli avea due dottrine di Scrittura: l'una era della storia biblica, e l'altra del biblico stile, e quest'ultima trapassando l'altra d'infinito vantaggio, è d'uopo conchiudere, che per meglio gustare la forza di quel dire, da fonti originali attingesse; e fatto studio d'ebraica favella, facesse pur quello dell'araba, come suole presentemente da noi praticarsi.⁵⁹

The question is still controversial, but it is generally assumed that, although he did not have a fluent knowledge of these two

54. *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols, London, 1926-1930, Vol. VII, 128.

55. *A Comment*, 111-12.

56. *A Comment*, xvii-xviii.

57. *Dissertazione dell'Abate M. A. Lanci su i versi di Nemrotte e di Pluto nella Commedia di Dante*, Roma, 1819.

58. See "Lanci" in the Darmouth Dante Project, <http://dciswww.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/dcis/wdi?&Alexandria.Darmouth.EDU&5100>.

languages, Dante might have known sentences from either.⁶⁰ Taaffe might have discussed the poem with the Abate and derived a more significant influence from the Italian critic. In his *Dissertazione* Lanci attacks the excessive reliance on Lombardi's among all previous commentaries of the *Divine Comedy*, as well as the emphasis on allegorical interpretations over historical and astronomical ones. Taaffe similarly attacks Cary for his use of Lombardi and, as we pointed out, for his excessive use of allegory. For Lanci, like for Taaffe, Dante "pria d'essere immortale Poeta, fu dotto, e scientifico, e fece la poesia alla storia, alla politica, alla morale, alla filosofia, e teologia nella forza maggiore degli anni e dell'intelletto servire".⁶¹

Taaffe's failure to win over Cary's support was probably the cause of the general lack of interest in his work. The fact that Cary was much more lenient with Rossetti's less conventional commentary is significant. Taaffe did, however, earn the interest of as fond a reader of Dante as Shelley, and, more recently, of a renowned Dantean scholar: Paget Toynbee. In his anthology *Dante in English Literature* Toynbee summarizes Taaffe's achievement:

Whatever his qualifications as a translator of the *Commedia*, Taaffe was a serious student of Dante, and his Commentary, which contains sundry translations from the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, is by no means without value.⁶²

59. Lanci, *Dissertazione*, 38-39.

60. See Angelo Penna, "Ebraico", "Ebraismi", in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols, 1970, Vol. II, 620-23; and Francesco Gabrieli, "Isalm", "Arabi", in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, III, 523-25; I, 341-42. The most consistent twentieth-century attempts to analyze Dante's knowledge of Islam are M. Asín Palacios's *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, Imprenta de Estanislao Maestre, 1919) and E. Cerulli *Il Libro della Scala' e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*, Città del Vaticano, 1949. As for Dante's use of Hebrew in *Inferno* VII 1, this had already been referred to by Pietro Alighieri "Satan caput et princeps daemonum".

61. Lanci, *Dissertazione*, p. 60.

62. Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary*, 2 vols, London, 1909, Vol. II, 341.

Portraits in Italy: Lord Byron and the Countess Guiccioli

Edna C. Southard

Teresa Gamba, the Countess Guiccioli (1800–1873) was much more insouciant than she appears in the half-length portrait by William Edward West. By all accounts, she was beautiful and vibrant, with a personality impudent enough to fascinate a jaded poet some twelve years her senior and to hold his interest for more than four years. The portrait raises many questions that have not been addressed in the previous literature, among them why the painting displeased all parties involved. It is time for Teresa Gamba to receive the scholarly attention she deserves.



*William West's portrait of the
Countess Guiccioli (1822)*

First, she was a highly significant figure in the life of the 19th century British poet, George Gordon, the sixth Lord Byron, who virtually defined Romanticism and who was a celebrity of star proportions in his own times. One cannot understand Byron

without trying to understand the woman he loved and whom he called his "last Passion". I will suggest here the presence of a strong woman, whose presence has been systematically suppressed, almost excised, because previous scholars have taken an imaginary gaze of a male taking a mistress.

Second, we will see here an instance of how Byron invented and reinvented himself, in this case through Teresa Gamba who as a strong and independent woman had her own abilities of self-invention. She was more than a participant in "Byronmania", as it was called even in his own time. We will see that the painting's stylistic references to Italian Renaissance art, specifically to paintings by Raphael and Titian, is not accidental. These references confirm that Byron requested the painting, and, as with images of himself, attempted to control the way his lover was depicted. Previous commentators, in taking a male view, have missed these points. They have dismissed Teresa Gamba as "Byron's mistress", a simplification and limited male-oriented view. Through the study presented here, more nuanced and more sensitive to gender issues, I will contextualize an important work of art to shed light on the painting that hardly does her justice as all three principals agreed and on the people involved in its making.

Recent scholars have discussed Byron's attempt to fashion other selves, his "wearing of masks", his creation of a fictional self for establishing his identity with an audience.¹ This re-invention of a celebrity personality has visual implications. Byron controlled or attempted to control his own visual image. He controlled the images used in the frontispieces of his publications, allowed himself to be shown usually half-length, and only occasionally full-length with

1. I am grateful to Professors Jay Ward, Laura George, Sante Matteo, and Robert Southard for their guidance and sharing of insights. Concerning Byron's self-fashioning: Jay Ward, "The gloomy vanity of 'drawing from self': Byron and Romantic Self-Fashioning", presented at the American Conference on Romanticism in Oxford, Ohio, November 2001; Joanna Manning; and Stephen Greenblatt, *Byron's Life and Times*. On the visual images, see Tom Mole, 'Byron, Westall, Asperne, Blood: An Early Engraved Portrait', *The Byron Journal* 29(2001), 98-102. Annette Peach, 'Portraits of Byron', *The Walpole Society*, 62(2000), 1-144, pays attention to the portraits and transformation of the image of Byron.

his lame club-foot covered. At least one portrait shows him full-length with his pants long. As his image became available to a wider public, Byron tried to control how his bodily image was shown, but he lost control with an engraved image in 1814. The most famous painted portrait, now in Albania, of Byron shows him in oriental clothing. Some of the images of him are boldly "masculine" and others allow a more "feminine" side to show. When Teresa saw West's portrait of Byron she is reported by West to have exclaimed, "*E troppo bello*". She would have understood the importance to Byron of presenting a "*bella figura*".

Byron's life is endlessly fascinating, but Teresa Gamba's life is locked in time and shrouded in myths and mysteries. She got a raw deal from later misogynist commentators: paying voluminous attention to her appearance, the most recent writer takes contemporary comments made about her in 1828 to conclude that "she seems to have aged well" – she had reached the advanced age of 28–, while he quotes Leigh Hunt who said that the portrait of her by West was "very like", and "the studied pretension of the attitude has a moral resemblance".² Although there are documents and she published memoirs of her life with Byron, there are many things that she left unsaid. The portrait of her, however, is a tangible object, a memento that none of the three principals kept. There are other known portraits of her, such as a drawing by John Hayter of 1818, and a sculpture by Lorenzo Bartolini of 1822, both without the reference to Venetian Renaissance painting. In all these images Teresa has similar features, a high forehead, her hair parted in the middle with cascading curls.³ What is different in the West painting from the other images of Teresa is that it is idealized in a particular way, specifically in Venetian Renaissance style. That idealization is worth a closer examination: it is not accidental, but rather an example of Byron's image control. In this case, the image-maker,

2. John Clubbe, "William Edward West's Portrait of Teresa Guiccoli", *The Byron Journal* (1979), 76–87.

3. Iris Origo, *The Last Attachment: The story of Byron and Countess Guiccioli as told in their published letters and other family papers* (London. Jonathan Cape and John Murray, 1949) frontispiece and ill, opposite 314.

William Edward West, did not satisfy his client, Byron, or the sitter, Teresa Gamba. West wrote a letter to Byron offering to sell the painting for fifty pounds, but Byron did not accept the offer.

Teresa must have seemed like a breath of fresh air to the jaded poet. She was young, aristocratically titled by marriage, and was audacious in her actions and speech. She said what she thought and bragged about her conquest of Byron. During that time he was writing *Don Juan*, where there is no single self in the voices. That Byron was influenced by the people around him is shown by his fascination with things American and his insertion of the Kentuckian Daniel Boone in *Don Juan* which has been related to the portraits made at this time of Byron and the Countess Guiccioli by William Edward West.⁴

While living in Florence in 1822, William Edward West (1788–1857), the charming and chatty American painter from Kentucky, travelled to the Villa Rossa in Monte Nero, four miles from Livorno. He was fulfilling a commission from George K. Bruen for the American Academy in New York to paint a portrait of Byron, the famous poet. Apparently at Byron's request, West also painted a portrait of Teresa Gamba, the Countess Guiccioli. Clubbe and Pennington have suggested that Byron asked West to paint the portrait of the Countess because he was fascinated by Americans. It seems more likely that Byron wanted a picture of his beloved Teresa to be a pair with the portrait of himself that West had been commissioned by the American Academy to paint. As it turned out, Byron and Teresa alternated their sittings and West painted the two on alternate days during the last two weeks of May, 1822. The sittings ended on July 2, according to a letter that Byron wrote from Pisa the following day. West finished the paintings when he returned to his studio in Florence. That they are a pair is confirmed not only by their rejoining in the 1985 West retrospective exhibition, but also by their measurements which are very similar. The portrait of Byron, now in the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland, measures 76.2 x 63.5 cm (30 x 25 inches). Its companion

4. See *Don Juan*, Canto 8, 610–67, Frederick Page (ed.), *Byron's Poetical Works*, 3rd corrected edition by John Jump (London, 1970). See John Clubbe, *Byron's Natural Man: Daniel Boone and Kentucky* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1979).

piece. Teresa Gamba, in the Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio, has the same dimensions of 77.5 x 66 cm (30 1/2 x 26 inches).⁵

Byron and West were the same age, both 34-years-old, when they met. Teresa Gamba was probably 22. Although West describes the Countess' appearance and personality, she has little to say about him in her memoir.⁶ During his lifetime, West would become famous for his portrait of Byron, which was once used as a frontispiece to a book by the poet, but Teresa's only known comment about it was that it was "*troppo bello*". She may have felt that West had depicted Byron as too effeminate and had missed the point of her attraction to Byron. The portraits that William Edward West painted of the two aristocrats – and West was star-struck by the "bloods", as he himself put it, of Europe – show nothing of the passionate natures that contemporary accounts and their own letters amply demonstrate. In his first letter to her in 1819, Byron said, "You sometimes tell me that I am your first real love – and I assure you that you will be my last Passion."⁷

The encounters among three people – British, America, and Italian – poet, painter, and young woman – provide insights into lives of privilege and politics in early 19th century international society. Byron and Teresa Gamba found each other mutually fascinating. West turned his encounters with Byron into his claim to fame. A well-known raconteur, West often told the story of meeting Byron especially after Byron's death in 1824.⁸

The portrait of the Countess remains enigmatic. Neither Byron nor Teresa seem to have liked it; West apologized to her for it, saying gallantly that it did not do her beauty justice; and the

5. For color reproductions, see Estill Curtis Pennington, *William Edward West 1788–1857: Kentucky Painter* (Washington, D.C., National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1985) especially color pictures 75 and 77. Clubbe, "West's Portrait of Teresa Guiccioli", (1979), 76–87; and John Clubbe, "The West Portrait of Byron", *The Byron Journal* (1980), 22–33.

6. Teresa Guiccioli (Marquise de Boissy), *Lord Byron jugé par le témoin de sa vie*, Paris 1868, quoted in Origo, 1949.

7. Origo, 45.

8. William Edward West papers, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian, published in *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, part 1, London 1826. See Estill Curtis Pennington, "Painting Lord Byron An account by West", *Archives of American Art Journal*, 24, no. 2 (1984) 16–21, and Pennington, *West*, cat. 18–20.

painting was presumed missing for a long time although in fact, its provenance can be entirely accounted for. West described Teresa as having "one of the most romantic-looking heads, set off as it was by the bright light behind it, which I had ever beheld" and he described painting her as a "flattering task".⁹

Teresa Gamba is shown in a dark green velvet dress with a red shawl, the sleeves of the dress sliced in Renaissance style to show the white cloth beneath, the waist cinched as always in West's portraits of women, and her golden blond hair curled and loose in Titianesque style. Her face is a perfect sixteenth-century Venetian Renaissance oval, Giorgionesque in its geometry, but impassive, serene, and apparently quite a bit duller than the lively young sitter. West's portrait of Teresa Gamba, an oil on canvas, 30 1/2 x 26 inches (77.47 x 66 cm), painted in 1822, was painted seemingly at the request of Byron. West offered the portrait of the countess to Byron in a letter of September 16, 1822 for fifty pounds but there is no record of a response. When West went to England, he took the painting with him. West lost all his money in a bad business investment and returned to the United States, leaving the painting in Britain.

The subsequent history of the portrait of the Countess can be reconstructed. It was sold to a private collector in 1829 and was owned by T.M. Joy of Martham Park, Wiltshire, around 1850; sold at Foster's of Pall Mall before 1874; owned by Algernon Graves in 1882; and appeared on the London art market again when it was purchased by the Samuel B. Mather family of Cleveland. It was inherited by the daughter of Mrs Robert Hamilton Bishop V, and bequeathed to her sons Jonathan and Amasa Bishop, who lent it to the Miami University Art Museum in 1973. Dr Jonathan S. Bishop gave it to the Miami University Art Museum in Oxford, Ohio in 1985 (1985. 81). He was a fifth generation descendant of Robert Hamilton Bishop, who was the first president of Miami University in 1903.

The painting was relined in 1912 by Ed Guenther in Cleveland, and was cleaned in 1978 shortly before the Miami University Art Museum opened. The painting was exhibited in *The Kentucky Painter from the Frontier to the Great War*, University of Kentucky, Lexington,

9. See Clubbe, "Guiccioli", (1979), 76.

1981; and in *William Edward West: Kentucky Painter*, 1985, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington D.C.; and in several exhibitions at the Miami University Art Museum.

In a remarkable coincidence, the painting's circuitous 150-year route to Oxford, Ohio, brings it serendipitously to a location about a hundred miles from the painter's home town in Kentucky. William Edward West was from Lexington, Kentucky. He studied in Philadelphia under Thomas Sully and went to Natchez, Mississippi. Towards the end of 1819, he sailed for Europe with the goal of studying painting at the Academy in Florence. His letters to his father express a somewhat blasé attitude toward what he saw, but he reported seeing the art of Sir Thomas Lawrence – "a number of his best paintings – many of the Kings and other bloods of Europe."¹⁰ Although he was already 31-years-old, West was impressionable, and was influenced by Lawrence's romantic windblown treatment of hair and lush coloration of Thomas Sully.

In Florence, West studied at the American Academy and lived in a palazzo at 12 Via Sancti Apostoli. Another artist from Kentucky, the sculptor Joel Tanner Hart, later lived there.¹¹ These lodgings in Florence were only a few blocks from the Ponte Vecchio and the Uffizi, where West would have seen the painting by Titian that influenced him in the portrait of Teresa Gamba which he finished in his studio in Florence. He also finished the portraits of Byron, Shelley, and Trelawney that he had started in May 1822 in Monte Nero. After West left Florence he lived in Paris and then, from 1825 to 1838, he had a studio in London, which is certainly how the painting got onto the London art market. West lost his money in a bad investment, sold everything and returned to the United States, establishing himself as a painter in Kentucky but best known during his lifetime for his portrait of Byron. His portraits after that of Teresa Gamba are different in style; his subsequent work does not show the strong influences of Italian Renaissance painting as overtly as we see it in this painting.

Always impressionable and absorptive in style, West painted the portrait of Teresa Gamba in Italian Renaissance style, with

10. Pennington, *West*, 14.

11. Clara Louise Dentler, *Famous Foreigners in Florence 1400-1900*, 1964.

reference to a famous oil on canvas that he would have seen in the Uffizi in Florence, a few blocks from his lodgings. *Flora*, (inv. 1462) ca. 1515 by Titian (Titiano Vecellio ca. 1490–1576) shows an idealized beauty that is characteristic of Titian and from him to much of 16th century Venetian painting. Like the portrait of Teresa, Titian's *Flora* is also an idealized, generalized portrait. The allegorical interpretation of the image is traditional, recalling a 17th century engraving by Joachim Sandrart. *Flora* holds a bunch of flowers in her right hand. The faces in both portraits are similar. In West's portrait the figure faces in the opposite direction from Titian's *Flora*, but the light comes from the upper left in both paintings. The parallels between the two paintings are striking and in the compositions it is clear that West's portrait of Teresa is not a likeness, yet he wrote to her in 1822 expressing his regret for not having "done more justice to your Ladyship's likeness."

Physical realism and idealization were contradictory aims in this painting but it was Byron, I would suggest, who may have controlled the image of the woman he loved, just as he is known to have attempted to control his own image. Byron compared Teresa to a painting by Raphael: calling her "much prettier than the Fornarina". He described her as "fair as Sunrise and warm as Noon", "much prettier" than Caroline Lamb "and not so savage".¹² The reference to Italian Renaissance painting, to the *Fornarina*, an oil on canvas painted by Raphael in 1520 now in the Gallery Barberini in Rome, is very specific. Like the seated woman in a turban in Raphael's painting, the Countess is shown 3/4 face but is looking in the opposite direction. Raphael's figure is nude to her breasts and wears a filmy cloth. Another visual connection to the West portrait is to Titian's *Flora*. It would have seemed very appropriate to recall 16th century Venetian imagery, since the relationship between Byron and Teresa Gamba began in that city, the essence of Romanticism, in April 1819. There they took long gondola rides together across the Lagoon, went to the theatre and at supper afterwards, enjoyed long conversations, and sunsets at the Lido. The particular reference to Titian's *Flora* relates to Teresa's youthful rejuvenation of Byron, who was feeling his age. The

12. Clubbe, "Guiccioli", (1979), 80.

painter, William Edward West, moreover, being the same age as Byron, would have also understood the parallel between Teresa and the allegorical figure of Flora representing springtime and rejuvenation.

Teresa Gamba's youth and irrepressible personality charmed Byron when they met in Venice in April 1819. At that time she had been married for a year and was in recent mourning for her mother and sister.¹³ One of five siblings, she had been married off to the Count Guiccioli. At age 18, she was the third wife of the 57-year-old man who had five children by a chambermaid who had been living in his home while he was married to his first wife. He was known to have had other affairs with the chambermaids who worked for the family. A violent and unpleasant man, his attacks provoked Teresa to barricade doors and try to escape his rages. Teresa's relationship with her husband and the stepchildren, who were not much younger than she, could not have been happy. After Byron left for Greece, she was involved in a drawn-out lawsuit with the Count, and it seems that when her family learned details of the Count's behaviour, they rallied to her side.

It was in this context that she met the charismatic Lord Byron in Venice. He spent the next six years in Italy, first in Venice. He followed her to Ravenna (1819–21) and through her family became involved in the Italian revolutionary movement. Her family was exiled by the Pope from their estate in Ravenna due to their republican activities and the Carbonari conspiracy. Byron and Teresa's father, Count Gamba, and brother Pietro, were all involved in the struggle to free northern Italy from Austrian oppression imposed by the treaty following Napoleon's defeat. During the exile from Ravenna, the Gamba family also lived in the palazzo near Leghorn and Pisa with Byron, Teresa, and the adventurer-poet Edward John Trelawny, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Leigh Hunt. Leaving her husband, Teresa and Lord Byron lived there in 1821–22. West painted them then, a few months before Shelley drowned and Byron went to his cremation at Viareggio in July. After a year in Genoa, Byron left in 1823 to help with the Greek struggle for independence from Turkey. He died in Missolonghi in Western

13. Teresa Gamba. *Vie de Lord Byron*, 41–51 in Origo, 39.

Greece on April 10, 1824. Teresa's brother, Pietro, joined Byron and also died in the struggle in Greece. After Teresa had lost not only Byron but her beloved brother, she returned to the Count Guiccioli but on negotiated terms of greater independence.

Early in their relationship, Byron described Teresa in a letter to Hobhouse on April 6, 1819, "She is pretty but has no tact; answers aloud when she should whisper; talks of age to old ladies who want to pass for young; and this blessed night horrified a correct company at the Benzona's by calling out to me '*mio Byron*', in an audible key, during a dead silence of pause in the other prattlers, who stared and whispered their respective *serventi!*"¹⁴ Teresa enjoyed the scandal and the conquest of the celebrity poet. A contemporary report by Rangone states that "the fair nymph was flattered by his attentions and, renouncing any attempt at decorum, made herself an object of general conversation by her unreserved behaviour. Mylord himself warned her, but Mylord himself also told everyone of her gracious favours." Byron dedicated a few poems to Teresa, but she denied this information after his death. Among them are the "Stanzas to the Po" of 1819.

We can conclude that Teresa's world was one of aristocratic mores in which the young woman had license within proscribed limits. In letters to Byron, three months after they met, she writes of an illness which has been interpreted as a miscarriage but not of a pregnancy by Byron, according to Origo. Both her youth and the forceful character of the men in her life put her on a very unequal footing in her personal relationships. She defied her domineering, philandering husband by escaping from him. Byron would have been sympathetic to this solution to a personal problem. He had left England probably to escape the scandals surrounding his failed marriage: incest with his half-sister Augusta, and homosexuality, also a punishable offence – a member of Parliament was hanged for it in 1815.

Teresa followed her charismatic lover known for his celebrity behaviour and his fascinating, chameleon moods. Byron's self-image is complicated; in 1821–22, he describes his own melancholy. As a child he was called a "disabled brat" by his own mother and

14. *I Guiccioli*, I, 18 quoted in Origo, 41. The letters are published in Origo.

he listed himself as the third most famous man in Europe. His attitude towards women is also well known by anecdote: he hated to see a woman eat, for example. In 1821 he attributed a quote to Voltaire that "women can't write tragedies unless they borrow testicles."¹⁵ While he held these and similar outrageous views, he also was protective and challenged by Teresa whose abilities in the area of self-invention were not negligible. Teresa may not have been his intellectual equal but she was his match in many ways.

The encounters among the poet, the painter, and the countess changed their lives. During his life, West was most famous for his portrait of Byron. Teresa's and her family's lives were forever transformed and essentially destroyed by Byron. When Byron left for Greece, Teresa returned to her husband. After he died, she married the Marquis de Boissy in 1851, and lived in Florence for the rest of her life. In her memoirs, *My Recollections of Lord Byron*, published in two volumes in 1869, she had little to say about the sitting and she never liked the portrait of Byron that West had made. If she ever saw the portrait of herself that West made, who took it with him to England, she never said so.

The painting refers to 16th century Italian Renaissance art, especially to Venetian painting. The influences of Raphael's Fornarina and Titian's Flora are seen in West's painting. These sources offer symbolic meaning to Byron and to West suggesting the rejuvenation that Flora, and allegorically, springtime brings, paralleling the vitality that young Teresa brought to the already tired and jaded poet. These ideas may have been what Byron suggested to West, whose talents, however, seem not to have satisfied his clients. As far as Teresa went, Byron was the love of her life and his letters were her souvenirs of her time with him. Whatever Byron's mementos of the relationship were, the portrait by the American painter was not among them.

*Miami University Art Museum
Oxford, Ohio*

15. Anne Hawkins, "Mrs. Baillie's testicles: Byron's reading of De Monfort," paper presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the American Conference on Romanticism, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, November 9-10, 2001.



FLORENTINE SHADOWS: DEATH, DUTY AND SANTA CROCE IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *ROMOLA*

Anne O'Brien

*'It has often been observed that in Italy
the memory sees more than the eye.'*

— Samuel Rogers, *Italy*, 1822

When writing her novel, *Romola*, George Eliot went to great lengths in order to create a distinctive Florentine air to the book. Her reading and research were extensive and she immersed herself deeply in Florentine history and culture. In her letters, Eliot tells of the "unspeakable pains in preparing to write *Romola* – neglecting nothing I could find that would help me to what I may call the 'Idiom' of Florence in the largest sense one could stretch the word to."¹

Much of the architecture of Florence plays an important role in the novel and an examination of Eliot's depiction and use of the church of Santa Croce shows the extent to which she was successful in absorbing Florentine landscape and representing it in *Romola*. Eliot visited Santa Croce during both her 1860 and 1861 trips to

1. Gordon Haight, (ed.) *The George Eliot Letters* 9 vols (New Haven. Yale U.P. 1954-1978), III, 301.

Florence. Indeed, in her "Recollections of Italy" she says that "The two churches we frequented the most in Florence were Santa Croce and the Carmine."² She was attracted by the tombs in the church and tells us that the monument to Dante, with its inscription "*Onorate l'altissimo poeta*" made her heart swell. Eliot made a particularly important visit to the church in 1861 when she witnessed a ceremony in honour of the Florentines who died fighting for freedom in 1848. George Henry Lewes, Eliot's partner, described the event to his son,

"The large church of Santa Croce was arranged with banners, catafalques, tablets and black crape, which gave it a festal yet solemn air. The aisle was filled with troops [. . .] Every altar was ablaze with candles. Two fine bands, [. . .] performed a requiem and some other pieces. After about an hour of this we had Padre Angelico, a famous preacher, who preached a politico-religious sermon with affecting eloquence and most impressive oratory. He is old and blind, and it was intensely interesting to the Mutter [Eliot], as you may imagine, to sit and look at his face and hear him uttering brave, wise words to the Florentines."³

The event in Santa Croce was an annual commemoration held on the 29th of May in honour of those who died for the cause of Italian liberty in 1848. The music used in the ceremony and the poetry inspired by the event in 1860 were published that year in a pamphlet entitled *I funerali di Santa Croce*. The first popular song was dedicated to the church:

2. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, (eds.) *The Journals of George Eliot* (Cambridge. C.U.P., 1998), 356.

3. Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, III, 422. Gordon Haight in *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford. Oxford U.P., 1968) says that Eliot used this experience in Santa Croce to create the scene of Savonarola's sermon in *Romola*. Although there is a connection between the two events, I feel that it is more important to view Eliot's experience in the light of the sentiments which she would have heard expressed in the church, and the feelings that would have been generated amongst the people.

Si canta mestamente in Santa Croce,
 In quella chiesa di tante memorie;
 Si canta il Miserere a bassa voce,
 Si porgon voti al Dio delle vittorie;
 E ghirlande di lacrime bagnate
 All'anime nel cielo incoronate.⁴

Eliot picks up on this notion of Santa Croce as the church of memories and incorporates it into her writing. Indeed, many of the further poems / prayers in the collection reflect sentiments which will later be found in Eliot's Florentine novel. A *De Profundis* expresses feelings of death, loss and bitterness, while a canto dedicated to Florence speaks of the duties of Florentines towards their city and their people. Moreover, having heard a requiem sung in the church during this ceremony, Eliot later uses similar music for expressive purposes in her novel when Romola emerges from Santa Croce after her engagement.

The sentiments expressed on that day in the Church are captured in various pamphlets which were published in Florence at the time to honour the dead soldiers.⁵ For example, a pamphlet entitled, *Dei Morti per l'Italica redenzione* (1860), emphasised the importance of respect for the past and appropriate commemoration for the fallen soldiers:

"E i posterì finalmente colpiti da devota ammirazione e da sincera riconoscenza ricercheranno nelle viscere della terra delle battaglie le ossa dei prodi per trasportarle in più sicuro loco, ed inalzarvi monumenti splendidi e duraturi."⁶

The love for one's native place is explained clearly to the people in the pamphlet:

4. Silvio Giannini, *I funerali di Sante Croce, canto del popolo e fiori* (Firenze. Niccolai, 1860).

5. See for example Mariano Cellini, *Il tempio mondiale di Santa Croce* (Firenze. Galileiana, 1863). Oreste Raggi, *La chiesa di Santa Croce e la sua facciata* (Firenze. Cellini, 1863) and Giosué Carducci's sonnets written in honour of Santa Croce in the 1860s, in *Poesie di Giosué Carducci*, (Bologna, Zanichelli, 1901).

6. D.F. Franceschini, *Dei Morti per l'Italica redenzione* (Firenze. Mariani, 1860), 4.

"Il patrio affetto è dono della natura, poichè le abitudini contratte in quel luogo ove respirammo le prime aure di vita producono in noi tale impressione da non poter obliare giammai. Le aure prodigateci dai nostri parenti, le strette relazioni dei congiunti, degli amici, la lingua istessa, la unione di sociali interessi; hanno tal potere nell'animo nostro da farci provare la più pura letizia, mentre al contrario la più tremenda tristezza se lungi dalla patria non ci sia dato di conversare con alcuno de'nostri."⁷

Eliot, who heard this form of rhetoric expressed under the eaves of Santa Croce, uses similar sentiments and feelings in the creation of her Florentine heroine. In her novel, the protagonist Romola finds that she is tied to Florence, no matter how painful some of those ties may be. Romola's patria was Florence and, in the 1860s, this meant strong allegiances and links to the past and to the future.⁸

In the years immediately following Italian unification, the years in which Eliot visited the country, particular homage was being paid to those who had given their lives to the cause of Italian freedom. Consequently, there was an emphasis on honouring the dead and paying a duty to those who had made the ultimate gesture of sacrifice. People were urged to show themselves worthy of such compatriots. Commemoration was to the fore in this period during which the tombs of the dead and in particular, of illustrious ancestors, were seen as sacred objects. As we shall see, Eliot incorporated these ideas into her work.

There was a great interest in monuments to the dead and in commemoration in the 19th century and there was particular concern about how to honour the past and to acknowledge one's duty to it. For many Victorians, Italy was the place where past and present met, where the dead lived side by side with the

7. *Ibid.*, 5.

8. "La patria non consiste solamente nel suolo. Essa sta nell'accordo delle opinioni, dei costumi delle credenze, nel sentimento della gloria nazionale; in quella simpatia che ci lega alle tradizioni del passato, al sepolcro dei nostri padri, alla culla dei nostri figli." Franceschini, 8.

living.⁹ Florence in particular was seen as a city where the two worlds of past and present met in harmony. The most popular poem on Italy in this era, Samuel Roger's *Italy*, expresses this train of thought eloquently,

Of all the fairest Cities of the Earth
None is so fair as Florence. 'Tis a gem
Of purest ray; and what a light broke forth,
When it emerged from darkness! Search within,
Without; all is enchantment! 'Tis the Past
Contending with the Present; and in turn
Each has the mastery.¹⁰



Italians had for years used Santa Croce as the point in Florence where past would meet present. It was here that Foscolo spoke in *I Sepolcri* of the possibility of regeneration for Italy based on inspiration drawn from the past. He said in an oft-quoted line,

'A egregie cose il forte animo accendono / l'urne de' forti'.

This interest in death, its relationship with the present, commemoration and its place amongst the living, is reflected in *Romola*. Indeed, the novel closes with a scene where the protagonist is organizing a commemoration in honour of Savonarola on the anniversary of his death.¹¹ The past and the present are ultimately presented as reconciled in Eliot's Florentine novel.

By the time Eliot visited Santa Croce in 1860, it had been transformed by words, associations and monuments, into a secular temple for Italian achievement, honour and fame. This was underlined by holding events such as commemorations for fallen

9. See Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford. Blackwell, 1992), or James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Stroud. Sutton Publishing, 2000).

10. Samuel Rogers, *Italy* (London. Moxon, 1842. Originally published 1822).

11. Commemoration may even have been connected with the initial idea for writing *Romola*: the theme for the novel was suggested to Eliot by Lewes on the 21st May 1860, only a few days before the anniversary of Savonarola's execution. See *The George Eliot Letters*, III, 295.

soldiers in the church, and by constantly reiterating the sentiments expressed by Foscolo in 1807. The rhetoric which involved the association of place with memory, which conferred certain buildings with particular significance was understood by Eliot and transferred into her novel.

Literature had played an important role in the creation of the image of Santa Croce and Eliot certainly drew on this literature when writing her novel. It may even be argued that her Florence was a "literary creation". She spent much less time in the city than the likes of the Trollopes and the Brownings and, with a few exceptions, relied more on what she read than on what she experienced. Indeed, one of the main criticisms levelled at *Romola* is that the book is overburdened by erudition which cramps the author's creative ability.¹² There can be no doubt that Eliot formed many of her ideas on how the city should be presented from various literary sources. Her representation of the plague, for example, draws on a long Italian literary tradition of describing the horrors of the *peste*. In the particular case of her descriptions of Santa Croce, we know that she had personal experience of the church, but we also know that she read widely from works in which the church is specifically mentioned. For example, from Eliot's letters, we can tell that she was familiar with Byron's *Childe Harold* and read the poem more than once.¹³ In *Childe Harold*, Byron famously described Santa Croce in the following manner:

In Santa Croce's holy precincts lie
Ashes which make it holier, dust which is
Even in itself an immortality,
Though there were nothing save the past, and this,
The particle of those sublimities
Which have relaps'd to chaos: here repose
Angelo's, Alfieri's bones, and his,

12. For example, Henry James said of *Romola*, "It is overladen with learning, it smells of the lamp, it tastes just perceptibly of pedantry," in *Partial Portraits*, (London. Macmillan, 1888), 55.

13. *The George Eliot Letters*, I, 51-52.

14. Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth, LIV, (London. John Murray, 1816).

The starry Galileo, with his woes;
Here Machiavelli's earth return'd to whence it rose.¹⁴

These lines, often quoted by visiting British tourists, underline the sacredness of the church as a home of greatness and its significance in the cult of immortality. Byron was not the only famous writer to have underlined the importance of Santa Croce in the 19th century; Madame de Staël in her book *Corinne ou l'Italie*, uses the church as a significant landmark in her character's development. She says,

"Cette église de Santa Croce contient la plus brillante assemblée de morts qui soit peut-être en Europe. Corinne se sentit profondément émue en marchant entre ces deux rangées de tombeaux. [...] La vue de cette église décorée par de si nobles souvenirs, réveilla l'enthousiasme de Corinne: l'aspect des vivants l'avait découragée, la présence silencieuse des morts ranima, pour un moment du moins, cette émulation de gloire dont elle était jadis saisie; elle marcha d'un pas plus ferme dans l'église."¹⁵

Here the author brings to the fore the importance of the church as a repository for achievement and memories. Like, Eliot, De Stael introduces Santa Croce as an active element in her heroine's emotional life. Eliot was very familiar with Madame de Stael's work and is even reputed to have been able to recite sections of it by heart.¹⁶

In preparing to write *Romola*, Eliot also read Agostino Ademollo's historical novel *Marietta de' Ricci* (1840). Ademollo's book tells the story of the siege of Florence of 1530 and is replete with erudition and local knowledge. Interestingly, it contains many scenes which are quite similar to Eliot's novel.¹⁷ If we are to limit ourselves,

15. Madame de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie* (Paris. Ledentu, 1819), IV, 214–15. Originally published 1807.

16. Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy* (London. Macmillan, 1998), 52–4.

17. For example, the depiction of the plague, descriptions of large gatherings in Florence, the actions of the heroine and in particular their desperate attempts to gain help in the convent of San Marco, are remarkably similar in the two novels. See Agostino Ademollo, *Marietta de' Ricci* (Firenze. Stamperia Granducale, 1840).

however, to observing the points of coincidence between the two writers with regard to Santa Croce, it will become clear how Eliot may have used her sources to infuse her novel with the "Florentine Idiom".

As in George Eliot's *Romola*, the square outside the Church is the scene of unusual imagery and action. In Ademollo's work, Machiavelli, (also a character in *Romola*), witnesses a festive scene which involves singing and dancing and youths shouting "Ben venga il morbo". Eliot will use the square in a similar fashion, for the scene immediately following Romola's betrothal in Santa Croce. The church of Santa Croce had a particular significance for Ademollo as his brother (to whom the book is dedicated), was buried there. Understandably then, the author regularly mentions the significance of the church as an important site of burial and fame. Ademollo uses Santa Croce as a setting for scenes associated with death and for scenes in which the importance of family links is emphasised. The Church is seen as an honourable place of burial, of tombs and of pain but also the location of family history.¹⁸

Ademollo dwells on the importance of the church in the preservation of fame, and singles out the example of Machiavelli who was belatedly honoured with a monument under its eaves. To be given a monument in Santa Croce was an acknowledgment of worth and Ademollo describes in superlatives the commemoration of Machiavelli. The author clearly felt strongly about the need to honour past greatness, to preserve the memory of the dead and to sanctify fame.¹⁹ This insistence on the desire to honour greatness with an appropriate memorial is reminiscent of Romola's father, Bardo's, desire to be immortalized.

18. In one of the early scenes, Machiavelli enters the church to find a young girl dressed in black crying inconsolably over a grave. In chapter seven Pandolfo, having killed a man, seeks refuge in the church and feels himself to be under the reproachful gaze of his ancestors buried there.

19. Interestingly, the opening chapters of *Marietta* describe the desecration of tombs and memorials in Florence by a rampaging mob, a scene depicted in a sorrowful tone. Such affronts to the dead were clearly heartfelt by Ademollo and it is thus understandable that he should attach importance to the preservation of memory and glory in Santa Croce.

It can thus be seen that George Eliot absorbed ideas of death and duty, of honour and fame from a variety of sources. Her wide reading brought her into contact with the ideas of many writers on Florence and its cityscape.²⁰ This reading was underlined by her personal experience in Santa Croce where she witnessed a ceremony dedicated to ideas of honouring the dead, preserving memory and performing a duty towards the past. This combination found its way into Eliot's writing and eventually was given expression in the representation of the church in the novel.

From the very outset of *Romola*, Eliot makes the reader aware of the special significance of Santa Croce. She does so in the Proem, when an observer surveys Florence and comments:

"And here, on the right, stands the long dark mass of Santa Croce, where we buried our famous dead, laying the laurel on their cold brows and fanning them with the breath of praise and of banners."⁽⁵⁾²¹

The author has placed immediate emphasis on the church's function as a site of greatness while also mentioning the input of subsequent generations in propagating this culture of fame.

The characters of *Romola* clearly illustrate this important aspect of the Church; Bardo, Romola's father "hoped that a burial might be granted him" in Santa Croce, "among the Florentines who had deserved well". (203) Indeed Bardo's "yearning for just fame" (326) drove his years of study. Bardo himself commented, "If Florence remembers me, will not the world remember me?" (53) His desire

20. For the works consulted by Eliot in preparation for her book see Appendix B in Andrew Brown's critical edition of *Romola* (Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1993).

21. All references to the novel refer to Andrew Brown's critical edition of *Romola* (Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1993). Andrew Brown notes that Eliot changed this paragraph from the original manuscript version. It previously read: "... of banners. Yes it is a great thing to dwell under the shadow of common ancestral monuments – Magnum est eadem habere monumenta, eisdem uti sacris, sepulchra habere communia." Brown comments "The quotation is from Cicero's *De Officiis* (1. 17. 55) and is incomplete. It should read "magnum est enim eadem habere monumenta maiorum, eisdem uti sacris, sepulchra habere communia" (for it means much to share the same family traditions, the same forms of worship, and the same ancestral tombs)" *Romola* (Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1993), 591.

to be remembered and to be honoured are corollaries of his desire to be buried in Santa Croce. Many of those entombed in the Church were further honoured with the erection of a monument in their memory. Bardo also hoped that a monument to his name would be created but he hoped that it would take the form of a library. Indeed, his lasting aim was the establishment of a library, formed from his collection of books, that would bear his name. However, after his death, Bardo's library is sold by his son-in-law Tito and his chance of being preserved in Florentine memory is damaged. The city honours the scholar with a burial in Santa Croce, but Bardo cannot rest in peace as his desire for fame is thwarted by the next generation. Tito ignores his duty to the past and by selling the library, frustrates Bardo's dreams of immortality.²²

Santa Croce is thus an active component of the Florentine landscape in *Romola*, reminding the reader and the characters of the importance of memory. Santa Croce is also, however, a church of tombs, a place of death and it is interesting that Eliot decides to locate Romola's betrothal and marriage in this church. The portents for the future success of the union of the two protagonists of the novel, Tito and Romola, are negative throughout, and none more so than in the location of the wedding in a place of death. Before the marriage, Romola's brother Dino had warned her of a vision he had experienced foreboding disaster for the matrimony:

"[...] you stood at the altar in Santa Croce and the priest who married you had the face of death; and the graves opened, and the dead in their shrouds rose and followed you like a bridal train. And you passed through the streets and the gates into the valley, and it seems to me that he who led you hurried you more than you could bear, and the dead were weary of following you and turned back to their graves." (161)

22. Felicia Bonaparte has noted, "When Tito betrays his promise to fulfill that wish [to found a library in Bardo's name], he not only robs Bardo of the only immortality Bardo believes in, but even more, he obliterates forever the visible evidence that proved Bardo's worth" and furthermore, "Bardo's library is of course the very symbol of the past, the repository of history." Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross* (Sussex. Harvester Press, 1979), 40-44.

Dino's vision incorporates the suggestive Florentine landscape; Santa Croce, the house of the dead, is where the horror that will be Romola's marriage will start. Her husband Tito will defy the memory of the dead, not allowing them to sleep easily in their graves. He will spend the novel running from the past, trying to avoid contact with his own personal history.

Romola does not heed her brother's warning and the betrothal goes ahead, albeit amidst disturbing imagery. The couple emerge from Santa Croce and "a strange dreary chant, as of a *Miserere*," (204) meets their ears. In Piazza Santa Croce, Tito and Romola are surrounded by the sinister and intimidating faces of the carnival:

"There came slowly into view [. . .] a huge and ghastly image of Winged Time with his scythe and hour-glass, surrounded by his winged children, the Hours. [. . .] And behind them came what looked like a troop of the sheeted dead gliding above blackness. And as they glided slowly, they chanted in a wailing strain. A cold horror seized on Romola." (204)

Eventually Tito and Romola become estranged, the main rupture being when the son-in-law sells Bardo's library for profit rather than creating a monument to the scholar in the city. For Bardo's daughter, Romola, the duty to her father's memory was a central aspect of her life. Eliot tells us of Romola's "anxiety with which she dwelt on the means of fulfilling his supreme wish." (249)²³ After his death, all that remained of her father's life and studies, "besides the tablet in Santa Croce and the unfinished commentary to Tito's text, was the collection of manuscripts and antiquaries, fruit of half a century's toil and frugality. The fulfilment of her father's life-long ambition about this library was a sacramental obligation for Romola." (249) It is interesting that Eliot chooses to describe Romola's duties as sacramental; Santa Croce enshrines fame in its honouring and remembrance of the dead. Bardo now lies in the Church and his presence there is a reminder of the duty

23. Jim Reilly in his book *Shadowtime* describes Romola's duty to her father's library as the "central dilemma" of her life. (London and New York. Routledge, 1993), 99.

of the present to the past. It is not a flippant duty, instead it is sacramental: memory must be honoured and Bardo's memory must be preserved. Eliot had heard the heartfelt pleas to Italians in 1860 to honour their ancestors; the rhetoric used on that occasion spoke of the duty in moral and even religious tones. The author of *Romola* uses similar language.

When the books are sold, it is not surprising that they pass by Santa Croce as they leave the city. Romola watches the event from her *loggia*:

"On the 23rd of December, she knew that the last packages were going. She ran to the *loggia* at the top of the house that she might not lose the last pang of seeing the slow wheels move across the bridge.

It was a cloudy day, and nearing dusk. Arno ran dark and shivering; the hills were mournful; and Florence with its girdling stone towers had that silent, tomblike look, which unbroken shadow gives to a city seen from above. Santa Croce, where her father lay, was dark amidst that darkness, and slowly crawling over the bridge, and slowly vanishing up the narrow street, was the white load, like a cruel, deliberate fate carrying away her father's life-long hope, to bury it in an unmarked grave. Romola felt less that she was seeing this herself than that her father was conscious of it as he lay helpless under the imprisoning stones, where her hand could not reach his to tell him that he was not alone." (321)

It is not just the weather which conveys the darkness of the injustice which has been committed towards the past; the Florentine landscape also conveys this feeling. Bardo's memory has been disregarded and the Church of memory, sits "dark amidst that darkness". The loss of the books is described like a death. Significantly, Eliot says the books are being taken away to be buried "in an unmarked grave", they will no longer be a shrine to Bardo's memory but instead will descend into anonymity. The city has lost a link to its past and conveys this in the darkness of the winter's morning. It is only appropriate therefore that on their way to the unmarked grave, the books should pass by Santa Croce, the church of tombs and memories. It serves to contrast Tito's act of betrayal towards the past and the manner in which memory should be preserved.

Tito is the outsider in *Romola*, the Greek who arrives in Florence and attempts to immerse himself in Florentine society. He too has a past however, he has been brought up by Baldassare, an Italian who took it upon himself to support and educate the impoverished Tito. Through misadventure, Tito and Baldassare were separated and the latter was taken prisoner. Early in the novel, Tito is given the possibility of helping Baldassare, of going in search of him and rescuing him from his plight. He decides however to ignore this duty, to ignore his past and to maximize his pleasure in Florence.

This denial of his duty to a man who had given him everything haunts Tito throughout the novel. Baldassare eventually manages on his own to reach Tito in Florence and learns of his "sons's" betrayal. Tito lives in constant fear as he attempts to deny the existence of Baldassare and denies any relation to him in front of others. He wants to construct a life without memories, without any duties to the past. He wishes to become a new person by willfully forgetting and then destroying the past. As Santa Croce reminds us however, memory and the past are vital components in the fabric of the city and it is impossible to ignore them. Much as Tito may try to bury the past, it continually returns in the shape of Baldassare. Tito is finally killed by Baldassare and in a sense it is the city which makes him confront his past. Tito jumped into the Arno to escape a murderous mob but the river brought he to one of its banks where Baldassare took advantage of Tito's weakness and strangled him. The Arno, the streak through the heart of the city, brings Tito face to face with Baldassare and his past.

Throughout the novel, Baldassare suffers from amnesia, a fact which brings the relationship with the past into even starker profile. Without memory, the hierarchy of duty crumbles. Baldassare is thus a floating character, searching in a city for the bonds and links that have been denied him both by his memory and by Tito. At one stage his memory suddenly returns and, Eliot says, "That city [Florence] which had been a weary labyrinth, was material that he could subdue to his purposes." (339). Memory is the key which can help a person come to grips with the city. It is just a momentary aberration, however, and Baldassare will soon again sink back into the fogs of amnesia. His lack of memory means that

his identity is not fixed, he is unable to solidify the bonds of human contact and to call on Tito to perform his duty.²⁴ Baldassare's inability to remember any of his studies enables Tito to successfully deny and ignore his links with his former mentor.

The example set by the past, as exemplified by the Pantheon of memories in Santa Croce, is a vital component in building for the future. History is not just a monument, a book, an inscription to be admired; it is a lesson which tells future generations how to act and what paths to follow. This is seen in the character Tito, who constantly denies the past, and sees his plans for the future undermined and ultimately extinguished. Romola on the other hand successfully faces the past and all the thorny issues it presents.

Romola constantly shows herself to be sensitive to the duty of the living to the past, to the dead and to their memory.²⁵ At the start of the novel we are told that Romola, "had inherited nothing but memories – memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father's happier time." (59) Despairing of her failed marriage, she decides to leave Florence and go in search of her father's books in the hope of recovering his dreams of fame. Importantly, on leaving the city, Romola catches sight of Santa Croce. The Church is a reminder of the past and of the preservation of memory.

"No one was stirring in the house, and she went almost as quietly as a grey phantom down the stairs and into the silent street. Her heart was palpitating violently, yet she enjoyed the sense of her firm tread on the broad flags – of the swift movement, which was

24. In his book *Storied Cities*, Michael Ross notes, "He (Tito) does not hesitate to liquidate the historical and family past, both embodied in Bardo's library. It is not so simple a matter, however, to expunge his own personal past." He adds, "Tito's victim, Baldassare suffers from an involuntary amnesia that complements his enemy's calculated, destructive forgetfulness." Michael Ross, *Storied Cities*, (Connecticut Greenwood Press, 1994), 50–52.

25. Caroline Levine notes, "Our two main characters represent two antithetical ways of remembering: Tito tries constantly to bury the past, or to conceal it, while Romola attempts both to make sense of the past and to value her initial ties, her original duties. [. . .] Tito says to Romola "My Ariadne must never look backward now – only forward." Caroline Levine, "The Prophetic Fallacy: Realism, foreshadowing and narrative knowledge in *Romola*" in C. Levine and W. Turner, (eds) *From author to text*, (Aldershot. Ashgate, 1998), 154.

like a chained-up resolution set free at last. The anxiety to carry out her act, the dread of any obstacle, averted sorrow; and as she reached the Ponte Rubaconte, she felt less that Santa Croce was in her sight than that the yellow streak of morning which parted the grey was getting broader and broader, and that, unless she hastened her steps, she should have to encounter face. Her simplest road was to go right on to the Borgo Pinti, and then along by the walls to the Porta San Gallo, from which she must leave the city; and this road carried her by the Piazza di Santa Croce. But she walked as steadily and rapidly as ever through the piazza, not trusting herself to look at the church." (332)

The pain of Tito's denial of the past and his lack of respect towards Bardo's memory is a sharp wound for Romola; she cannot even bring herself to look towards the site of her father's tomb as she leaves Florence.

Romola, however, does not make it far beyond the city boundaries; she meets Savonarola who convinces her to return to the city of her birth. The manner in which he convinces her is interesting:

"My daughter, you are a child of Florence; fulfill the duties of that great inheritance. Live for Florence – for your own people, whom God is preparing to bless the earth. Bear the anguish and the smart. [...] Come, my daughter, come back to your place!" (367)

Savonarola persuades Romola to abandon her plans of duty to her father's memory and instead to dedicate herself to a more religious duty. Her new life will no longer be centred on the search for fame for her father, rather, she will concentrate on humble tasks of servitude. Romola returns to Florence and works among the poor and the sick, she walks the streets of the city, immersing herself in the needs of the Florentine people. Florence is, in the words of Savonarola, "her place" and although her life there may be unhappy, she has a duty to the city.

Florence is the city which shapes her as a person, its past is her past. Savonarola says to Romola, "You assert your freedom proudly, my daughter. But who is so base as the debtor that thinks himself free?" (361) He adds,

"And you are flying your debts: the debt of a Florentine woman; the debt of a wife. You are turning your back on the lot that has been appointed for you – you are going to choose another. But can a man or woman choose duties? No more than they can choose their birthplace or their father and mother." (361–62)

In attempting to leave the city, Romola wanted to create for herself a new life and identity. As the shadow of Santa Croce reminds us however, Romola's past is rooted in the city and it is not something she can easily shrug off. In going in search of her father's memory, she is destroying her own identity and breaking the links which tie her to the city.²⁶ Savonarola's arguments convince Romola to stay, "My daughter, every bond in your life is a debt; the right lies in the payment of that debt; it can lie nowhere else. In vain will you wander over the earth; you will be wandering forever away from the right." (365)

Convinced by Savonarola, Romola stays in Florence and helps the needy. Later in the novel, the protagonist does in fact leave Florence for a brief spell. Disillusioned with events in the city, she casts out on a boat, and lets it float aimlessly on the water. While adrift at sea she feels that she is "without bonds, without motive" (568), but this does not last as the boat eventually brings her to an unnamed village, where Romola proceeds to help the local inhabitants to overcome the ravages of the plague. In contrast to the detail of Florence, this village is strangely anonymous: it is never named and we are given no indication of its location. Although she saves the lives of the inhabitants, Romola does not stay in the village, it is not "her place". Florence's links with the main character reassert themselves and she feels compelled to return to her native city:

"Florence, and all her life there, had come back to her like a hunger; her feelings could not go wandering after the possible and the vague: their very living fibre was fed with the memory of familiar things." (568)

26. "For Romola, however, the Florentine past cannot be so nonchalantly doffed. Ultimately, her city holds for her a destiny, an identity, that she cannot evade." Ross, 55.

Romola settles back in Florence and embraces the city and all the ties that bind her to it: her history and that of Florence are inextricably bound, her memories are entwined with the memories of the city.²⁷ As Michael Ross has said, *Romola* "is the story of one woman's success in recognizing and salvaging, on her own terms, her city's heritage."²⁸

Romola takes responsibility for her life and in doing so cements the frame of her identity. She chooses to live in Florence and therefore comes to terms both with her past and her present; she is running from neither. By acknowledging the importance of the past to the present she is able to move on in the linear development of life. Unlike Tito, she does not remain trapped in the past, eternally locked in a deadly embrace with Baldassare. Instead of choosing to ignore the unsavoury aspects of Tito's past, his mistress and their children, Romola takes them under her roof and forges a new future for all of them out of the debris of the past. Taking individual responsibility, recognizing duty and acknowledging memory, Romola can now live in comfort with the city of Florence.

In the 19th century, there was a concerted effort to promote Santa Croce as an important site of memory for Italians. In the overall context of the *Risorgimento*, the church was viewed, through literature and through ceremonies, as a focal point for expressions of duty to the dead, and manifestations of patriotism towards the past. Eliot, with her vast reading and her personal experience absorbed the messages associated with Santa Croce in these years and translated them into her Florentine novel. As previously mentioned, Eliot sought to create "the Idiom of Florence" in *Romola* and extensive reading showed her how she could incorporate her ideas on duty within the context of a novel deeply rooted in a historical time and place. She grasped the ideas of memory and brought them to life for her protagonist. The intimacy of George Eliot with her subject matter meant that she could understand the emotive importance of certain places in Florence and it is as if she

27. Julian Corner has commented "Romola's life is ruled entirely by duty". Julian Corner, "Telling the whole: trauma, drifting and reconciliation in *Romola*" in Levine and Turner, 71.

28. Ross, 54.

penetrated the psychological side of buildings and locations. As an analysis of her portrayal of Santa Croce shows, she managed to put her finger on a crucial pulse of Florentine life and create an aspect of Florentine landscape that blends perfectly with the emotional horizons of her fictional characters.

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Ruskin, Vernon Lee, and the Cultural Possession of Italy

Francis O'Gorman

Charlotte Brontë told her publisher that the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843) had prompted a visual epiphany. Hitherto, she said, "I have only had instinct to guide me in judging of art; I feel now as if I had been walking blindfold – this book seems to give me eyes."¹ Brontë's belief that Ruskin – or the "Graduate of Oxford", the pseudonym he had used – had taught her to see differently was in keeping with Ruskin's desires to raise the education of the eye to the centre of moral pedagogy, to teach the principles of proper, faithful sight. The world of the visual arts looked differently to Charlotte Brontë after reading *Modern Painters* I, and readers throughout the century shared her reaction to the influential power of Ruskin's prose on the nature of their perception. Edith Wharton recalled reading Ruskin in her father's library, and likewise her memory was of his influence on visual discernment. "His wonderful cloudy pages", she said, thinking of Keats, "gave me back the image of the beautiful Europe I had lost, and

1. Quoted in Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years, 1819–1859* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 73.

woke in me the habit of precise visual observation."² For readers of Ruskin, J. M. W. Turner, the Pre-Raphaelites, Tintoretto, and Carpaccio were perceived through or against or variously in relation to his gaze: his presence, the weighty reality of his cultural authority in the realm of the visual, could not be ignored. The prolific novelist and critic Margaret Oliphant, whose textual negotiations with Ruskin were far-reaching,³ observed in 1892 that his words "pervaded the world" and "led rightly or wrongly [. . .] the generations of his time".⁴ She was diagnosing a distinctive feature of the afterlife of Ruskin's words in late Victorian culture.

The perception of painting through a Ruskinian lens mattered to Charlotte Brontë as much as it frustrated Oliphant who, feeling her lack of training in art, was vexed at his prominence. But nowhere was the cultural visibility of Ruskin more noticeable at the end of the nineteenth century than in the English perception of Italy. From the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846), following the revelations of his 1845 Italian tour, Ruskin had written on Medieval and Renaissance art of northern Italy. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), deploying a history of the shift from Gothic to Renaissance as an admonishment to England, he had created a text that would loom over late nineteenth-century accounts of the sea city, fictional and historical, so that Stopford A. Brooke could, at the beginning of the new century, anxiously reflect in his *The Sea-Charms of Venice* (1907) that to try to describe Venice after Ruskin, the "Angel" who had "watched over her on the Campanile to the islands on the far lagoon", seemed "almost an impertinence".⁵ In the 1870s, Venice had figured in the political schemes of *Fors Clavigera* (1871–1884), just as her artefacts had become part of his private mythology and communication with Rose La Touche; he

2. Quoted in Carol J. Singley, *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 215n.

3. See Francis O'Gorman, "'Amiable but determined autocracy': Margaret Oliphant, Venice, and the Inheritance of Ruskin" in Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler, eds, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth Century British Women Writer and Artists in Italy*.

4. Mrs Oliphant and F.R. Oliphant, *The Victorian Age of English Literature*, 2 vols (London: Perceval, 1892), II.214.

5. Stopford A. Brooke, *The Sea-Charms of Venice* (London: Duckworth, 1907), 8–9.

had lectured before the University of Oxford in the 1870s on Italian engraving, Tuscan art, the Aesthetic and Mathematical schools of Florence, on Botticelli, and the "Relation between Michelangelo and Tintoret" (1871), publishing *Val d'Arno* (1873), *Mornings in Florence* (1875–1877), a *Guide to the Academy at Venice* (1877), and the revision of his ideas about the history of the Queen of the Adriatic, *St. Mark's Rest* (1877–1884). His last published words in *Praeterita* (1885–1889), were, appropriately after a lifetime's involvement with the country whose name Browning thought engraved on his heart, a memory of the arches and fountains of Siena, visited last with Charles Eliot Norton.

Italy and Ruskin were inseparable, but that inseparability bequeathed a challenge that was potent for those writing on northern Italy in the last years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries. For Margaret Oliphant, Ruskin's apparently privileged position as a writer with an independent income, free from the domestic necessities that drove and sometimes drained her creativity, precipitated resourceful textual countermoves, strategies of rhetorical parrying that opened up spaces for her own literary identity, and nowhere did she engage more with him than in her own history of Venice that directly disputed the terrain of *The Stones*.⁶ E.M. Forster, early in the new century, perceived Ruskin's presence in northern Italy as substantial too. He found comedy in the extent of his influence on the perception of Italian Gothic architecture in the Santa Croce episode of *A Room with a View* (1908), poking gentle fun at his moralising criticism and naiveté about Gothic structures being "built by faith".⁷ When Forster came, misleadingly, to satirise Ruskin's social utility in *Howards End* (1910), it was through Leonard Bast's reading of *The Stones of Venice* that he chose to do it.⁸

6. See Mrs Oliphant, *The Makers of Venice: Doges, Conquerors, Painters, and Men of Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1887).

7. E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 43, 44. There is some treatment of Ruskin and Forster in Penelope Gay, "E.M. Forster and John Ruskin: The Ambivalent Connection" in *Southern Review*, 11 (1978): 283–95.

8. On Forster's view of Ruskin in this episode, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 405.

Textual negotiation with Ruskin and Italy of an exceptionally sophisticated form characterized the now under-appreciated work of the English essayist, novelist, travel writer, and aesthete, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget 1856–1935). Lee was a serious reader of Ruskin, whose writings were bound up with the northern Italy in which she had lived through most of her productive life and her often silent transactions with Ruskin, a man she once called “perhaps the greatest and strangest artist of our days”,⁹ were enabling, necessary, and complex. Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1975) and *A Map of Misreading* (1975) proposed a general theory of poetry – though there seems no reason why it should be confined to poetry – that saw all strong writers persistently engaged in creative misreadings of their forebears; poetry, he thought, was always an act of belated reading in which there were no texts but only relations between them. Lee’s misprision of Ruskin in prose, her reconfiguration of his terms in her own words, brings Lee, in this respect though not in others, under the aegis of Bloom’s theoretical mapping of the practices of writing against the past. But it does so with a special force, for trying to defeat Ruskin was also to destabilize a whole practice of theologized aesthetics, a historiography that privileged moral teaching, and a procedure of reading Italy as a nation whose past admonished England’s present ethical precariousness. Lee’s textual settlement with Ruskin was not only an act of personal definition, necessary for the formation of her own voice against his, but part of a broader campaign to contest the absorption of Ruskin’s principles of history and art criticism in the English cultural imagination of another nation.

To understand the dynamics of this relationship is also better to understand the complexities of Lee’s Paterian inheritance. Recent work, especially Talia Schaffer’s,¹⁰ has recovered the presence of female Aesthetes across a range of domains in British cultural production at the end of the century, recuperating their construction of Aestheticism according “to a slightly different set of rules from

9. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: Satchell, [1882]), 197.

10. See Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000) and note 11.

their male counterparts".¹¹ The relation of such diverse writers as Marie Corelli and Gertrude Jekyll to the male authority of Walter Pater, the first major spokesman, though not the founder, of the English Aesthetic Movement, has naturally been an important issue for feminist historians concerned with literary inheritance. Yopie Prins, in a recent intervention in this debate, concentrating on women's homoerotic appropriations of ancient Greece in the second half of the Victorian period, proposed, punningly, that the idea of Pater as the "father" of the female Aesthetes was misleading. Preferring to see Pater in an "avuncular" role in literary history, Prins concluded her account of his "wayward daughters" (chiefly Michael Field and Jane Harrison) with the observation that "while women writers at the turn of the century are variously aligned with Pater, the path through his writing to their own is never straight".¹² Prins's tales of the tantulate complicated the notion of Paterian patrilinear literary authority, and, certainly in terms of Aestheticism, Vernon Lee stood in no straightforward relation to the author of *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). On the one hand, she had little patience with theologized aesthetics, and assumed a Paterian position in arguing for the disconnection of moral and aesthetic terms such as she found in Ruskin's prose, and for a break in the assumption that good art could only be the product of a healthy artist and national culture. As with the Aesthetes, she also prioritized individual impression as the key subject of art criticism. But, on the other, she was suspicious of the kind of Aestheticism proposed in the "Conclusion" to Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873) as overlooking the real relationship between aesthetic and ethical terms, neatly summing up her own view in 1882 in distinction to Pater with the words: "though art has no moral meaning, it has a moral value; art is happiness, and to bestow happiness is to create good".¹³

11. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds, *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), "Introduction", 1.

12. Yopie Prins, "Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters" in Richard Dellamora, ed., *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 72.

13. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, 229.

If Prins' argument holds for the question of Lee's "Aestheticism", no literary model of aunt-niece relations or paradigms of unstraight paths are applicable in plotting Lee's relation to Pater's prose in the matter of her rhetorical movements against Ruskin. Here, Lee became more plainly the child of Pater, her rhetoric born from his and rising from their shared need to set a distance between themselves and the central Victorian champion of Christianized aesthetics. Lee found in *The Renaissance* a set of elegantly oblique strategies against the unnamed Ruskin, a text that gained much of its energy from its continual unstated argument with the man who was Slade Professor of Fine Art while Pater was teaching at Brasenose, and her prose was nourished by such transactions. (Indeed, as Christa Zorn has implied, such intertextual strategies could, on occasions, be used in relation to Pater himself.¹⁴) Pater wrote against Ruskin, however much he shared important connections amid his differences, sometimes in almost every word of his finely-woven study of the spirit of the Renaissance. But it was on the subject of Italy that torsion was greatest. It "is in Italy", Pater remarked in the "Preface",

in the fifteenth century, that the interest of the Renaissance mainly lies, – in that solemn fifteenth century which can hardly be studied too much, not merely for its positive results in the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalites, with their profound aesthetic charm, but for its general spirit and character, for the ethical qualities of which it is a consummate type.¹⁵

Each term resonated with its anti-Ruskin charge. Saluting the *Quattrocento*, the quality of the Renaissance mind, and the distinction of its art was silently to resist the whole trajectory of Ruskin's work on Gothic Venice; to praise the "ethical qualities" of the Renaissance was provocatively to contravert the heart of his

14. See Christa Zorn, "Aesthetic Intertextuality as Cultural Critique: Vernon Lee Rewrites History through Walter Pater's 'La Gioconda'", *Victorian Newsletter*, 91 (1997): 4–10.

15. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xxxii.

Venetian historiography. Refusing to name Ruskin, Pater's prose comprised muted respect and acknowledgement, mixed with a kind of literary insolence, a deliberate strategy of rebuttal yet persistent invocation to defuse his cultural power. Even at the conclusion of his chapter on "Leonardo da Vinci" (originally 1869), there was poised provocation. Scripting a secular aesthetics against the logic of Ruskin's broadly Christian discourse, Pater, writing on a painter for whom Ruskin had little sympathy, resisted his conviction in the continuity between great art and great soul, between painting of stature and integrity of moral identity, by reserving to the last paragraph, as if a matter of little significance, "the question of the exact form of [Leonardo's] religion."¹⁶ Pater unobtrusively shifted, through the structural organization of his prose, Ruskin's central interest in the moral identity of the artist into a question of mere antiquarianism, reserved for the final moment of the discussion and syntactically paralleled in importance to a factual query about whether or not Francis I was present at Leonardo's death.

Unstated antagonism, deft but secretive, plural in technique but consistent in direction, gave shape to Pater's prose in *The Renaissance*, providing Lee with a model for engaging with the shade of Ruskin as she too wrote on Italian cities, medieval Italian art, the meaning of Venice, and the moral identity of the Renaissance. Yet to restore, at odds with Prins, this older model of literary authority in terms of a discourse composed against the cultural visibility of Ruskin in Italy is not simply to privilege, in a map of literary descent, the familiar father over the less-remembered child. Lee absorbed from Pater, the "master we have recently lost",¹⁷ as she wrote in her own *Renaissance: Fancies and Studies* (1895), the patterns of prose that secretly fenced with Ruskin, but in writing of Venice, Siena, Florence, Tuscany, and northern Italy in general in the shadow of the author of *The Stones of Venice*, Lee's countermoves were more inventive and subtler than Pater's. She cleared a space for own literary identity against the man whom she admired, believed mistaken, read thoughtfully, and sought to

16. *Ibid.*, 82.

17. Vernon Lee, *Renaissance: Fancies and Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Lane 1909), 255.

overcome, with a refinement that revealed an important development of her Paterian inheritance just as it disclosed both the necessity and difficulty of transacting with Ruskin in the last years of the nineteenth century. Lee's textual struggle is a distinctive episode in the history of Ruskinian influence and in the management of the Paterian bequest, a suggestive example of late Victorian writing spurred by resistance to the past, and a valuable instance of the late nineteenth-century woman writer adroitly circumventing a great male sage with little personal sense – and in this respect different from Margaret Oliphant – that her engagement related to a question of sexual / textual politics or to what Gilbert and Gubar would later theorize as the insistently oppressive force of male writers on Victorian female creativity.

Vernon Lee's early subject matter as a critic of Italian culture was prompted by the presence of Ruskin. Pater's choice of the Renaissance, the spirit "of general elevation and enlightenment",¹⁸ in 1873 was to privilege what Ruskin has censured. Although J.B. Bullen does not mention her in his study of the Renaissance myth in the nineteenth century,¹⁹ Lee wrote widely on the Renaissance too, including *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance* (1884) and *Renaissance: Fancies and Studies*, and in the "Valedictory" of the latter fashioned a complex negotiation with Ruskin's conception of the goodness of art and the celebratory duties of the critic to which I shall return. But a major early book on Italian culture, written when she was only 24, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), took a new direction in opening a cultural arena distinct from those occupied by author of *Mornings in Florence* and "Michelangelo and Tintoret". Ruskin's Renaissance had been the death knell of northern Italy; his interest in the dying Venice ceased beyond the sixteenth century, and, for him, sculptural features "of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' revealed simply the "close [of] the career of the architecture of Europe".²⁰

18. Pater, *The Renaissance*, xxxiii.

19. See J.B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

20. *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, eds, E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903–1912), 11.196. All future references to this edition are in the main text as volume: page number.

To write on the artistic achievements of eighteenth-century Italy was to have moved into the vectors of post-Renaissance history Ruskin regarded, at least in the first part of his career, as arid and of impoverished instruction.²¹ Lee remarked that he “perceives the whole plastic art of the 18th century, architecture, sculpture, and painting, are as bad as bad can be”,²² and she chose to counter him directly through the historical analysis of *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* by celebrating what he deplored. Agreeing with Ruskin only so far as to admit that that there was “throughout the whole eighteenth century, much that was childish, pedantic, and servile”,²³ Lee recuperated as artistic activity of significance the achievements of the Arcadian Academy, the theatre of Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi, and – despite her later confessed ignorance of the subject – the music of Jommelli and the opera libretti of Metastasio. “Italy alone”, she declared provocatively, “had artistic life”²⁴ in an age Ruskin had marked as peculiarly moribund.

Lee’s engagement with Ruskin’s historiography – or what she perceived to be his historical preferences – helped define the strategy of a novelist of international stature. The young Edith Wharton, finding Lee’s clue suggestive, was to perceive in the *Settecento* a cognate way of approaching the imagined history of Italy while keeping a distance from the art critic whom she knew, later, had had substantial power on her youthful mind: Ruskin, she said, had been “an interpreter of visual impression [who had done] me incomparable service.”²⁵ But at the beginning of her career, she was not to celebrate him so innocently and instead had to negotiate his presence as an interpreter of Italy as she planned her first novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), in despite of his widely acknowledged imaginative custody of the terrain. This ambitious

21. For a fuller account of Ruskin’s changing regard for the eighteenth century generally, see Dinah Birch, “Ruskin’s Revised Eighteenth Century” forthcoming in Francis O’Gorman and Katherine Turner, eds, *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003).

22. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, 221.

23. Vernon Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, 2nd ed. (London: Unwin, 1907), 41.

24. *Ibid.*, 7.

25. Quoted in Singley, *Edith Wharton*, 215n.

work, which gestured favourably towards the hero of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* and Lee's *Studies*,²⁶ took the melancholy history of Odo Valsecca and his doomed efforts to cast off the shackles of feudalism in the ducal territories in Lombardy as the sole plot of its long narrative. But if the novel did not have amplitude in narrative scope, it had capacity in muffled intertextuality. Wharton, depicting Venice in Book II of the novel as a place of sexual decadence and secret sexual liaison against any nobler conception of her *quondam* glory, constructed, at a wider narrative level, a silent counter to the historiography of *The Stones of Venice*. She saw in Odo's story the importance not of heeding the warnings of history or of returning to the dignity of the Middle Ages, but of escaping from the past and its medieval remains, of embracing a life of intellectual and political liberty freed from the doctrines of the church *dell'Italia medievale*. *The Valley of Decision*, which Lee revealingly thought a "wonderful account of historical truth".²⁷ was articulated against the trajectory of Ruskin's Venetian diagnosis, putting its faith in modern enlightenment and in a secular society that grew painfully from the eighteenth-century's battle against the grip of the Gothic ages which *The Stones* had mourned. Hope for the fortunes of modern Italy, Wharton implied, and for the human civilizations struggling to escape the pressures of the past represented by her, came from a century in which the burdens of religion were being overthrown. In the *Settecento*, it was the atheists not the priests who, "at risk of life and fortune, laboured for [the] moral liberation [of the peasantry]".²⁸ Lucy Newlyn has argued that it is through allusion to each other in the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge that respect and affection were articulated but also distinctions voiced, and "tacit opposition"²⁹ expressed. Wharton's and Lee's techniques against Ruskin move

26. See Penelope Vita-Finzi, "Italian Background: Edith Wharton's Debt to Vernon Lee", *Edith Wharton Review*, 13 (1996): 14-18.

27. Vernon Lee, "Edith Wharton's *Valley of Decision*: A Rediscovered Contemporary Critique" in Millicent Bell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 159.

28. Edith Wharton, *The Valley of Decision* (New York: Scribner, 1902), 295.

29. Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), viii.

beyond Newlyn's model because they include a kind of topographical and historical allusion as an act of dissent, a form of literary invocation that, not relying on the recollection of specific words or rhythms, partly depends rather on the spatial and temporal, on shared geographical and chronological loci to manage the broader presence of an opposing author in a creative textual exchange.

Wharton was to publish more positively on Ruskin's association with Italian art – as opposed to moral history – later in her career, at a greater distance from him and her first acquaintance with his writing. In *False Dawn* (1924), Ruskin anachronistically³⁰ appeared as a character, whom the hero – Lewis Raycie – first meets on Mont Blanc and then has as a friendly guide to the art of Venice; the story, acknowledging Ruskin's power over the perception of the art of Italy without the necessity to manoeuvre around his political and moral discourse clear from *The Valley*, assembled Ruskinian preferences for Italian medieval art against the debased taste of old New York in the 1840s, represented by Raycie's father. Where *The Valley* had implicitly found Ruskin questionable in cultural, spiritual, and ethical history, *False Dawn* detached such concerns, and allowed him significance as a judge of "taste" in the visual arts that involved the excision of his moral discourse – indeed, old Mr Raycie mocks it with greater energy than Forster's Mr Emerson. The adjustment in Vernon Lee's later views of Ruskin, in distinction to Wharton's, did not concern Italy, as I discuss presently. For Lee, policing the distinctions between her imagining of the country she had made her home and his potent grip remained always an animating challenge. But it was not just the choice of the eighteenth century or the Renaissance that comprised Lee's reconstruction of Italy against Ruskin, nor did her celebration of the multiple identities of Rome in *The Spirit of Rome* (1906) – a city Ruskin never admired – exhaust the limit of her literary repositioning in relation to him. In a range of articles through the middle of her career, Lee subtly represented distinctively Ruskinian spaces in rhetoric that sought to overcome the traces of the critic she

30. Wharton remarks on Ruskin's enthusiasm for Carpaccio, but this painter came to matter to him only in the 1870s (the novel is set in the 1840s).

believed "in many respects, a man left far behind by the current of modern thought",³¹ yet whom she knew persisted in ghostly occupation of the nation with which her literary persona was involved.

"Pisa and the Campo Santo", published in *The Enchanted Woods* (1904), shadow boxed with Ruskin. It concerned a space of lasting significance to him, of both aesthetic and personal consequence. The frescoes of the Campo Santo Ruskin first saw on his unaccompanied tour of Italy in 1845, writing to his father of their "vividness and fullness of conception" (4.xxxi), and their unparalleled grasp of the biblical history of the patriarchs. Publicly, he recalled them in the autobiographical "Epilogue" to *Modern Painters* II (1846) a year later as a "veritable Palestine" (4.350), a revelation of the sincerity of medieval art new in his experience of Italian visual culture, and which helped determine the reorientation of *Modern Painters* away from Turner in the first volume to a discussion of Italian religious art in the third. The Campo Santo, Ruskin said, was one of the three most precious possessions of Italy, and in *Praeterita*, at the close of his writing life, he built Chapter 6, entitled "The Campo Santo", from the memorialization of its significance in 1845. The frescoes, he remarked, taught at once "the entire doctrine of Christianity, painted so that a child could understand it" (35.351), affirming the integrity of medieval faith in forms of art that were its truth-telling effect. Like the Tintoretti of the Scuola di San Rocco, the Fra Angelicos of Florence, and the Giotto frescoes of the Chapel of the Arena in Padua, the paintings of the Campo Santo, and especially Gozzoli's depictions of Old Testament history and the *Sacrifice of Job* then attributed to Giotto, comprised chief sites of Ruskin's early experiences of medieval Christian art that shaped his subsequent work on the visual and its relationship to faith.

Vernon Lee's *The Enchanted Wood* used the Campo Santo frescoes deftly to lever away the persistence of Ruskin, writing over a visual and historical geography inextricable from the substance of his aesthetic and personal history. Via the Campo, Lee expressed a counter-Ruskinian rejection of the idea of art as expressive of

31. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, 201.

moral or religious temper of the kind that continually typified her movement against him, and endeavoured to challenge the hegemony of the Middle Ages, to re-imagine an Italian city with a sharply alternative sense of what constituted its historical past and what was prominent in its inheritance from earlier generations. Her Pisa was, in the first place, not dominated by the artefacts of the medieval, of which, she said, apart from a few buildings, "there remains nothing".³² More prominent was its eclecticism, the "confused impression" (15) of its identity, its mingling of styles, and the fact that the town "taken as a whole, is vaguely seventeenth century" (16). There was no visual revelation of Medieval faith legible in stone or art to be had here. Ruskin had said in *Modern Painters* IV (1856) that the architecture of the cathedral church of Pisa – characteristically identifying a mythical point of origin in a historical tradition in a way extensively deployed in *The Stones of Venice* – formed the source of the greatest of the Christian artists and architects of the pre-Renaissance (6.434), but Lee sought to demedievalize it too, to detach the building from Christian and medievalist discourse, hailing it as "built by Greeks or pupils of Greeks" and pagan in its inception. It was "one of the last works of antique art" (18), she said: it was conclusory not initiatory.

Writing of Ruskin's treasured Campo Santo, Lee's terms gained their combative vitality from tackling his shadows. Presenting herself in this essay as in others as the wanderer (sometimes by bicycle) around cities, a free subjectivity unconstrained by the requirements of domesticity or, *contra* Ruskin, of intellectual purpose, she perceived the frescoes, regarded briefly and described impressionistically, as simply "half-effaced" depictions "of mediaeval moralities and legends" (19), the faded remnants of a dead culture. The space could not have been more thoroughly reconceived. What was of more interest to the author of *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* was the "local celebrities with eighteenth-century pigtails or heads of hair *à la* Brutus" (19) that rested there, the sort of impious accretions on the medieval fabric that Ruskin deplored in letters to his father, in the long note to

32. Vernon Lee, *The Enchanted Woods and Other Essays on the Genius of Places* (London: Lane, 1905), 15. Other references given in main text.

Modern Painters II (4.38) and, in Venice, in the "modern upholsterer's work" (24.217) of the tomb of Doge Domenico Michiel in San Giorgio Maggiore. The Pisan Campo mirrored the city at large as a confusion in which the medieval played only a minor role. And the Middle Ages, for Lee, reported nothing to the present. In *The Valley of Decision*, the Italian pre-Renaissance had to be escaped and it was a condition of the revival of the modern that the mortmain of the medieval be removed; for Lee, in a cognate focus in writing on Pisa, the medieval was an enervated cultural and moral space: the "Past" of the Campo Santo "has so long ceased to be alive that [. . .] it seems scarcely to have gone through the bitterness and solemnity of dying" (20). Lee's interest in Siena in *Genius Loci* (1899) had been in the medievalism "which died, so to speak, without issue",³³ and her representation of the deathly medieval Pisa a few years later against Ruskin was an effort to defeat his insistence, audible from *Modern Painters* II to the pages of *Praeterita*, that the traces of medieval Italy spoke wisdom to the benighted nations of modern Europe. Ruskinian conceptions of the prophetic nature of Italy were convincingly erased in *The Enchanted Woods* and the process was neatly emblemized by Lee's submerging of Ruskin's admiration for the instruction provided by the Gozzoli frescoes of Old Testament history beneath the brisk comment that the Middle Ages remained artistically visible in the Campo's cloister only "in the group of maimed and blind and halt who are calling on Death" (19). The *Trecento* carnival of death, imagined in blunt and deliberately ungenerous terms – she was thinking of Francesco Traini's *Triumph of Death* – overcame the Ruskinian salutation of the life that flourished in the Medieval: death overscored his continual claims for the locus of true Italian vitality.

Detaching the visual from the Christian, art from belief, painting from faith, was the overt accomplishment of Lee's final glance at the Campo Santo frescoes. Invested in this visual moment was a perception that reoriented the theologized gaze she contested explicitly in the essay on "Ruskinism" (1882). "Nothing could be more charming", she remarked,

33. Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci: Notes on Places* (London: Grant Richards, 1899), 51.

than to run one's eyes along the frescoes, which, in their patchiness of colour, sometimes very vivid, sometimes utterly faded, are really like variegated flower-beds. One steps across the grass and sunshine of the enclosed space to have the pleasure of the contrast, and to see the frescoes also from the opposite side, framed in by the white carved mullions, vivid blue or mauve pink, with a figure here and there standing out" (20–1).

Lee's language was cognate with the Aesthete's in her privileging of the spectator's gaze at the art object, the "what is this [. . .] to me?"³⁴ of Pater's *Renaissance*, and she transformed the subject of cultural and theological consequence for Ruskin into a composition of colour that engaged, a configuration of pleasing forms, floral-like whites, blues, and pinks. The Campo Santo became an occasion for the inscription of a discourse of visuality that gained momentum from muted contest with the Christianized aesthesis of Ruskin who had found a "Palestine" in what Lee denoted, in an entirely different register, as "charming".

Writing on Pisa provided an opportunity specifically to re-occupy a topographical locale privileged in Ruskin's texts, but it was textually claiming Venice – without trace of Stopford Brooke's later anxiety – that allowed a more ambitious act of engagement with *The Stones* and *St. Mark's Rest*, an occasion provocatively to use a form of Ruskinian rhetoric against itself in an effort to exorcise the spectral presence of the writer Lee called in "Ruskinism" "the almost isolated champion of creeds and ideas which have ceased even to be discussed among the thinking part of our nation."³⁵ *The Stones of Venice* loomed large in Lee's understanding of Ruskin's possession of Italy, but the volumes did not drain his efforts to teach the history of the sea city. Convinced of the need to provide for the classes of men to whom he was lecturing at Oxford in the 1870s more effective guidebooks than those provided by John Murray for their continental tours – an increasingly fashionable and profitable industry – Ruskin imposed on himself the duty of writing accounts of Florence and Venice "to give what guidance I

34. Pater, *The Renaissance*, xxix.

35. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, 201.

may to travellers in Italy" (23.293). *St. Mark's Rest*, the resulting guide to Venice, was subtitled with words that indicated Ruskin's disillusionment with the effectiveness of his earlier books – an anxiety in fact woven into the texture of *The Stones* from the beginning³⁶ – to have meaningful influence on English perception of the city: *The History of Venice, Written for the Help of the Few Travellers who still Care for her Monuments*.

The first chapter of *St. Mark's Rest*, addressed directly to a wandering English tourist, endeavoured to fix his or her mind not on the beauty of the city or the charm of its facades or the elegance of its provisions for relaxation and luxury, but on the historical and moral meaning of two of its most visible artefacts. The twin columns on the Molo, Ruskin said, were memorial not merely picturesque, commemorating the Doge Domenico Michiel's siege of Tyre in the twelfth century, which was a defining and emblematic action, as Ruskin saw it, of a brave Christian prince worthy of honour. Instructing his readers to take a boat out to the steps of San Giorgio Maggiore (the church in which Domenico still lies buried), Ruskin commended the upright actions and startling bravery of the Doge – *Cattolico uomo e audace* – affirming the force of the statement still legible on his gravestone: "Whosoever thou art, who comest to behold this tomb of his, bow thyself down before God, because of him" (24.217). Ruskin had moved from description of a familiar tourist site into a discourse that celebrated true Christian heroism as an indicator of the temper of twelfth-century Venice and which tried to foster in those few travellers who did still care for Venice a perception that was historically sensitive, politically and theologically responsible.

E.V. Lucas in his guide *A Wanderer in Venice* (1914) had named Ruskin "first among the dead"³⁷ of the historians of Venice, and it was this potentially disabling kind of topographical possession that Lee silently acknowledged. Yet where Lucas sparred with Ruskin by simply warning his readers away, telling them that

36. See Francis O'Gorman, "'Do what you can, and confess frankly what you are unable to do': Ruskin's Aesthetic of Failure in *The Stones of Venice*" forthcoming in *Review of English Studies*.

37. E.V. Lucas, *A Wanderer in Venice* (London: Methuen, 1914), vii.

Ruskin was an uncomfortable read, a writer whose work is only "for the student patient under chastisement",³⁸ Lee endeavoured more complex textual manoeuvres to pension off Ruskin's shade in her essay "The Lion of St Mark's and Admiral Morosini" from *Genius Loci*. Silently inscribed against the rhetoric of *St. Mark's Rest*, Lee deployed the columns of the Molo, or at least the eastern column, to produce a reading of the history of the city that was provocatively evacuated of Christian achievement and which affirmed, in its place, a city rooted in pagan Classicism and which flourished in the Middle Ages not in virtue but in trade, in which the glorious age of faith was rewritten – as it was in Margaret Oliphant's study – as the heyday of commercial prosperity. Lee declared herself in *Belcaro* impatient of Ruskin's theologized aesthetics that were, to her mind, the result of a compromise, an effort "morally to justify his artistic sympathies and aversions, morally to justify his caring about art at all."³⁹ In "The Lion of St Mark", she placed under erasure that admiration for medieval Christian faith that had been the guiding point of the discussion of the columns in *St. Mark's Rest*. In inviting her readers in *Genius Loci* to ponder the columns' meaning, and that of the lion, "truculent, with stiffened tail and white, terrific eyes", she was asking a question that gained its torsion from deft mimicry of Ruskin's: "what does [the lion] mean? And what has he to do with this lazy over-lovely city? To understand him would be to understand Venice [. . .]."⁴⁰ But despite the proximity of Lee's and Ruskin's rhetoric at a superficial level, the columns so inscribed, made meaningful rather than merely visually pleasing, historically instructive rather than simply the object of the tourist's casual gaze, supported no reading for Lee that could be berthed with *St. Mark's Rest*.

Henry James, another serious reader of Ruskin and Italy, created a Venice distinct from that of *The Stones* in *The Aspern Papers* (1888) by investing in the historical trope of Venice as pirate, and provocatively turning the city into the victim rather than the

38. Ibid.

39. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, 213.

40. Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci*, 110. Other references in main text.

perpetrator of pillage, spoils, and stratagems. Not pillage but profit guided Lee's reading of the artefacts of the Piazzetta against Ruskin's praise of Ducal faith as she saw the pillars revealing the fact that Venice "is different from any of her mediaeval rivals [. . .] inasmuch as, like her Lion on the column, she looks East" (113): the lion of St Mark emblematically signified the direction of Venice's colonial aspiration and her commercial gaze that once made the lagoon "the great harbour for [. . .] the Alexandrian world" (114). The direction of the lion's gaze was to the location of the riches of Venice, assuring her commercial pre-eminence throughout the Middle Ages until the discovery of the trade routes with the Far East irrevocably ended it, leaving her "merely a dead city from past times" (115). Taking a single monument and reading it synecdochically as illustrative of the identity of a culture was to mimic a Ruskinian rhetorical procedure, his arresting movement from artefact to cultural diagnosis that had characterised his deciphering of the art and architecture of the sea city from the 1850s. But, for Lee, this rhetorical pattern generated a discourse that helped scythe clear a space for her own secular literary identity as an English writer on Venice in despite of the phantom of the author of *St. Mark's Rest*, whom Margaret Oliphant had hostilely called "our great autocrat in art".⁴¹ Writing medieval Venice as, at its heart, commercial and imperial, as an arena of spectacularly successful international trade and domination, with its armies and ambitions always ready "to spring into the East" (115), Lee brought to the surface that which the Christian priorities of *The Stones* had persistently muted, continuing her palimpsest of Ruskin's work over the body of *La Serenissima*. "Literature", Lucia Boldrini agreed in her recent study of the relations between Joyce and Dante, "is made by conscious agents whose imitations are deliberate and intentional acts".⁴² Vernon Lee's imitative transactions with Ruskin's texts were not just a standard part of the identity of the literary, but a distinctive element of the fabrication of her textual presence against a forefather, and a component of a wider cultural

41. Mrs Oliphant, *The Makers of Venice*, 53.

42. Lucia Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante, and the Poetics of Literary Relations: Language and Meaning in Finnegans Wake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11.

effort to disengage Italy from Ruskin's presence in the literary imagination of the late Victorian period.

The annexation of Ruskin's verbal postures for the purposes of transacting with his lingering authority gave to the motion of Lee's writing on northern Italy a distinctive current. But these examples of the writing of individual cultural spaces, an imaginative topography of contest, were not the limits of Lee's deployment of Italy to threaten the security of Ruskin's presence. She chose telling moments to continue her ironization of his persistent legacy throughout her work, inventively borrowing his procedures to articulate a language against him. Reading the architecture of the Basilica di San Marco, for instance, at the climatic close of the *Essay on Art and Life* (1896) became a way of ironically articulating a non-Christian account of the "upward life of the soul"⁴³ and its patterns of being and becoming. Lee took a sacred space dear to Ruskin's Venice and deployed his technique of reading architecture as expressive of spiritual identity to generate, with audacity, a radical alternative to his theologized account of human spiritual life arising from the "constant interchange of [San Marco's] vault and vault".⁴⁴ Her appropriation of Ruskin's rhetoric for mutinous purposes over Italy was evident similarly in extensive terms in her consideration of the whole question of the moral identity of the Italian Renaissance in her Pater/Ruskin-transaction *Renaissance: Fancies and Studies*. Here, she tackled Pater's silent opponent in his *Renaissance* by adopting a Ruskinian conviction to produce another unRuskinian proposition. Ruskin had consistently argued that it was not art's business to deal with the immoral, to depict the wicked, or picture pain, and had maintained through his critical career that "all great art is Praise" – the title of chapter 1 of *The Laws of Fiesole* (1877–1888) – in the same way that he had formulated the business of the art critic as a matter of celebration rather than censure. Lee, reconfiguring the critic's commitment to praise, teasingly agreed that much of the Renaissance should not be considered in the discourses of modern art criticism because its

43. Vernon Lee, *Essay on Art and Life; as written by Vernon Lee, and done into a book at the Roycroft Printing Shop* (East Aurora, N.Y.: 1896), 91.

44. *Ibid.*, 90.

moral evils were too great to contemplate. "[W]hy should we sicken ourselves with the thought of this long dead and done for abomination?"⁴⁵ she asked, separating in the process her analysis of the period from Pater's. Proscribing the moral caducity of the Renaissance as outside the proper concerns of art criticism, Lee was creatively ventriloquizing Ruskin's belief that art and art criticism should deal only with the good, yet not to affirm him but in order to redeem the Renaissance, so bitter to his mind, from the legacy of his denunciation. We "know we had better turn our backs", Lee said, on the corruption of the *Quattrocento*, silently acknowledging that *The Stones'* diagnosis had had integrity, but instead, she added, re-orienting its principles in a single line: we should "get from the Renaissance only what was good" (259).

Lee's discourse in the "Valedictory" of *Renaissance* proposed that the goodness of Renaissance art had still to be acknowledged despite the wretchedness of its moral standards. She was divorcing art from the moral temper of the culture, yet, where this was to repudiate a principle of *The Stones*, she was extending Ruskin's generous conviction that the role of the critic was to celebrate by reading Renaissance art, in despite of the moral poverty of its age, in search of what was valuable. Swerving further from Paterian conceptions and involving herself in a yet more intricate *pas de deux* with Ruskin's heritage, Lee suggested that there was moral advantage in the contemplation of this art that could be disassociated from the evils of the *Quattrocento*: "if we wish to be sound", she said, "let us fill our soul with images and emotions of good" that did not suffer from the wickedness of the Borgias or the "foul-mouthed humanists" (250) of the Italian Renaissance. Hoping for the "soundness" of the spectator who regarded the valuable productions of the Renaissance that were not contaminated by its depravity, Lee was invoking but also transforming the Ruskinian notion that the proper perception of the visual was a matter of moral realisation.

Lee positioned herself in relation to Ruskin subtly in multiple ways, and the creativity this precipitated constituted a challenge to Bloom's emphasis on anxiety in the patterns of writers' influence

45. Vernon Lee, *Renaissance*, 250. Other references in main text.

and W. Jackson Bate's similar concentration on the "burden of the past".⁴⁶ The presence of the ancestor for Lee was not to make her another Atlas, but was as motivating and productive as it was necessary. It was also at times peculiarly tangled. Nowhere was the complexity of her engagement with Ruskin, the uncrossing as well as the crossing of her literary persona with his, more complicated than in her efforts to desynonymize northern Italy and Christian medievalism through writing alternative histories. Impatient of Ruskin's theology and moralizing view of art, she revelled in the opportunity to separate northern Italy from the dominant terms of his Protestant readings. In "Tuscan Churches in Summer" (1899), she symbolically enjoyed the pleasure of being locked outside Italian churches rather than in; in "All Souls' Day at Venice" the same year, she conceived the city as a necropolis only, a peculiar enclave detached from the flow of modern life, and separated from any moral meaning; and in "Holy Week in Tuscany" (also 1899), she mediated on the pre-Christian roots of Eastern celebrations, suggesting that Christianity was an appealingly picturesque re-enactment of human rituals unconnected with the substances of pious medieval faith that Ruskin had affirmed in *The Stones* as the key to understanding the epoch of Italy's moral prosperity. "For how many thousands of years has the procession wound through that valley?", Lee asked:

Surely long before Christ was born; in the days of Pales and Vertumnus, who knows of what gentle gods of the fields, before the days of Rome and Etruria.⁴⁷

The gesture was to reclaim for Italy a heritage that the Protestant Ruskin of the early 1850s had refused; finding the pagan at the root of the Christian, it was to come closer to Pater's Italy in *Marius the Epicurean* than the Christian virtues of Gothic Venice, and to open up vistas of a history of human faith unessayed in Ruskin's mid-century analysis.

46. See W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap, 1970).

47. Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci*, 27.

Yet the Paterian, pagan interests of *Genius Loci* were not only legible as a turn against the Evangelical author of *The Stones*, whose work on Venice in the early 1850s had embraced even more energetically pro-Protestant polemic in response to Pius IX's *Universalis Ecclesiae* (1850). To find in the rituals of Christian faith the roots of myth, and to perceive a continuum of substances of belief beneath different forms of religious practice was paradoxically to approach Ruskin's own intellectual movement away from the Protestantism of his early career as a cultural historian of northern Italy to the syncretic thinking of his final decades. Lee's subtle engagement with the spirit of *The Stones* in the 1890s was of a piece with Ruskin's negotiation with his own past. His retreat from Protestantism, up to the "unconversion" of 1858 and beyond, involved the gradual reconstruction of his religious faith: on occasions in the early 1860s, this had led to nearly anti-Christian statement. But from *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) onwards, what gained in importance in the economy of his changing theology was myth, understood as the sincere production of human faith, and he came increasingly to perceive the pre-Christian beliefs of Egypt, Greece, and northern Europe more generally as expressive of the permanent values of human life and its understanding of the divine.⁴⁸ It was this confluence of convictions – impossible for the writer of *The Stones* in the early 1850s – that defined the now little-read accounts of Gothic cities in the 1880s that were eloquent of the shifts they marked between *The Stones* and the pluralism of the later years. Such confluence was strikingly clear, to take an example, in Ruskin's meditation on the foundation of Amiens cathedral in *The Bible of Amiens* (1880–1885), a Gothic edifice that precipitated the expression of his reconfigured beliefs about the forces of faith. "Who built it, shall we ask?", he said, replying in words that could almost have been Pater's, which fused the

48. On Ruskin and myth see Dinah Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), Dinah Birch, "'The Sun is God': Ruskin's Solar Mythology", in J.B. Bullen, ed., *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 109–23, and Francis O'Gorman "'To see the finger of God in the dimension of the pyramid': A New Context for Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866)" forthcoming in *Modern Language Review* 2003.

Christian and the pagan, collapsing history into a single continuum of faithful and creative reverence:

God, and Man, – is the first and most true answer. The stars in their courses built it, and the Nations. Greek Athena labours here – and Roman Father Jove, and Guardian Mars. The Gaul labours here, and the Frank: knightly Norman, – mighty Ostrogoth, – and wasted anchorite of Idumea. (33.131–32)

Pater had fashioned a convert anti-Ruskinian verbal texture in *The Renaissance*, yet Ruskin in discussing the cathedral of Amiens approached precisely the voice that had once been raised against him, further entangling the lines of relationship between the two men, and setting hurdles for the arguments proposed in Nicholas Shrimpton's recent discussion of "Ruskin and the Aesthetes".⁴⁹ Lee wrote against Ruskin's youthful subscription to Protestant Christianity, but fashioning imagined Italian spaces against him, she unexpectedly entered a harmonious relationship with his own patterns of mature self-revision at the close of his writing life. Ruskin's words and changed theological convictions, the productions of his last creative years that resisted his statement in *Praeterita* that, from his childhood to the present, he was "in nothing whatsoever *changed*" (35.220, italic original), became threaded into Lee's anti-Ruskinian writing, complicating the nature of her softly audible references to him and her strategies of dissent against the writer whom Grant Allen had archly endeavoured to dismiss in his historical guide *Venice* (1898) as a figure speaking merely "enthusiastically rather than critically".⁵⁰

Lee's terms could merge with Ruskin's even at the moments of her most inventive challenges to him, and the overlap of voices presaged, in due course, a greater sense of sympathy for Ruskin himself. Partly through the agency of her close friend Clementine "Kit" Anstruther-Thomson who was enthusiastic about Ruskin's social teaching and belief in the value of working-class art

49. Nicholas Shrimpton, "Ruskin and the Aesthetes" in Dinah Birch, ed., *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131–51.

50. Grant Allen, *Historical Guides: Venice* (London: Richards, 1898), 118.

instruction – an enthusiasm that brought a distinctive nuance to the homosexual erotics of their friendship⁵¹ – Lee came to find the subject of “Ruskin as a Reformer”, as opposed to art critic, or theological thinker, more appealing. In *Gospels of Anarchy* (1908), she wrote approvingly, under this title, of Ruskin’s political economy, the tenets of which, “were they taken to heart”, she said, “would improve not only economic theory as propounded in books, but economic practice as it enters into the life of every well-to-do man and woman.”⁵² Like J.A.Hobson, Michael Sadler, William Beveridge, and the host of labour movement supporters in England at the beginning of the twentieth century recently discussed by Lawrence Goldman and Jose Harris,⁵³ Lee was drawn to the suggestive political legacy of Ruskin’s thought in the decade immediately after his death. Celebrating his politics in 1908, but inventively challenging him as a possessor of Italy in her writing on the country and its art throughout her career, Lee’s productive relationship with her forefather places a question mark over the straightforward model of female-male literary relations Gilbert and Gubar thought characterised the Victorian period. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) proposed that women writers avoided the oppressive power of men and sought instead “female precursor[s] who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, [proved] by example that a revolt [. . . was] possible.”⁵⁴ Engaging so capably and extensively with Ruskin, Lee would surely have found such a statement baffling.

51. See Diana Maltz, “Engaging ‘Delicate Brains’: From Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson’s Psychological Aesthetics” in Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds, *Women and British Aestheticism*, 211–29.

52. Vernon Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy, and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1908), 312.

53. See Lawrence Goldman, “Ruskin, Oxford, and the British Labour Movement 1880–1914” and Jose Harris, “Ruskin and Social Reform” both in Dinah Birch, ed., *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*, 57–86, 7–33. There is a little more on the resonances of Ruskin’s economic work in Willie Henderson, *John Ruskin’s Political Economy* (London: Routledge, History of Economic Thought Series, 2000).

54. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 49, italic original.

Lee's view of Ruskin changed, just as Ruskin's view of his earlier self metamorphosed. Finding herself in greater sympathy with him in 1908, however, was only to add an ironic twist to her previous confrontational practices of writing in tension with him through the procedures of his own rhetoric. Sophisticated forms of inscription against Ruskin through the reoccupation of geographical spaces in northern Italy gave a distinctive energy to Lee's work, and constituted an enlargement of a technique of resistance she had once learned from Pater. She put that heritage to use in imagining Italy differently, and as a way of defining the modern against an iconic figure of Victorian aesthetics. The business of reinscribing Italy became for Lee an episode in the self-defining conflict with the enduring voice of Ruskin and an aspect of a broader development in the cultural conception of Italy outside his terms. Beyond this, it was also a feature of her discursive formation of a sense of modernity in opposition to a figure who might easily be seen as bound to the past. As for Forster and T.E. Hulme, dismissing Ruskin became part of the procedure for marking out the modern against the Victorian and, in the process, projecting a model of literary history that involved discontinuity and the disenfranchising of the past in favour of the present, with its inevitable loss.⁵⁵

Robert Browning, in the volume of poetry published on the day of his death, *Asolando: Fancies and Facts* (1889), demonstrated what vitality was possible to a poet at the very end of his life. But included in the diverse range of writing in this fresh collection was a poem that was also strikingly predictive of the intellectual terrain of Lee's endeavours that I have been suggesting in this essay, just as it was remarkable for its exploration of the dynamics of human exchange in a way more familiar from the early work of T.S. Eliot. In "Inapprehensiveness", a man and a woman regard

55. For some commentary on forms of literary history that involve loss, see Roger Sale, *Literary Inheritance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). For other discussions of the notion of influence relevant for the nineteenth century, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) and Robert Douglas - Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

the landscape around Asolo, the Veneto home of Browning's friend, Katherine de Kay Bronson, to whom the volume was dedicated. Nervously, the male speaker, trying to make polite conversation to disguise the fact that he feels passionately for his companion, remarks apparently casually:

[“] Has Ruskin noticed here at Asolo
That certain weed-growths on the ravaged wall
Seen” . . . ⁵⁶

He is unable to finish his line, to reach the conclusion of his recollection of Ruskin, because he becomes, despite his best efforts, silently consumed in his feelings for her. The speaker's companion, perhaps unaware or deliberately choosing to ignore her friend's mental turmoil – an account of which fills the centre of the poem – returns at the end to the unthreatening question of Ruskin's imagined perception of Asolo. “No”, she says, in words that form the final lines of “Inapprehensiveness”:

[“] the book
Which noticed how the wall-growths wave’ said she
‘Was not by Ruskin.”
I said ‘Vernon Lee?’⁵⁷

Lee gestured towards the subtitle of *Asolando* in the title of her analysis of the *Renaissance: Fancies and Studies* by way of post-humously returning the compliment. But by the time she was mulling over the ideas for that book, she might have privately recognized what significance there was in the now dead Browning's lines. “Inapprehensiveness” alighted on a question of the economy of influence as it was worked out not through plainly recognizable textual allusion or the familiar patterns of intertextuality, but through the writing of spaces, the scripting of the geographical, and there was a peculiar aptness and historical coherence in Browning's dramatization, at the end of his life, of a debate about

56. Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 2.887.

57. *Ibid.*

the literary possession of an Italian topography as a choice between a text by John Ruskin or Vernon Lee. As far as Lee's work was concerned, "Inapprehensiveness" had set precisely those terms that would help define her resourceful imagining of the country against the "greatest and strangest artist" of the previous generation and the continuing, challenging afterlife of his words.

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LIVING WITH
DANTE AND PETRARCH.
“MONNA INNOMINATA” BY
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Francesco Marroni

1. The Rossetti family are undoubtedly a unique case in the history of English literature. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to emphasize the way in which two literary traditions merged in their artistic biographies. Rather, it is my aim to focus on the essential contribution which Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti, in particular, gave to the development of nineteenth-century European culture.

What I wish to underline, above all, is the importance of memory in their works which is indicative of the persistence of Italy and Italian culture in their formative years as well as in the phases of their artistic maturity. Thus, it may be said that the whole of Gabriele Rossetti's life may be seen as a struggle to prevent the culture and literature of Italy, his mother country, from being consigned to oblivion. His work aimed at conserving the ethical values and political ties which, for all the Rossettis meant a reaffirmation of their roots and a way of giving continuity and significance to their condition as exiles. And, above all, this struggle against oblivion meant an assertion of their own cultural identity

in a society – British Victorian society, of course – whose major tenets did not contemplate a facile assimilation of alien cultures.

In order to offer you an idea of the typical attitudes assumed by intellectual men of letters towards such an artistically lively family, it would be useful to consider what John Ruskin wrote in his autobiography in 1899: “[Dante Gabriel Rossetti] was really not an Englishman, but a great Italian tormented in the Inferno of London.”¹ Ruskin’s words are no exception, and they appear all the more reductive and unkind towards the poet and painter, especially when one considers they were written after Dante Gabriel had already left a profound mark on the development of Victorian art thanks to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The truth behind Ruskin’s judgment is that the whole of the Rossetti family, including the lesser known children Maria Francesca and William Michael, always proudly defended their Italian origin, without fear of creating embarrassment in the face of the growing British patriotism of that time.

It may be worthwhile recalling that for many decades Gabriele Rossetti worked on a monograph on Dante which became a real obsession for him. In fact, his studies on Dante were to accompany him all his life to such an extent that the shadow of the Italian poet constantly loomed over the household from his children’s very infancy. Besides considering his personal exegesis of the *Divine Comedy* (1826) a fundamental work for all future studies on Dante, Gabriele Rossetti was also convinced that Dante’s verses contained a political and exoteric scheme whose cryptic matrix was to be found in the Carbonari movement as well as the Masonry.² With

1. John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 451.

2. See Gabriele Rossetti, *Comento analitico al “Purgatorio” di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Pompeo Giannantonio, Firenze, Olschki, 1961. In order to understand the importance of Dante studies by Rossetti, it is worth reading the introduction by Giannantonio who, among other things, writes: “Il linguaggio misterioso di Dante ha, secondo il Rossetti, i suoi precedenti nella Scuola platonica, la quale, a sua volta discende direttamente dai Pitagorici [. . .] La filosofia di Dante è la platonica, la quale adopera l’amore come mezzo del proprio linguaggio e quindi come fine della propria arte; Dante diviene in tal modo un seguace della setta dei *Fedeli d’Amore*, ma per non incorrere nei rigori dell’Inquisizione scrive, come altri della sua età e della sua setta, in una forma sempre più arcana, accessibile solo a pochissimi iniziati [. . .]” (p. LV).

respect of the symbolic valency of Beatrix, Rossetti aimed at reading the numerology of *Vita Nuova* on the basis of precise hermeneutical lines: "Beatrix is that woman of intellect to whom Pythagoras gave the name of philosophy."³ As a result, Petrarch, together with Dante, became the object of Gabriele Rossetti's philosophical studies whose axiological dimension was based on the interpretation of Laura as a representation of Mystic Truth – made possible thanks to an exoteric reading of *Secretum* by Petrarch. In Rossetti's view, the fifth book of *Secretum* had been destroyed either by the author himself or an initiate in order to prevent people at large from discovering the revelation of the sect's formulas.⁴

It is by now evident that the atmosphere in which the four young Rossettis grew up was imbued with the Italian culture of which both Dante and Petrarch were the tutelary deities and guiding spirits, a culture and moral way of life that Gabriele Rossetti had no intention of consigning to oblivion. In addition, his marriage to such an educated and sensitive woman as Frances May Polidori⁵ had further contributed literary yeast to his already

3. Gabriele Rossetti, *La Beatrice di Dante, ragionamenti critici*, ed. M. Luisa Giartosio De Courten, Imola, Galeati, 1935, p. 135. This book was published by Rossetti, at his own expense, in London in 1842. In this essay, Rossetti's interpretation is centred on the symbolical meaning of the number nine, which being sacred for all the esoteric schools, provides also with its multiples the numerological structure for the creation of the character of Beatrice. On this topic, see also Ermanno Circeo, "Per un'analisi della *Beatrice di Dante* di Gabriele Rossetti," in *I Rossetti tra Italia e Inghilterra*, ed. Gianni Oliva, Roma, Bulzoni, 1984, pp. 191–194.

4. On this point, Giannantonio, *op. cit.*, in the wake of Rossetti's analysis, writes: "Il Petrarca era ben addentro ai segreti della setta [...] la sua educazione in Provenza, ove eran ancor vivi i ricordi della strage degli Albigesi, sgozzati dai seguaci del papa per il loro settarismo, e la sua presenza a Tolosa, centro animatore del settarismo, sono elementi indiscutibili della sua iniziazione" (p. XLIV).

5. Frances Mary Polidori (1800–1886) was the daughter of Gaetano Polidori, a severe and demanding Tuscan who had been secretary to Vittorio Alfieri. He was a scholar and translator of Milton, besides being the compiler of an English-Italian-French dictionary. Polidori also wrote a series of moralistic poems. He fled to England during the French Revolution, and eventually married Anna Mari Pierce who bore him eight children, among whom Dr. John Polidori, a friend and personal doctor of Lord Byron, well-known for his Gothic tale *The Vampyre* (1819). He committed suicide apparently to avoid paying gambling debts.

lively mind. So much so that, for the rest of his life he could count on her intelligence which was ever ready to provide order and stability to his excesses and unruliness. In spite of the fact that his wife was half-English and had worked as a governess, Gabriele Rossetti educated his children with a sort of worship of the Italian language, a worship which was more often secluded from rather than open to the stimuli of the outside world.⁶ Therefore, it is no surprise that all the Rossettis gave their contribution to Dante studies in their maturity, partly as a sort of tribute to the memory of their father, who as a result of his interpretation of the *Divine Comedy* had received harsh criticism and scornful comments, sometimes even culminating in hostility from his own fellow patriots.⁷ Significantly, Christina Rossetti proudly reviews the contribution her family gave to the promotion of Dante studies in England in an article on Dante published in *Century Magazine* in 1884:

My father, Gabriele Rossetti, in his "Comento Analitico sull'Inferno di Dante" has left to tyros a clew and to fellow-experts a theory. My sister, Maria Francesca Rossetti, has, in her "Shadow of Dante" eloquently expounded the Divina Commedia as a discourse of the most elevated faith and morals. My brother Dante has translated with a rare felicity the "Vita Nuova" [. . .] and other (political) works of his great namesake. My brother William has,

6. See Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography*, London, Virago, 1994, pp. 21–24. In particular, on the isolated nature of Gabriele Rossetti's children's education she writes: "Of children outside the family, they saw little [. . .] to all intents and purposes the Rossettis were self sufficient, hermetically sealed from the rest of the world. They were neither quite English nor quite Italian [. . .] the children's upbringing was not English, and they grew up with little reference to English behaviour. They never learned, for example, the English embarrassment before things of the mind; and social small talk was a thing at which, to her cost, Christina never grew adept" (p. 24). See also Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti. A Literary Biography*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1994, who observes: "Family life [. . .] combined affection and security. Fatherly exuberance was balanced by maternal steadiness, and her firmness softened by his generosity" (p. 24).

7. As has been frequently pointed out, Gabriele Rossetti felt a strong self-identification with "il Sommo Poeta", of whom he also felt himself to be the interpreter and inheritor of an esoteric knowledge which was reserved to a chosen few. This clearly emerges in his autobiographical poem *Il veggente in solitudine* (1846), in which he euphorically describes his journey from Malta to England in terms of mystic experience.

with a strenuous endeavour to achieve close verbal accuracy, rendered the *Inferno* into English verse.⁸

The central position occupied by Dante also entailed the central focus of a cultural tradition of which the Rossettis considered themselves to be the exclusive representatives. It is no accident that in the preface to *A Shadow of Dante* (1871), Maria Francesca Rossetti felt obliged to underline the fact that the value of Dante's works went well beyond the limitations of a nation and of an era: "Dante is a name unlimited in place and period. Not Italy, but the Universe, is his birthplace, not the fourteenth century but all Time is his epoch."⁹ To put it briefly, in presenting Dante as a poet who was able to communicate with all the people in the world, Maria Francesca intended to convince the English not only of the importance of Dante studies but also of the validity of his cosmological view of the universe and his ethical and religious teaching. But, even more than this, Maria Francesca was carrying on – along the same lines as her father – the same defence of Italian culture which, above all meant the struggle against oblivion. This intellectual struggle which manifested itself only within the four walls of the family's silent domestic daily life determined the prevalence of the Italian tongue, whose effects opened up fascinating new ground and stimulating new visions.

While it is true that the search for cultural identity involved a dialogic relationship with Dante, it is equally true that this sort of protective attitude was a reaction to a condition of marginality deriving from the fact that the Rossettis were never completely accepted as English. And it would be impossible to fully understand the development of Dante Gabriel and Christina's literary imagination without taking into account the particular condition of initial liminality which, together with the natural talent and extraordinary poetic sensitivity, determined the enthusiastic responses of the late-Victorian literary circles.¹⁰

8. Christina Rossetti, "The Poet Illustrated out of the Poem", *Century Magazine*, XXVII, February 1884, p. 566.

9. Quoted in Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

10. For a most interesting account on this theme see Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1998, pp. 117–149 and *passim*.

2. One of the poetical works which most fully reveals this dialogic imagination is *Monna Innominata* (1881) which can be read as a testimony of Christina's desire to vie with tradition in order to verify within the living texture of her writing her ability to creatively combine two languages, and two cultures. Perhaps, even more than this, the fourteen sonnets which make up the sequence delineate – as the subtitle suggests – “a sonnet of sonnets” in which the real protagonist is memory itself both in terms of linguistic-cultural values and as a winding existential journey feeding on the search for the ultimate truth. Namely, memory as formative continuity and memory as allusive art. Memory of a remote past inhabited by silent women, and memory of the spiritual stages of a woman fully aware of the looming problematics of the present. The memory of the self, and the memory of God.

On a surface level, *Monna Innominata* is characterised by a semantic linearity, but it is the explicit intertextual density, together with the geometric presence of the double epigraphs (Dante e Petrarca), with the estrangement produced by its Italian title – as the epigraphs themselves are –, that make it the most mature and complex textual sequence in the whole of Rossetti's poetical works. It is not a mere celebration of a literary tradition, but its questioning. Christina aims to go beyond tradition by reconstructing the image of woman, until then seen as a passive source of inspiration – a source which, according to the canons of courtly love, was more often fictional than real, and thus the result of a rhetorical artifice rather than an authentic dialogue with a real personality. Not a voice and a soul of a woman, but only a shell of a woman imaginatively placed upon the pedestal of a unique and sacred and inviolable love which was finally perfected when the lovers met in Paradise.¹¹

11. See Mariaconcetta Costantini who quite rightly writes: “Dalla lirica amorosa di Arnaut Daniel, filtrata attraverso le ‘riscritture’ di Dante e Petrarca, Rossetti mutua il paradigma erotico che è alla base dei suoi componimenti e che raggiunge la sua espressione climactica in *Monna Innominata* [. . .] Trasferendo il momento della soddisfazione erotica nell’Aldilà, i poeti dell’amor cortese ambiscono a superare la dicotomia *terreno* e *divino* e a riconfermare, anche nel campo delle passioni, la validità di uno schema tipologico dell’esistenza” (*Poesia e sovversione. Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Pescara, Campus, 2000, p. 41).

Christina, on the other hand, retraces the existential footpaths of these silent protagonists, thereby digging into her memory in order to find the words they were not able to say, *the words they could not say*. Thus, in breaking the institutional barrier of conventions, the poet reacts in a transgressive way against the inheritance of the past, in order to imaginatively modify the present. She is fully aware of living in a society in which too many women are still forced to remain silent, and in which the relationship between man and woman is still too often characterised by the social and cultural dominion of the former, in line with Tennyson's formulation from *The Princess*: "Man to command, and woman to obey; / All else confusion."¹²

In the light of these brief considerations, it is only too easy to see how the modality in which the epigraphs are inscribed in the poetical texture goes well beyond the use of quotations given as a testimony of suggestions or associations that arise in the moment of inspiration. They constitute a peritext that represents a precise hermeneutic itinerary in which, in as much as they subscribe and reject the ideological plot of each sonnet, we are able to detect a textual process that is far from being indirect and decorative. Therefore the quotations are not a mere embellishment or support to the poetic discourse developed in the fourteen sonnets, but an equally important text which, however short, convey and imply the whole original text. As the tip of an iceberg, the epigraphs, in their structural and significant liminality, enact a vertical dialogue with the world of Rossetti's sonnets. And, at the same time, as a result of the regular repetition, they offer the frame of a horizontal dialogue between the two great poets whose voices seem to conspire against the female poet who is attempting a revision of male poetical attitudes.

Christina Rossetti makes no mystery about her revisionist strategy and in her preface she most clearly expounds, without refraining from offering a controversial analysis of a poetical genealogy, the reasons which motivated her to give the word to a "monna innominata" who had for too many centuries been forced to silence:

12. Christopher Ricks (ed.), *The Poems of Tennyson*, London and Harlow, Longman, 1969, p. 815. The quotation is from "The Princess" (1847), Part V, lines 440-441.

Beatrice, immortalized by “altissimo poeta . . . cotanto amante”; Laura, celebrated by a great tho’ an inferior bard, – have alike paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness.¹³

The introductory page to the sonnets begins with a powerful metapoetic sign which is also a message of great cultural impact since Christina, from the very beginning of her work, interweaves her own words with those of Dante “altissimo poeta . . . cotanto amante.”¹⁴ The presences of such exceptional women as Beatrice and Laura prepares the reader for a discourse that is to be expressed on a high moral level as a result of Christina’s desire to grant a more authentic and credible identity to a tradition which found its culminating moment in them.

But what exactly, one may ask, was the image Beatrice and Laura projected and what was the ultimate significance of their poetic celebration?

As we have seen, for Gabriele Rossetti, Beatrice and Laura were respectively the symbolic representations of Philosophy and Mystical Truth. Christina, who was fully involved in her father’s studies and his erratic search for a symbolic order, very soon realised that, given such an exegetic outlook, the human dimension of the two female figures had been absurdly denied in order for them to be represented in a purely abstract intellectual manner.

13. Christina Rossetti, *The Complete Poems*, Text by Rebecca W. Crump, Notes and Introduction by Betty S. Flowers, Harmondsworth, London and New York, Penguin, 2001, p. 294. All subsequent references are to this edition. Henceforth page numbers will be given in the text preceded by CP.

14. “Altissimo poeta” is the title with which the poet (probably Homer) on behalf of the other poets (Horace, Ovidi e Lucan), greets Virgil in the IV Canto of the *Inferno*: “Onorate l’altissimo poeta: / l’ombra sua torna ch’era dipartita” (lines 80–81). With respect to the expression “cotanto amante” (*Inferno*, V, v. 134), it is from the story of Francesca da Rimini: “Quando leggemmo il desiato riso / esser baciato da cotanto amante, / questi, che mai da me non fia diviso, / la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante” (vv. 133–135). This memorable tercet describes the kiss which Guinevere, following the suggestion of the seneschal go-between (Galehaut), gave to Lancelot to make him reveal his love.

Significantly, the first paragraph concludes by emphasising the opposition between *resplendent which charms* and *scent of attractiveness*. Here Christina boldly denounces the lack of credibility of such women who, being so far from reality in their passions, seem to have lost the last remnants of an autonomous voice. Beatrice and Laura no longer speak simply because they have been crushed – and thus strongly penalised – by their power as symbols. Rossetti's aim is not to remove their exegetic and cultural associations (which would, after so many centuries, be impossible anyway) so much as to boldly and creatively reveal – the existence of another alternative, the presence of another possibility or, to put it another way, the emergence of another truth.

It is no accident that in the second part of the preface Christina is eager to immediately remind the reader that, before Beatrice and Laura, many other unnamed ladies (“*donne innominate*”) were sources of inspiration:

These heroines of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies “*donne innominate*” sung by a school of less conspicuous poets; and in that land and that period which gave simultaneously birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadours, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude, while the barrier between them might be one held sacred by both, yet not such as to render mutual love incompatible with mutual honour (CP, p. 294).

The barrier in the courtly love convention which Christina mentions is the marriage of the beloved women to another man. But, in spite of this obstacle, it is possible for her to gain a respect which is to be seen as a strong sign of a positive mutuality in terms of behavioural codes. In Rossetti's view, the transition is from “*exceptional honour*,” based on abstraction, to “*mutual honour*” animated by a shared language which is able to confirm the poetical status and credibility of the interlocutor. To put it briefly, in a scene characterised by the inversion of roles, many other unnamed ladies had an equally legitimate claim to being celebrated. It is this idea that makes the *Monna Innominata* sonnets such an innovative work in the panorama of Victorian poetry. It must also be underlined that, in the light of Gabriele Rossetti's

studies,¹⁵ the explicit reference to the Albigesi once again recalls Petrarch who is believed to have changed the ideas on which the mystical and esoteric discourse of his *Canzoniere* had originally been based after coming into contact with this sect. However, it comes as no surprise that the arguments on historical problems, undergo a sudden and unexpected interruption (almost to the point of frustrating the reader's expectations) to return to the theme of the "donna innominata."

The idea of a poetical inheritance in Rossetti only makes sense when, at the very moment in which she decides to put it into question, she is able to conceive a poetic space in which past and present are confronted, and this confrontation obviously entails a confrontation between respective cultural codes, languages, feelings and, even more, different ways in which the relationship between man and world is organised. At this point I would like to quote the last paragraph of the preface in which Christina Rossetti outlines the intertextual, epistemical and interpretative encounters upon which she focuses her poetical conceptions:

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend. Or had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead than happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the "Portuguese sonnets," an inimitable "donna innominata" drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura (CP, p. 294).

The introductory page closes with a sort of impasse in which Beatrice and Laura are still seen in their celebratory pedestals

15. See William Whitla, "Questioning the Convention: Christina Rossetti's Sonnet Sequence *Monna Innominata*," in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 82-131. In particular, in the preface, he writes: "Gabriele Rossetti explicated the works of Dante and his contemporaries according to an allegorical method that read the works and the history as having mystical significance, governed by arcane knowledge, and involving the Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire, such heresies as Albigensianism and Catharism, and the works of many of the troubadour poets" (p. 88).

looking down on the "donne innominate" without understanding their ethical value. But besides this tautological and monumental circularity it would be appropriate to underline here the stress on a new feminine role: the poetess who expresses her feelings however less "resplendent with charms," is undoubtedly full of "attractiveness," since only from the voice of such a figure can a more tender or more authentic and significant portrait be drawn. With a further note of rejection, Christina Rossetti shifts her attention to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, asserting that if her life had been an unhappy one (like those of the nameless women of the past) she would have been able to achieve, through the depths of her feelings, a poetic representation of the female universe which her verses still lack. Moreover, by explicitly referring to *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), thereby involving a poetess who narrates her own requited and accomplished love, Christina establishes a parody and an allusive tension with another text which she seems to disapprove of implicitly and even reductively for its conventionality.¹⁶

3. The creative design which gives expression to Rossetti's exploration is characterised by an attempt to overcome an axiological crisis that the poet feels to be more and more serious and urgent as time goes by. This condition, mingled with a personal crisis which involved an unresolved conflict between faith and a lack of faith, produces a heuristic tension in which the questioning of a poetic tradition postulates a redefinition of its ontological coordinates and a problematic re-focalisation of Christina's relationship with the world. Thus, the need to trust in a culturally firm

16. Cfr. Anthony H. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1988, pp. 155–156. On the relationship between *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and *Monna Innominata*, Harrison observes: "Unlike Rossetti's sequence, Browning's surrenders entirely to tradition. As all readers of her sonnets are aware, Browning's speaker repeatedly embraces her subordinate role in relationship with her beloved" (p. 156). On the innovative and anti-traditional valency of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* Biancamaria Rizzardi has written some most perceptive pages (*Aracne. La sfida femminile alla poesia vittoriana*, Urbino, Quattro Venti, 1999, pp. 11–79, and, in particular, pp. 71–77). See also Marjorie Stone, "'Monna Innominata' and *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Sonnet Traditions and Spiritual Trajectories," in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Mary Arseneau, Anthony H. Harrison and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1999, pp. 46–74.

stronghold which, in Rossetti case, can only mean preserving the memory of past poets, and the poets in *Monna Innominata* happen to be Dante and Petrarch whose respective works are dramatically recalled in a strategically allusive *mise en abîme*. It is from this dense interweaving of poetic voices, and this network of intertextual echoes and suggestions that the sonnet sequence of *Monna Innominata* bases its progression from language to silence and from acts of transgression to the final abandoning of God.

At this point, since time does not permit me to discuss every sonnet in the sequence, I will attempt to follow a coherent semantic and structural progression limiting analysis of the first four, that is the first quatrain. We may begin by considering the first composition which is completely centred around the speaker's recollection of the painful moment of separation from her lover and of her desire to see him again:

Come back to me, who wait and watch for you:-
 Or come not yet, for it is over then,
 And long it is before you come again,
 So far between my pleasure are and few,
 5 While, when you come not, what I do I do
 Thinking "Now when he comes", my sweetest "when":
 For one man in my world of all the men
 This wide world holds; O love, my world is you.
 Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang
 10 Because the pang of parting comes so soon;
 My hope hangs waning, waxing, like a moon
 Between the heavenly days on which we meet:
 Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang
 When life was sweet because you called them sweet?
(CP, pp. 294-295)

From a thematic point of view, the dominant feature of Sonnet I is that of separation which, in this case, is seen as the permanent condition of the lovers in that the encounter already contains the inevitable following scene in which one of them will have to leave the other. Given the fact that the impossibility of a re-encounter and the absence of physical union are the sad certainties upon which the poetic voice constructs the story of a denied love, it is obvious that only memory can restore the image of the absent

loved one. Thus, the tension of the first three lines which highlights the obsessive circularity of a mind incapable of deciding: ¹*Come back to me* vs. ²*Or come not yet* vs. ³*you come again*. The key to interpreting so much painful indecision is inscribed in the phrase *the pang of parting* in line 10 in which the cause (PARTiNG) at the same time phonetically and graphically contains its effect, that is pain (PANG). This permanent condition of suffering derives from the absolute dependence on the loved one, as is declared in lines 7–8 where we may note an anti-euphoric crescendo modulated by the triple occurrence of the lexeme *world* (⁷*my world*, ⁸*This wide world*, ⁸*my world*). Against this iteration there is the corresponding construction of the male protagonist in the same lines 7–8 through a strategic transition in euphoric terms: ⁷*one man* → ⁷*all the men* → ⁸*YOU*. The syntagm that marks the culminating point of the evocation of the loved one is “my world in you” in which the association between loved one and world presents the great centripetal power conveyed by the idea of love as a physical presence. The couplet which concludes the sonnet is a rhetorical question which is, in effect, a return to the past as if by now all the doors leading to it have been closed. The sonnet thematically opposes *now* and *then* which no longer entrusts itself to the joyful interplay of words of love (¹³*the songs I sang* / ¹⁴*you called them sweet*), but to the woman’s sole ability to recall the way of re-conquering her loved one whilst re-conquering her own role in the world.

Passing on to the two epigraphs, it must be said that in *Monna Innominata* they are always quoted in the original language with no other information provided apart from the author’s name which in purely textual terms indicates a deliberate cultural reticence. Behind this attitude lies a dialogic imagination whose focus is on the voices of both poets rather than the written word. At the same time, the high degree of memorability of the quotations harks back, not to the individual work, but to the literary system itself:

“Lo dì che han detto a’ dolci amici addio.” – DANTE.

“Amor, con quanto sforzo oggi mi vinci!” – PETRARCA.

Turning back to Sonnet I, apart from the reiterated semantic and grammatical isotopy of the very *come* implying an absence both desired and imagined by the speaker, it is necessary to add

that the unifying term with the Dante epigraph is represented by the lexeme *sweet* (repeated twice in the last line and in the fifth present as *sweetest*). The quotation (from *Purgatory*, VIII, line 3) is strategically connected with the quotation placed before Sonnet 2 which is the first line of a canto in which Dante celebrates the value of a memory which is still attached to the pain of separation produced in whoever is far from their loved one:

Era già l'ora che volge il disio
 ai navicanti e 'ntenerisce il core
 3 lo dì c'han detto ai dolci amici addio;
 e che lo novo peregrin d'amore
 punge, se ode squilla di lontano
 6 che paia il giorno pianger che si more.¹⁷

The double quotation from the incipit of Canto VIII immediately activates an allusive plot around the theme of remembrance: the Dantesque scene evokes the negated desire to be near a loved one, which becomes all the more harrowing at dusk, when the soul becomes particularly sensitive to the condition of solitude. The cry of the dying day becomes the cry of a memory which, not knowing how to console itself, gradually succumbs to a nostalgia in which desire and pain are interwoven.

No less intense is the dramatisation of a memory in the quotation from Petrarch (*Canzoniere* LXXXV, line 12) taken from Sonnet 85 in which the first encounter is evoked: the poet, sees Laura again at the same time and in the same place he saw her the first time, when he fell in love with her:

17. Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, *Purgatorio*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1985, pp. 82–83. All subsequent references are to this edition. Other editions include *Divina Commedia*, ed. Bianca Garavelli, under the supervision of Maria Corti, Milano, Bompiani, 1996; and *Divina Commedia*, Introduction by Italo Borzi, Comments by Giovanni Fallani and Silvio Zennaro, Roma, Newton & Compton Editori, 1999. Obviously, the Dante epigraphs in *Monna Innominata* are reproduced according to Christina Rossetti's transcriptions.

Io amai sempre, et amo forte anchora,
 et son per amare più di giorno in giorno
 quel dolce loco, ove piangendo torno
 spesse fiate, quando Amor m'accora. 4

Et son fermo d'amare il tempo et l'ora
 ch'ogni vil cura mi levâr d'intorno;
 et più colei, lo cui bel viso adorno
 di far co' suoi exempli m'innamora. 8

Ma chi pensò veder mai tutti insieme
 per assalirmi il core, or quindi or quinci,
 questi dolci nemici, ch'i' tant'amo? 11

Amor, con quanto sforzo oggi mi vinci!
 Et se non ch'al desio cresce la speme,
 i' cadrei morto, ove più viver bramo.¹⁸ 14

The main contrast is between *now* and *then*: the poet seeks to keep Laura's features alive in his memory in the same way in which they appeared to him the first time he saw her, so much so that the place of their encounter (*dolce loco*) also becomes the scene in which the pain of distance is felt more intensely. In this prospect the oxymoron *dolci nemici* is introduced which, by referring to the time, place and Laura herself, is placed into a dialogic relationship with the Dante segment *dolci amici* in a complex strategy of lexematic bilingualism which plays on the adjective *sweet*, almost as if to counteract the suffering of separation and distanced with the sweetening power of memory.

The motif of the first encounter described in the Petrarchan sonnet functions as a link of Sonnet 2 of *Monna Innominata* in which the poetic voice adopts a clearly polemical stance toward

18. Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, Introduction by Roberto Antonelli, with a critical essay by Gianfranco Contini, textual notes by Daniele Ponchiroli, Torino, Einaudi, 1992, p. 118. All subsequent references are to this edition. Other editions include *Il Canzoniere*, introduction by Mario Marazzan, notes by Nereo Vianello, Milano, Bietti, 1966; e *Rime*, ed. Guido Bezzola, with an essay by Andrea Zanzotto, Milano, Rizzoli, 2000. The Petrarch epigraphs in *Monna Innominata*, as with the Dante epigraphs, are reproduced according to Rossetti's transcriptions.

the behavioural conventions of courtly love, by blatantly confessing her inability to remember the time and place of the encounter:

I wish I could remember that first day,
 First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
 If bright or dim the season, it might be
 Summer or Winter for aught I can say;
 5 So unrecorded did it slip away,
 So blind was I to see and to foresee,
 So dull to mark the budding of my tree
 That would not blossom yet for many a May.

(CP, p. 295)

In reply to Petrarch's sonnet, Christina likewise dramatises the contrast between *now* and *then*, assigning the poetic voice a desire which is immediately denied. Therefore, in this case, the *ars memoriae* is forced to succumb and to drift into an oblivion which appears all the more deeply rooted inasmuch as *then* a blind unawareness had prevailed over the awareness of the time and place. There is no idealisation of the first encounter in *Monna Innominata* as is the case in *Vita Nuova* in which Beatrice enters Dante's poetic imagination. But if this is the case, one may ask, why is there so much insistence on the inability to return to the crucial moment of the experience of love? If we look closely, in Rossetti's representation the denial of the first encounter (₁*that first day* → ₁₃*If only now I could recall that touch*) recalls the fleetingness and transitory nature of human life which, in comparison with the Divine Order of things, is not worth dedicating so much psychological and emotional energy to.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in antithesis to the idea of oblivion, Sonnet 2 explores the semantic field of memory (₁*I could remember* → ₉*I could recollect* → ₁₃*I could recall*) which culminates in the desire for physical possession in an ecstatic return to an eros that seems to confirm the dominion of writing over absence, the victory of poetry that affirms the presence of the loved one over oblivion which annihilates everything.

19. See also Harrison, *op. cit.*, who rightly observes about Sonnet 2: "It is anti-Romantic (specifically, un-Wordsworthian) in that its central problem does not hinge on a recollection that overshadows present thought and intensifies present joy, but rather on the absence of any emotionally sustaining memory air at all" (p. 176).

Therefore, the fact that the Petrarch epigraphs to Sonnet 2 ("Ricorro al tempo ch'io vidi prima," *Canzoniere* XX, line 3, p. 22) significantly shift the discourse of the encounter with the loved one to the need of finding the right words to describe her is most appropriate:

Vergognando talor ch'ancor si taccia,	1
donna, per me vostra bellezza in rima,	2
ricorro al tempo ch'i vi vidi prima,	3
tal che null'altra fia mai che mi piaccia.	4
.....	
Più volte incominciài di scriver versi:	12
ma la penna et la mano et l'intellecto	13
rimaser vinti nel primier assalto.	14

There is a movement from the opening scene (a past moment that can only be re-evoked by the memory) to the moment of writing in which the problem no longer concerns the act of remembering but the act of artistic creation. And I feel it is most important to underline here how, through the quotations from Petrarch, Rossetti's poetic discourse moves decidedly in a meta-linguistic direction revealing in a more evident manner the self-reflexive quality of the entire sequence in which everything contributes to define the experimental nature of her exploration.

Moreover, it is undeniable that the first two quotations from Dante (both, we may recall, from the incipit of Canto VIII of *Purgatory*) also introduce the theme of troubadour lyrical poetry through the figure of Sordello who, as is known, never turned away from the conventions of love poetry, according to which women were an indispensable guide to spiritual elevation.²⁰ From

20. Born in Goito (Mantua) in the early 1200s, Sordello was much admired by Dante, probably because of the didactic poem *Ensenhamen d'onor* and of the "lament" on the death of Ser Blacas which also contains a polemical note against European sovereigns. He died in 1269. Sordello's first appearance does not occur in Canto VIII of the *Purgatorio*, but in Canto VI (lines 58-75) in which the encounter with Virgil becomes a motive of joy: "Quell'anima gentil fu così presta, solo per lo dolce suon de la sua terra; di fare al cittadin suo quivi festa" (vv. 79-81). For a detailed study of the figure of Dante's Sordello, see the most useful notes in the editions of the *Commedia* quoted above.

Sordello onwards there developed a poetic tradition which Christina Rossetti, moving from a Victorian context, metapoetically investigates with the aim of retracing those precursors whom she fictionally exploits, both by analogy and contrast, as fundamental figures in constructing the voice of her *donna innominata*.

4. Sonnet 3 is dominated by the theme of dreaming. Here the poetic voice, in line with traditional convention, sees in the reign of darkness a fantasy world that gratifies her search for her loved one which the daytime world, on the other hand, impedes and rejects. Constructed as it is on a semantic axis around which the lexeme *dream(s)* obsessively moves, the poem reaches its disturbing and anti-phrastic climax in the biblical association of the final line (Ecclesiastes, 1, 9):

12 If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake,
 13 To die were surely sweeter than to live,
 14 Thou' there be nothing new beneath the sun.
(CP, p. 296)

“There be nothing new beneath the sun:” What deep meaning, we may ask, is concealed behind this biblical reference? And why, after having declared that sleep and dreams are more satisfying than life, does the poetic voice conclude with such a gnomic phrase that leads us to think of the relativity of things and, consequently, of the relativity of the sentiment of love.

According to one of the most recurrent themes of lyrical courtly love poetry, the power of love ultimately succeeds in giving a substance to dreams which end only to make way for the actual presence of the loved one who, in the transition from dream to reality, becomes a vehicle of perfection. What must be noticed is that this line, which re-conducts everything to the right measure, implies the refusal of such a concept. In this process of estrangement, the unpredictability of the line with the inclusion of a biblical reference within a poetical canon, becomes the indication of a deliberate axiological revision on Rossetti's part. Furthermore, with reference to the total relativity of earthly life, the concluding verse of the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes* is all the more significant: (1, II). In this context the two epigraphs are vitally functional and serve to reinforce the unpredictability of the sonnet:

"O ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto!" – DANTE.

"Immaginata guida la conduce" – PETRARCA.

Both quotations lead the reader into a world of shadows in which everything occurs under the sign of vanity. Thus, in Petrarch's sonnet (*Canzoniere*, CCLXXVII, p. 351) ¹²*un doloroso velo* (a painful veil) covers the eyes of the poet impeding him from seeing ¹³*la disiata luce* (the longed-for light): Laura appears distant and unreachable (⁹*Immaginata guida*) while the poet, in his sorrow and pain, grows prematurely old.

As for the lines from Dante, it must be pointed out that they refer to the Florentine musician Casella who the poet recalls very affectionately and movingly (*Purgatory*, II, lines 76–81):

Io vidi una di lor trarresi avante
per abbracciarmi, con sì grande affetto,
78 che mosse me a far lo somigliante.
Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto!
tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi,
81 e tante volte mi tornai con esse al petto.

The supreme Poet puts his trust in his memory: his Florentine friend speaks the same language as he does and has seen the same landscapes and scenes as he has, so that their memories inevitably interweave with each other to such an extent that neither of them can fail to recognise the similarity of their feelings. *Se nuova legge non ti toglie/memoria* (If a new law does not remove you/memory) the poet asks him, inciting his friend to use his *Amoroso canto* (lover's song). Rossetti's implicit reference to Casella is also a part of the network of allusions that constitutes the great semantic and thematic unity of the *Monna Innominata* sonnets. Thus, after quoting the first line of the song commented on in the III tract of *Convivio*, Casella begins to sing *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona* (v. 112). And it is precisely these words which the reader finds as a memorable epigraph to Sonnet 12 in the network of learned references.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that in Rossetti's metapoetic vision, *Monna Innominata* becomes the locus in which poetic genealogies, autobiographical needs and ideological tensions are confronted in an attempt to revise the form and content of

contemporary poetry, an attempt which ultimately aims at representing the condition of those Victorian women who, somehow, felt the persistence of limitations and prejudices in their social and cultural roles.

There follows a semantic structuring of Sonnet 4 in which, at the conclusion of the first thematic movement (that is, the first quatrain), we are invited to observe the direct and unambiguous declarations of the joint relationship between the poetic voice and the loved one, a relationship which goes beyond the roles imposed by convention:

- 1 I loved you first: but afterwards your love
- 2 Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier sing
- 3 As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.
- 4 Which owes the other most? My love was long,
- 5 And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
- 6 I loved and guessed at you, you construed me.
- 7 And loved me for what might or might not be –

(CP, p. 296)

This is the scene with which the poetic voice concludes the first quatrain of her “sonnet of sonnets”. In the first line the fracture produced by the adversative conjunction *but* in a thought that, on the surface, appears to be circular and epanaleptic – *I loved you first: but afterwards your love* – marks the beginning of a rivalry in love and art which, in the following sonnets, leads to the affirmation of the primacy of the love of God over every other form of love. Thus, there follows a shift in the debate to a spiritual level in which the idea of the relativity and vanity of earthly things before Divine splendour emphatically returns. Sonnet 4, on the other hand, presents a dialogue between equals which, by overcoming every form of confrontation and competition, seems to suggest total unity with the inclusion of one person’s thoughts in the thoughts of another, beyond any form of hierarchy.²¹ But although this is

21. See Whitla, *op. cit.*, who writes: “The notion that lovers should be so interpenetrated, far beyond the exchange of hearts, so as to cease rivalry, subverts the convention of the beloved as exalter, the lover as abased (queen/subject, mistress/slave, goddess/worshiper, saint/sinner, pride/humility, as in Petrarch, 21, 140, 154, 294 and 302)” (p. 120).

hypothesised in the second part of the sonnet (that is in lines 9–14 of the sestet), it never actually happens precisely because the factor upon which the whole discourse is constructed is the initial disjunction that words are unable to mend – the dove succumbs before the domineering flight of its mate who, thanks to this artifice, seems to impose his voice. This appears all the more evident if we consider line 6 (*I loved and guessed at you vs. you construed me*) in which the woman's love is opposed to the fictional construction of the man, who, as is clearly stated, construed the portrait of his beloved according to the principle of "to be or not to be", that is according to convention rather than under the impulse of deep and authentic feelings.

In coherence with the polemical tone of the lyrical-I, the epigraph from Petrarch seems to confirm the triumph of the poetic primacy of the male lover who Christina, however, wants to put into question: "*Ogni altra cosa, ogni pensier va fore / et sol ivi con voi rimansi Amore*" (*Canzoniere*, LXXII, Lines 44–45, p. 100). It may be useful here to read the two lines in the context of the song from which they are taken:

Vaghe faville, angeliche, beatrici
 de la mia vita, ove 'l piacer s'accende
 che dolcemente mi consuma et strugge:
 come sparisce et fugge 40
 ogni altro lume dove 'l vostro splende,
 così de lo mio core,
 quando tanta dolcezza in lui discende,
 ogni altra cosa, ogni penser va fore,
 e sol ivi con voi rimansi Amore. 45

Addressing himself to his "*Gentil mia donna*" and dedicating a second song to her eyes, the poet abandons himself to an exultation of the beauty of Laura who becomes the passive protagonist of a portrait whose depiction she is completely excluded from. Passing on to the epigraph from Dante, it must be immediately pointed out that this comes from the invocation to Apollo in Canto I of *Paradise* (line 9): "*Poco favilla gran fiamma seconda.*" The terminological connection with Petrarch's "*Vaghe faville*" must not go unnoticed. But besides this parallel, which, however, concerns

different semantic fields, it must be underlined that in the light of Christina's interpretation and revision, the Dante quotation takes on a meaning which aims directly at the idea of an intertextual fecundity. In fact, if the non-figurative meaning of the quotation means that a great fire can be ignited from a spark,²² from Rossetti's point of view the stress is on the transmission of literary knowledge in which little suggestions can stimulate great creative processes. In this sense it may be useful to recall that in *Purgatory*, Stazio declares that in comparison with the *Eneid*, his work is a mere "faville [. . .] de la divina fiamma" – "spark of the divine flame" – (XXI, lines 94–5), thus confirming the allusive literary metaphor around which Christina structures *Monna Innominata*.²³

5. This analysis of the first four sonnets of the *Monna Innominata* sequence clearly demonstrates that Dante and Petrarch mean much more to Christina Rossetti than quotations to be used as epigraphs: both poets intervene as "sparks" in the "great fire" of Rossetti's macrotext, giving her language a density that reveals all its semiotic complexity on the level of two cultural and linguistic universes. In a sense, in comparison with Christina's English literary models, Dante and Petrarch remain the unsurpassed and unsurpassable voices from which she begins to imagine her work in terms of a sort of cultural crossroads from which she can only detach herself when she has found her own authentic voice.²⁴

22. As has been noted by several Dante commentators, mottoes were very common in Medieval literature but they were based on religious texts. Thus, in the *Epistola di Giacomo*, III, 5, we read: "ecce quantus ignis quam magnam silvan incendit". Reading on in Sapegno, we may also note the following: "*Volgarizz. di Albertano da Brescia*: 'di piccola favilla nasce gran fuoco e piccolo incominciamento genera gran fatti'; Paolo da Certaldo, *Libro*, n. 231: 'piccola favilla fa gran fuoco'; Cino da Pistoia; 'gran foco nasce di poca favilla,' ecc." (*Paradiso*, ed. N. Sapegno, *cit.*, p. 8).

23. As regards Rossetti's epigraphs, see Bianca Garavelli's comment: "[. . .] l'autore pensa alla *Poca favilla* del suo poema proiettata nel tempo che gli verrà *di retro*, e immagina un infinito seguito di voci poetiche che potranno ispirarsi al suo insegnamento e superarlo in bravura. Ma dietro la professione di umiltà si nasconde una straordinaria coscienza della propria eccezionalità: *miglior voci verranno, forse*, dopo la sua *Commedia*, ma fino ad allora è lui il più grande" (*Paradiso*, ed. B. Garavelli, *cit.*, p. 6).

24. As a testimony of her profound knowledge of Petrarch's works, it must be said that Christina Rossetti had prepared the entry on Petrarch for the *Imperial*

The transition is therefore from memory to oblivion. On the one hand the poetess experiences this exploration as an encounter with her predecessors whom she is able to reach thanks to a memory which drives her writing along a conventional channel in which *imitatio* and *aemulatio* are intertwined and superimposed. On the other, the need to confer her language with an exact *Stimmung*, leads her writing to adopt the art of oblivion as a more important device than the art of remembering, the words and accents of previous voices. To put it another way, the tension of forgetfulness can only be the result of a pre-existing memory which, in Rossetti's case, is most evident from an autobiographical point of view. Therefore, the innovating impulse is the result of a complex layering of cultural systems which, in the *Monna Innominata* sequence, portrays a progression characterised by an originality that is at least equal to its textual density, involving the reader in a confrontation with the contrasting forces of memory and oblivion in every line. The continual affirming of traditional values, together with the continual negation of any form of authority, make Rossetti's poetical work not only the stage of an exegetic and philological challenge, but also the point of departure for a new conception of poetic creativity.

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Dictionary of Universal Biography. Furthermore, in the second half of the 1870s, she was assigned the task of noting quotations, references and allusions to Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio for the critical edition of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, edited by Alexander Grosart. It was in this period that Christina also supervised the work of Charles Cayley who was translating the sonnets and songs of Petrarch.