University of Alberta

'A Wanton Woman and a Wise': Women Writing about Desire in Renaissance Europe, 1540-1620

Katy Emck 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Comparative Literature

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Name of Author: Katy Emck

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36, Cardross St.
London W6 ODR
BRITAIN

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *'A Wanton Woman and a Wise': Women Writing about Desire in Europe, 1540-1620* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. E.D. Blodgett

Dr. J. Hart

Dr. N. Rahimieh

Dr. L. Woodbridge

Dr. R.A. Young

Dr PJ Ford, External Examiner

Dr. U. Margolin

6 September 1996

FOR JOHN AND ANN EMCK

THESIS ABSTRACT

This study addresses women's writing about love in Renaissance Europe, and the social, intellectual and cultural forces that served to repress or liberate their discourses of desire. The Renaissance is a key period for women's writing because humanist ideals of education contributed strongly to the emergence of some liberated female voices in Europe. Equally, however, the ideal of feminine chastity was extended and developed in a number of genres concerned with feminine conduct. The net effect of these works was to suppress and police any possible language of female desire. "A Wanton Woman and a Wise" addresses moments of discontinuity and conflict in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, Veronica Franco's verse and Mary Wroth's prose romance *Urania*. The contradictions in these women's discourses of desire are shaped by ideals of feminine conduct, but Marguerite de Navarre, Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco also subvert these ideals.

Marguerite de Navarre uses a circumspect authorial strategy which is directly contingent on the necessity for women to practice concealment so as to maintain their sexual reputations. The *Heptaméron* is also a story about the behaviour it appears to condemn: that is, courtly seduction and flirtation.

Like Marguerite de Navarre, Mary Wroth has a split agenda. Her prose romance *Urania* has a streak of exhibitionism which contradicts the high value it places on feminine modesty. *Urania* places the conscience of a virtuous woman centre-stage. Yet the role of women's love poetry, of the literature of private passion or will, is central in the romance. The heroine's virtue gives her a right to speak, and thus to engage in a discourse of endlessly protracted desire. As with Marguerite de Navarre, the language of feminine virtue incorporates a subterranean language of *jouissance*.

Where Wroth and Navarre disobey the dictates of proper femininity in covert and cunning ways, the Italian courtesan poet Veronica Franco disobeys them openly. She celebrates her freedom of speech and is not self-veiling but self-publicising and entrepreneurial. She de-idealises sexual relations, which are cast as battles of will in which she is determined to assert her autonomy. Yet Franco is still subject to the patriarchal culture that commodifies the sexuality of courtesans.

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INTRODUCTION

Public Voice and Private Will in Renaissance Women's Writing

Ovid's claim that "my life is moral but my muse is gay" (*Tristia* 1924, 2.354) could not have been made by a woman writer until this century.[1] Very few women have had gay muses in Ovid's sense of the word: flippant, sexually practised, amoral, amused. Renaissance women writers, the subject of this study, by and large responded with pious works to the misogynist prejudice that their work would be as immoral as their sex. They avoided writing which dealt with the gayer themes of love and sexuality.[2] Yet male authors traditionally invited women's identification with 'romantic' genres. The troubadour convention of addressing love poems to a lady fed into medieval romances which invoked a female audience at the same time as expressing suspicion of women's constancy and virtue. Dante's portrait of Francesca in the second circle of the *Inferno* gave enduring voice to the belief that it was primarily women who read romances, and that their reading led them into adulterous affairs. Attitudes to women's reading and writing of the literature of love were characterised by patriarchal double-speak. In this light, it is not unthinkable that women writers espoused moral muses while leading gay lives.

Women who wrote of love necessarily confronted a signifying system prejudiced against their own desire and self-expression. In the Renaissance some women began to write and publish love poetry, romances and novellas with a self-conscious awareness of the limits imposed on them by the belief that a woman who wrote of love was lacking in virtue. They appropriated and shifted subject positions prepared for them by patriarchal literary culture; types such as the remote courtly lady, the unbridled virago of romance-epic and the morally ignorant devotee of tales of love. In adopting "immodest" genres they laid themselves open to charges of lewd conduct. Their writings contested the belief that female speech and writing were an illegitimate form of sexual display. They wrote of love from the perspective of female characters and thereby laid claim to women's right to desire at all. But they did so with a consciousness of the need to defend female virtue, and this entailed considerable contradictions. This study addresses the

forces that served both to repress and to liberate women's writing about desire in Renaissance Europe, and the ways in which women encoded female sexuality in their texts. It will concentrate on texts by three writers from Italy, France and England respectively. The French queen Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549), the Venetian courtesan Veronica Franco (1546-91) and the Jacobean Englishwoman Lady Mary Wroth (c1586-c1651) each illuminates and challenges female sexual decorum in different ways.[3] I will trace the contradictions involved in their literary reponses to a culture which constructed women as primarily sexual creatures while barring them from the exercise of their own sexuality in word as well as in deed.

Women's writing about desire in the Renaissance bears witness to the internalisation of codes of sexual conduct and identity which have - to all intents and purposes, anyway - only recently broken down in the sexual revolution of the sixties. In the Renaissance, the cardinal Christian and monastic virtue of chastity is obsessively rewritten as the cardinal female virtue.[4] Women's sexuality is disbarred in the interests of an anxiously patrilineal culture. As the dominance of clerical thought becomes less pronounced, so does the belief that women were the more libidinous sex, which was underpinned by the demonisation of Eve and by male celibates' projection of their repressed desire onto women. The model of the cold, courtly lady who keeps masculine desire in check was popularised by the spread of Petrarchism and may also have contributed to an emerging, desexualised ideal of woman centred around the culture of civility.[5]

Arguments for feminine chastity become increasingly nuanced and pervasive and are incorporated into books on conduct which aim to fashion women as well as men. Influential Italian books on manners and conduct - such as Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* and Castiglione's *Il Libro del cortegiano* - incorporate classical ideals of virtue into their ideals of feminine conduct. They emphasise the virtues of self-restraint in women and distance themselves from the idea that husbands should control their wives' libido by locking them up. The internalisation of chastity is written into these formulations. Female chastity did not just comprise virginity (or, in the case of a married woman, fidelity) but a whole set of submissive behaviours that were increasingly detailed in books of instruction on wifehood, domestic economy and women's education.[6] The chaste ideal ramified into prescriptions such as Barbaro's on the proper activities

for women by day and by night, on their gestures and movement, speech and reading material, clothing and eating. When a woman showed independence of will she was thought lewd and lascivious. Her independence was short-circuited by the demand that she stay at home in order to prove her own virtue and consolidate her husband's wealth.[7]

Barbaro's work, written in 1415 and translated and reprinted into the seventeenth century, instituted an entire genre: that of the wifely and domestic conduct book. In locating woman so firmly in a private, domestic domain separate from her husband's sphere of activity but still governed by him, it provided a model for the containment and organisation of female energies that might otherwise go astray. The word chastity derives from the Latin *carere*, "to be cut off from, to lack" (Jed 8). The ideal of the discreet woman similarly comprises the notion that she should be separate and shut away, not only physically but mentally. Thus a seventeenth-century English proverb states that "a discreet woman has neither eyes nor ears" (Goreau 105). She virtuously refuses to be a subject of knowledge and flawlessly subordinates herself to the will of husband or father. Chastity is associated with women's confinement to the private sphere. Thus Leonardo Bruni states that rhetoric, that quintessentially public tool of education, "lies absolutely outside the province of women."[8] In this context it is not surprising that the female humanists of the early Italian Renaissance found themselves confined, both literally and psychologically, to a kind of secular nunhood because they had ventured into the public and incipiently unchaste terrain of rhetoric.[9]

The interrogation of feminine virtue fuels the plots of numerous early modern dramas, romances and novellas. Examples from English drama are legion: *The Changeling*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Othello* and *Much Ado about Nothing* all in their different ways deal with the neurotic extremes to which the desire to control women's sexuality could lead. Finally, the medieval genre of the defence or attack of women is the basis of an entire sequence of stories in that most influential of works, Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*. The third book of *Il cortegiano* is ostensibly about the fashioning of an ideal court lady to match the courtier himself, but its adversarial polemical structure - one character, the Magnifico, consistently defends the virtues of women against another, Gaspare, who consistently downgrades them -

derives from formalised debates about the nature and worth of womankind.[10] The tales of female virtue in this section of *Il cortegiano* emphasise, predictably enough, the loyalty of wives to their husbands and families, and their willingness to endure threat, torture and death - also to inflict it on themselves - in the service of a higher good. Usually, that higher good is their chastity. This narrativisation of feminine virtue feeds, through the work itself as well as the tradition of the *Querelle des femmes* which informed it, straight into the romance and, ultimately, the novel.

The rise in the culture of female virtue that had taken place by the time of the sixteenth century is illuminated by the example of women writers from the twelfth century.[11] The female troubadours of Provence describe their delight rather than their mortification in desire. The Countess of Dia provocatively declares the necessity for frankness when a woman loves. She

> ... should dare to love him face to face;
> for courteous and worthy men
> can only speak with great esteem
> of a lady who loves openly. (Bogin 83)[12]

The *lais* of Marie de France are full of women who actively circumvent the bonds of marriage and the jealous possessiveness of men, have sex with their lovers and are not blamed for it. In "Guigemar" a young knight on a magic ship gains access to a lady immured in a walled garden by her jealous husband. Without a hint of disapproval, the narrator endorses the way the pair become lovers on the first night: "they lay together and talked, kissing and embracing. May the final act, which others are accustomed to enjoy, give them pleasure" (*The Lais of Marie de France* 50).[13] This writing occurs in the absence of the shaping and explaining force of the culture of feminine virtue, which pits itself against sexual pleasure. Medieval fictions about the trials and fulfillments of courtly adultery gradually give way to fictions of virtuous and unvirtuous courtship leading to marriage. Thus Castiglione demands that women resist courtship unless it is a prelude to marriage. By the time that Madame de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* and Richardson's *Pamela* were written, an entire narrative architecture of virtuous resistance to unlawful desire was in place. These two influential novels about women struggling to retain their virtue work to dilate desire by deferring its consummation. Desire and the denial of desire have become hopelessly confused, and women's

conscious reason and their internalisation of certain checks and constraints on behaviour occupy the centre of both stories.

The first play to be published by a woman in England, Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), also places discretion and restraint at the centre of its conflict. In Mariam, will and the denial of will are intertwined in a way that looks forward to novels about female sexual virtue. Mariam's willfulness makes her careless about her reputation: she is outspoken rather than verbally circumspect and submissive, and her indiscretion brings about her downfall. The play charts a concatenation of resentments and misunderstandings centred on Mariam's resistance to her husband Herod's tyrannical behaviour. When Herod hears that she has confided in their butler he concludes that "She's unchaste/ Her mouth will ope to every stranger's ear" (IV.vii.434) and has her put to death. As if to refute the charges of sexual and verbal incontinence that have been levelled at her, Mariam at the moment of her death is made into a figure of virtuous self-control, dignifiedly silent. Nuntio, a witness, describes her thus:

> When there I came, upon the way I saw
> The stately Mariam not debas'd by fear:
> Her look did seem to keep the world in awe. (V.i.25-8)

Yet by refusing abjection and adopting a stance of lofty superiority Mariam creates a sense that her will, if not her tongue, is still resisting. The sense of her resistance to punishment is further emphasised when Nuntio describes her "dutiful, though scornful, smile" (V.i.49). Mariam's final moments are constituted by an oddly active, even dissonant, form of silence. Yet she remains unimpeachable because, according to Renaissance ideals of femininity, her silence is a mark of virtue and submission.

Where desire and will are closely associated in Renaissance England, and where both are associated with speech, *The Tragedy of Mariam* is paradigmatic of other works by early modern women which deal with sexual desire from the perspective of a female persona. The ideal of chastity underpins the play's poetics of restraint yet there is a powerful seam of resistance to the ideal's demands. Cary's play creates a forcefield of meanings that are not directly articulated, or which are articulated only to be disavowed. Thus Mariam, in equal and ambivalent measure, is and is not self-controlled. She is dissociated from Herod's plotting sister Salome, whose sexual rapacity points up Mariam's chastity, but she is also

associated with her. At the end of the first act, hard upon a scene in which Salome has revealed her venality, the chorus launches into a diatribe against people who pursue power, gain and pleasure (I.vi.493-528). The chorus seems clearly to refer to Salome. However, in the penultimate verse it switches tack and abruptly identifies Mariam as the real object of its censure. Its accusations remain oddly inappropriate. An uncertainty about whether to attack or praise Mariam's virtue, and indeed about *how* to define it - whether as restrained or incontinent will - is at the heart of the play.

Finally, Cary invents a character named Graphina whose name is derived from the Greek word *graphesis*, which means *writing*. Surprisingly, in view of writing's association with speech, Graphina is constructed as a paragon of feminine virtue because of her quiet ways. She is silent but in some sense eloquent. The trope is a familiar one. Francesco Barbaro wrote in *De re uxoria* that "women should believe they have achieved the glory of eloquence if they honour themselves with the outstanding ornament of silence," and repeated a line later, "all that is required of them is eloquent, well-considered and dignified silence" (206). However, such lofty serenity is a world away from Cary's emphasis on Graphina's low status and lack of confidence. She is a child rather than a matron:

> Scarce can her infant tongue with easy voice
> Her name distinguish to another's ear. (II.i.17-18)

Graphina herself says,

> If I be silent, 'tis no more but fear
> That I should say too little when I speak. (II.i.49-50)

Where Mariam has too much subjectivity for her own good, Graphina's virtue is that she has "too little." Yet this is subverted by the association of Graphina's name with the silent speech of writing. The fact that the idea is not fully developed is perhaps its point. It is half-said, half-articulated, half-thought. Its uneasy dissonance replicates the chorus' confusion of Salome with Mariam.

Critics have sensed in Mariam a powerful emblem of the problems and conflicts involved in early modern women's speech/writing. The early modern definition of female silence as a form of eloquence is infinitely suggestive. The old critical conundrum that the text's ostensible word is by no means the whole story takes on a particular urgency in the case of Renaissance women's writing. Asking how modern

feminist critics may read the "compromise solution" of Cary's play, Margaret Ferguson writes:

> ... what is radical must be inferred or teased out by a reader who assumes that an emphatic "no" may mean a "yes" - a reader, in short, sympathetic with psychoanalytic modes of interpretation and also aware that the censorship so often constitutive of the female author's text may derive not only from what we call the "unconscious" but also from direct social pressures or from the combination of the two known as internalisation. ("Running on with Almost Public Voice" 57-8)

Traditional humanist critics accept, without theorising it, the success of women's internalisation of "femininity." They assume the already-achieved work of patriarchy on women; that is, the silencing of women's expression of *difference* (disagreement, distinction) and *différance* (slippage and alterity showing up in the language of the status quo). There is an opposite but a similar tendency in feminist re-elaborations of Lacan. Femininity and women's "proper" desire is an unrepresentable absence, substanceless and excluded within the phallic language that grounds identity. Such a reading of women's "language" lends itself to Renaissance women's texts, as their writing was so powerfully conditioned by the idea of chastity and the view that a virtuous women was a silent woman. Furthermore, these texts suggest Luce Irigaray's premise that woman does not enunciate but is enunciated. The chorus in *Mariam* expresses its patriarchalist doctrine of wifehood with an admantine logic that exceeds the best efforts of male writers. The play's emphasis on the virtues of wifely chastity and the deep dangers of feminine impulse underscores the chorus' characterisation of Mariam as an inadequate wife. Equally, Marguerite de Navarre's tales of rape and her discourses of feminine circumspection and anonymity seem to confirm a crude patriarchal logic that silences and mutilates women's bodies, voices and desires.

However if, as in Judith Butler's elaboration of gender, femininity is conceived as "cultural performance" (x), then wifely submission, virtuous silence and even the representation of rape can be seen as performance; as a "correct" response to the patriarchal signifying system that shapes but does not ground identity. The heroic chastity of Renaissance heroines knowingly conforms to a demand that women be heroically chaste. It provides an acceptable literary form for women writers wishing to be, in Elizabeth Cary's words, not only chaste but "chastely deemed" (I.v.394). The idea of performance has peculiar resonance in this context. Notions of cunningly-performed social identity, very much connected to the

equation of public reputation with moral quality, permeate Renaissance literature.[14] In particular, women's chastity and their *reputation* for it are conceived as equally important. As Castiglione writes, "nelle donne sia tanto estremo obbrobrio e vergogna, che quella di chi una volta si parla male, o falsa o vera che sia la calunnia che se la dà, sia per sempre vituperata" (246). Reputation is quintessentially an effect of discourse. Given the self-consciousness that defines reputation, it is a performative rather than a constitutive component of identity. The early modern woman acts - or writes -in such a way that she will appear to the world as a "glorious object" or a "mirrour of modestie" or both.[15]

For both men and women it is above all virtue that must be performed, and language is the medium of performance *par excellence*.[16] Butler suggests that signifying "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications*" (136). She goes on to advocate "an account of identity... which locates the problematic within practices of signification" (144). Renaissance women's writing about desire is peculiarly problematic in that it is regulated by ideals that prohibit their expression of desire in the first place. Their authorship of texts about love is, *a priori*, a contradiction in terms. This makes it necessary to tease out moments of discontinuity and conflict in their texts that are not separate or prior to the language/performance of virtue, but built into its *process*.

"Virtue" - in particular, the prioritisation of virtuous suffering over "gay" immorality - has never really kept women in check. Their sexuality has never been fully controlled. But for the sake of their own social survival they have understood the ways in which it should be. This study incorporates the idea of women's literary performance into the concept of a male gaze that alternately represses women's display of sexuality and demands it. It also assumes women writers' alternate complicity with and evasion of this gaze. While I am drawing on Laura Mulvey's theorisation of a masculine gaze of desire that has a power of action, possession and control which women do not usually have, I hope to show that Renaissance women subverted and circumvented "the gaze," and that this did not necessarily entail the denial of pleasure which Mulvey advocated. However, it did entail a *masking* of pleasure. Renaissance women's incorporation of modesty into their literary language parallels Norbert Elias' notion of the mask as

personality in *The Court Society*. Elias locates the consolidation and acceleration of this process in Renaissance ideas, to use a latter-day phrase, of "self-fashioning."

> The capacity for a conscious shaping of the self is developed in societies the specific structure of which demands an extensive and constant masking of momentary impulses as a means of social survival and success, a masking that becomes an integral feature of the personality structure. (240)

Thus the masks that Venetian women wore when they walked abroad, or that women wore to the theatre in Restoration England, are inscribed into the "public" writing of Marguerite de Navarre, Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco.

Furthermore, the "male gaze" is inscribed in their social and literary contexts. Clearly, the play of demand and response is particularly potent within genres which deal directly with love and sexuality. Where Elizabethan romances addressed a female audience with stringent injunctions to chastity and restraint, the novella genre tended to delight in narratives about venal, self-assertive women. I have accordingly viewed Mary Wroth's romance and Marguerite de Navarre's novella cycle as responses to the masculinist "gaze" encoded in their genre models. Similarly, I have viewed Veronica Franco's poetry as a response to variously idealising, erotic and sexually debasing poems addressed to her by men. Each of the writers in this study was interested in social self-preservation as much as contestation. Their texts encode a tension between responding "correctly" to the desire of the other, of patriarchy, and expressing the desire of the self. My study aims to trace Renaissance women's ideologically conservative performance of virtue and femininity in their texts - self-censorship in action - so as to show how their process of self-legitimation produces resistance and conflict. Dissonant meanings erupt from the interstices between conflicting arguments which suggest that feminine "virtue" and "vice" are continuous with one another rather than polarised.

Thus the peculiar *tension* of Cary's play derives from her desire to dissociate Mariam's immoderate speech from any hint of unchastity. The play puts forward female anti-types - Salome and Cleopatra - whose sexuality and ambition are underlined in order to show Mariam's "unspotted" purity. Yet Cary cannot keep Mariam from overlapping with these figures. When it comes to authors such as

Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth, who placed sexuality at the centre rather than the margin of their works, the tendency to champion virtuously chaste women while expressing oblique sympathy for women of immoderate desire becomes quite pronounced. In genres dealing with sexual desire, it is more difficult to divide up the world of women in Cary's manner. Mary Wroth and Marguerite de Navarre are in thrall to genre-based stereotypes of women which they simultaneously welcome as liberating forms of expression and repudiate in their effort to maintain the standard of virtue. Their construction of female speech and sexuality is contradictory and self-censorship is only partially achieved.

Marguerite de Navarre, Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco each respond differently to their breach of literary conduct in writing as women in secular genres dealing with love. Their responses were mediated by divergent socio-cultural and ideological environments as much as generic precedents, which exercised different kinds of licence and restraint on their literary production. Marguerite de Navarre was the sister of François I and closely associated with his libertine court, but she was also an evangelical reformer and religious writer. Veronica Franco presents an enormous contrast. She was a courtesan whose role as a sex object in Venetian salon society allowed her to combine erotic discourses with discourses of etiquette that raised her social status and endowed her with the virtue associated with literary achievement. Marguerite de Navarre, for all her experience of a society that was by Renaissance standards sexually liberated, had a considerable social as well as intellectual investment in upholding the standard of feminine modesty and chastity in her writing, especially as these virtues were quintessentially Christian. She had a pre-eminent social position to uphold where Veronica Franco, clearly, did not. At a time when women's virtue was obsessively equated with their sexual reputation, Franco was able to write in an openly erotic way precisely because she had no "virtue" to lose. The third of the writers in this study, Mary Wroth, falls somewhere between Marguerite de Navarre and Veronica Franco. Niece to Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, the influential patron Mary Sidney, Mary Wroth participated in Jacobean court society and benefited from her family's links with the literary avant-garde of the English Renaissance. Yet her place in the social elite of her day was precarious and she parallels Veronica Franco in that the outspokenness of her writing was connected to her outsider status. Wroth only wrote her romance *Urania* after falling out of favour with the

Jacobean court, and her fall from grace in all likelihood resulted from her flouting of sexual convention when she bore illegitimate children by her cousin, William Herbert.

None of the writers featured in this study was discreet and chaste according to the "textbook" definition of virtuous femininity. Their writing emerges out of social contexts that set store by female eloquence and provided them with relative freedom of community and opportunity.[17] The pretext for their venturing into the literature of love was in each case a courtly or pseudo-courtly environment that valued accomplished performance by women and whose culture depended on a kind of erotic chemistry between the sexes. This new culture of courtly, mixed-sex composition embraced a vastly different ethos from that of the learned women of early Renaissance Italy, who found themselves in a state of social and sexual ascesis, largely isolated from the company of both sexes and inhabiting "book-lined cells."[18] Marguerite de Navarre was closely associated with a court whose cultivation of the fine arts and love for extravagant festivities and games finds a direct echo in her account of the genesis of her novella cycle. She writes that the idea for the *Heptaméron* came from a storytelling game that she devised along with other members of the royal family, who wished it to imitate Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. The royal family's emulation of Boccaccio is typical of the French court's love for all things Italian at this time. The current of influence passed to England. Thus Mary Wroth actually took part in Italianate masques in James I's court at Whitehall. Images of masquing and theatrical spectacle appear in Wroth's romance and love poetry. Like Marguerite de Navarre's allusion to storytelling games in the *Heptaméron*, these images are important clues to a shift in the tenor of courtly culture which enabled women to venture into genres they previously would not have put their names to. Finally, many of Veronica Franco's poems derive from the fashion for poetic improvisation and competition in Venice's most important salon of the 1570's. Even more than the unfinished works of Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth, these are polished, bravura performances that smack of public self-presentation and erotic challenge.

Franco's witty interchanges with male poets testify to the spread and downward movement of a central ideal in Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*, that of the court lady. In *Il cortegiano* the court lady's accomplishments - music, dancing, fine manners - are accorded a new importance because they reflect

those of the male courtier. Indeed, the *cortegiano* depends on the presence of the *donna di palazzo* as catalyst for his own performance.

> ... corte alcuna, per grande che ella sia, non po aver ornamento o splendore in sé, né allegria senza donne, né cortegiano alcun esser aggraziato, piacevole o ardito, né far mai opera leggiadra di cavalleria, se non mosso dalla practica e dall'amore e piacer di donne, così ancor il ragionar del cortegiano è sempre imperfettissimo, se le d o n n e , interponendovisi, non danno lor parte di quella grazia, con la quale fanno perfetta ed adornano la cortegiania. (263)

The court lady's role in endowing the courtier's conversation with "grace" is not a passive one. She must be able to pick up on the tone and subjects he chooses, or even set the pace herself. She is getting a training in the art of polished self-presentation just as much as he is and, for all that Castiglione limits her role, his description comprehends the considerable social and intellectual skills she needed to perform it properly. These skills spread, along with the fashion for gatherings that emulated the refined and playful tone of Castiglione's Urbino. Fifty years or so after Castiglione wrote his book, Italy and France saw an expansion of academies and salons that had absorbed the ideals of courtly and humanistic accomplishment to which he gave such enduring life. Some salons included women in their ranks and were even run by them.[19] The language of courtly compliment, of praising the virtue of women, informed poetry addressed by men to poetesses such as Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches in France and Veronica Franco in Italy. Its ethos was informed by the fashion for literary defences of the female sex and their abilities. Equally, high-minded idealisations of virtue mingled with a current of libertinism, spurred by ever more fleshly versions of Ficinian love theory.[20] The contradictory demands of the male gaze permeated these environments, as well as the literary exchanges that arose within them. There was a demand that women perform their sexuality as much as their virtue.

When women got up and performed Petrarchan verses and music, proverbially the most seductive of the arts, they actualised a current of sexuality that ran through Castiglione's descriptions of the court lady's charms and accomplishments. Men demanded an erotic role from women performers who, in transgressing the convention of feminine reticence, seemed to suggest their own sexual availability. This sexualisation of the poetess is illustrated by an incident concerning the French writer Catherine des Roches

and her côterie.[21] Catherine had a set of poetic *blasons* dedicated to her. The *blason* was a French poetic form that involved composing a poem about any part of a woman's body. When Etienne Pasquier, a member of Catherine's salon, initiated a multi-authored collection of these verses to a flea after he saw one on the poetess' breast, eighty pages of attentive lyrics by men were produced, some of them obscene. They give a sense of the erotic energy which could be generated by the combined forces of masculine competition, the presence of a woman poetess (an already-eroticised category) and the pre-ordained tendency of certain poetic forms to make women into objects of desire. Clearly, the flurry of suggestive poems might demand a response in kind. But Catherine des Roches had created for herself a sternly chaste poetic persona and invented, in Ann Jones' words, "a female flea not interested in seduction but in self-protection" (*The Currency of Eros* 57).

However, other poetesses responded with overt eroticism in this new culture of male-female poetic dialogue. The Lyonnaise Louise Labé and the courtesan Veronica Franco adopt frankly sexual voices. Yet their poems could not in any simple sense be described as capitulations to masculine demand. Both of them use the literary model of Roman elegy that Vives, among other humanist educators, had forbidden to women as pernicious. In Franco and Labé, as in Ovid, Propertius and Catullus, love is equated with war. The equation, already subversive in Augustan Rome, becomes even more so when the warrior-like lover and speaker is a woman. Both poetesses adopt competitive stances within highly erotic poems, and make sexuality reflect on personal power and will.

Louise Labé's famous sonnet, in imitation of Catullus' "da mi basia mille" poem to Lesbia (6), is a minor masterpiece that runs through a number of subject positions which anticipate the rhetoric of Navarre, Franco and Wroth.[22]

> Baise m'encor, rebaise-moi et baise;
> Donne-moi un de tes plus savoureux,
> Donne-moi un de tes plus amoureux:
> Je t'en rendrai quatre plus chauds que braise.
>
> Las! te plains-tu? Cà, que ce mal j'apaise,
> En t'en donnant dix autres doucereux.
> Ainsi, melant nos baisers tant heureux,
> Jouissons-nous l'un de l'autre à notre aise.

Lors double vie à chacun en suivra.
Chacun en soi et son ami vivra.
Permets m'Amour penser quelque folie:

Toujours suis mal, vivant discrètement,
Et ne me puis donner contentement
Si hors de moi ne fais quelque saillie. (XVIII 131)

The first four lines are a provocative *display* of sexuality, guaranteed to gratify a male audience - particularly in a context of live recitation. They declare that the speaker is more sexually passionate than her lover by competitively measuring her performance against his. The next seven lines equalise the lovers' relation and sublimate carnal love by means of a Neoplatonic image of androgynous mutuality. The final four lines, however, suggest a return to the theme of sexual inequality which was earlier articulated in inverse form when the woman lover described her superior passion. With their regretful return to "vivant discrètement" they hint that the speaker's passionate sonnet is the result of her excessively confined existence. The sense of excess is defined as a reaction to constraint, and the aggression of the final word "saillie," with its militaristic connotations, underscores her challenge to a socio-sexual order that made women's chastity and silence a function of their subordination.

All three writers in this study challenge this order in one way or another, yet each challenge has the phyrric quality of Labé's sonnet, with its final suggestion that actively and openly to desire "hors de moi" is an unfulfillable fantasy (a kind of leap - *saillie* - into the abyss). However, the sonnet beautifully describes its own dilemma between expression and constraint. It contains in embryonic form the modalities of covert, frustrated and aggressively competitive desire that are visible in the writings of Marguerite de Navarre, Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco, whose work I deal with in this order so as to show a range of positions, starting from the most "correct" and ending with the most contestatory depictions of female sexuality.

The woman author writing of love can either, like Louise Labé, play up to her sexual objectification or she can circumvent it with a discourse of virtue. Where Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth use the latter strategy, Veronica Franco adopts the former. Franco aggressively refuses the velleities of proper feminine conduct and courts the gaze of her literary interlocutors and male audience. She extends

Louise Labé's note of competition by casting herself as a dueller who fights her lover in the bedroom and gains supremacy over him. In adopting masculine genre models and speaking positions that denote martial rather than sexual honour she refuses the vulnerability and restraint of femininity. Yet her self-masculinisation, for all its appearance of empowerment, is essentially defensive. In reversing the unequal hierarchy of power in sexual relations, Franco keeps the "beloved" at bay and wards off the fetishistic aggressivity of the male gaze.

Veronica Franco's defensiveness echoes the more conventionally feminine rhetoric of Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth. Where Franco uses her sexuality as an expression of will, Navarre and Wroth perform the will's repression of sexual desire. They do so in order to defend themselves against imputations of unchastity. Franco's writing responds to the demand that, as a courtesan, she display her sexuality. Wroth and Navarre seek approbation from the culture that praises women's chastity. In writing a romance and a novella cycle respectively, each adopts already-feminised genres. Furthermore, each attempts to cleanse the genre of its more flagrant discourses of female desire in order to display the virtue of women. Yet each in her different way problematises virtue and engages in forms of immodest display that contest the rule of chastity and silence.

Mary Wroth's *Urania*, and the sequence of love sonnets that accompany it, displays an oddly hyperbolic response to romances that celebrate feminine virtue. She creates a drama of frustrated longing which courts the excess of unbridled desire. There is a parallel here with Louise Labé's semi-repudiated fantasy of unleashed desire, "permets m'Amour penser quelque folie." Marguerite de Navarre is also ambivalent. She proclaims the virtue of women by displacing desire onto men, who are generally cast as agents of unlawful and uncontrolled sexuality. The spiritualising tendency corresponds to her shifting of the emphasis of the novella genre itself towards a discourse of "parfaicte amitié," and parallels Labé's sublimatory gesture in sonnet XVIII: "chacun en soi et son ami vivra." However, Marguerite de Navarre's celebration of feminine chastity in the *Heptaméron* also serves to deflect interest away from a more interstitial and covert story of flirtation and intrigue between the story-tellers in her frame tale. Both Wroth and Navarre find convoluted, even cunning, ways to write about female desire while appearing to write

about its negation.

A necessary perversity of female desire/writing exists within a Christian patriarchy which has traditionally prohibited and demonised it. All the three writers in this study display a doubled logic whereby the sexuality that is asserted - whether virtuous or lustful, restrained or unbridled - comes at key moments to denote its opposite. The woman who performs her chastity is nevertheless impelled by desire; the prostitute who puts her sexuality on show keeps desire at arm's length. In each case, a falling into line with the prescriptions of patriarchal culture perversely but also cheeringly contains a deeper seam of resistance.

NOTES

1.The Latin is "vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea" (*Tristia* 1951, 2.354).

2.In *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, Ruth Kelso emphasises the way that Christian virtues were inculcated in Renaissance gentlewomen while their male counterparts were encouraged to pursue the pagan virtues of "self-expansion and self-realisation" (36). The English Renaissance model of pious femininity receives further treatment in Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*. Margaret Hannay's *Silent but for the Word* looks at Tudor women's translations and religious writing.

3.Mary Wroth's birth and death dates are uncertain. Josephine Roberts' Introduction to *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* estimates that Wroth was born in 1586 or 1587 and alludes to a Chancery Deposition which dated her death in either 1651 or 1653, 6, 40.

4.See Louis B. Wright, "The Double Standard," on the spread of the ideal of chastity in England from the Renaissance onwards, and Joan Kelly in "Did Women have a Renaissance?" 36-47.

5.See Leonard Forster for an excellent overview of the pervasive influence of Petrarch's poetics and "manner" in *The Icy Fire*, 1-60. For a study of the comparative influence of Petrarch in England and France, see Stephen Minta, *Petrarch and Petrarchism*.

6.I am indebted to Ann Jones' "Nets and Bridles" and *The Currency of Eros* (11-28), which provides the most searching analysis of the literature of feminine conduct in Renaissance Italy, France and England. Ruth Kelso's study of European conduct books for women, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, examines the broad context for the growth of the genre. Peter Stallybrass' "Patriarchal Territories" also addresses writing on wifely conduct and Luce Guillerm's *Le Miroir des femmes* contains French texts on the subject.

7.Peter Stallybrass' "Patriarchal Territories" describes the connections between male anxieties about property and wives, and the desire to contain and preserve control over both by immuring women within the private space of the home. Suzanne Hull's *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*, which addresses Protestant books of instruction on marriage and household affairs, makes some of the same points.

8.Leonardo Bruni, "De Studiis et litteris." *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators: Essays and Versions*. Trans. W.H. Woodward. (Cambridge, 1879. Reprint, ed. E. Rice, New York: 1963) 126. Quoted in Margaret Ferguson, *Rewriting the Renaissance*, xvi. Here, and throughout, Latin quotes are given in English translation.

9.This is Margaret King's argument in her edition of female humanists' writing in early Renaissance Italy. See *Her Immaculate Hand*, 13.

10.Works which address the Renaissance controversy over women are Linda Woodbridge's *Women and the English Renaissance*, Constance Jordan's *Renaissance Feminism* and Maité Albistur's *Histoire du féminisme français* (1: 19-187). *Women and the English Renaissance* is particularly pertinent in its discussion of the influence of debates about the nature of women on literature.

11.In "Did Women have a Renaissance?" Joan Kelly argues that medieval aristocratic women were sexually free compared to Renaissance women, who were burdened by the culture of chastity. While Kelly takes the culture of courtly love too much at face value, her argument has bearing on the respective literary cultures of the two periods and she makes similar points about medieval women writers to my own.

12.The Countess of Dia's Provençal version runs;

pois qu'ill conois sa valenssa,
que l'aus amar a presenssa;
que dompna, pois am'a presen,
ja pois li pro ni li valen
no.n dirant mas avinessa. (Bogin 82)

13.Marie de France's entire passage is distinguished by frankness and ease in talking about sex:

La dame entent que veir li dit
E li otreie sanz respit
L'amur de li, e il la baise.
Des ore est Guigemar a aise:
Ensemble gisent e parolent
E sovent baisent e acolent.
Bien lur covienge del surplus,
De ceo que li autre unt en us! (*Les Lais de Marie de France*, 21)

14.Jean-Claude Carron's "Les noms de l'honneur féminin à la Renaissance" demonstrates the shift between medieval and Renaissance ideas of honour, and emphasises the Renaissance preoccupation with reputation.

15.The novellas of Robert Greene make ample use of the idea of woman as a "mirror of modestie." Both quotations are from *Works* 2:24.

16.Juliana Schiesari's "In Praise of Virtuous Women?" gives a faultless analysis of the different concepts of masculine and feminine honour in Renaissance Italy, and the constrictions feminine virtue.

17.See Ann Jones, "Nets and Bridles" (42-52) on women's social opportunities and constraints in the court and cosmopolitan côteries of sixteenth-century Europe. Carole Lougee's *Le Paradis des femmes* demonstrates the social mobility of seventeenth- century salon culture in France and its linkages with feminism.

18.The phrase is from Margaret King's "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance."

19.Perhaps the most celebrated female-run literary salon of sixteenth-century France was that of the mother and daughter Madeleine and Catherine des Roches. See Anne Larsen, *Madeleine des Roches, Catherine des Roches*.

20.In *Le Miroir des femmes* Luce Guilerm discusses opposed but complementary discourses of libertinage and female virtue, 98-210.

21.I am drawing on Ann Jones' reading of the *blasons* dedicated to Catherine des Roches and of Catherine's response to them in *The Currency of Eros*, 53-9.

22.See Guy Lee's bilingual translation of Catullus in *The Poems of Catullus*, V.

CHAPTER ONE

Marguerite de Navarre's 'Heptameron:' "a pastime to pleasure the flesh"

Storytelling games and the virtue of women

Marguerite de Navarre seems at first glance to live up to Jakob Burckhardt's ideal of the "unsexed" Renaissance woman who attains equality in a man's world. As sister to François Ier and a powerful queen in her own right, she was better positioned than almost any woman of her time to pursue a variety of intellectual interests and to exert her influence on others. She made manifold use of her privilege, pursuing links with humanist thinkers, protecting religious reformers and commissioning a translation of Luther's treatise on monastic views, as well as becoming patron to France's foremost poet of the time, Clément Marot, and a notable author in her own right. Equally, she marshalled troops, supervised the building of fortifications, received ambassadors and was active and successful in the negotiation of political alliances between France and Spain.[1]

Most of all, Marguerite's social position and intellectual capabilities allowed her, in Pierre Jourda's words, to be, "à l'aube de la France moderne, l'ancêtre idéale et inégalée des plus grandes de nos femmes de lettres" (xiii). Her literary output was prolific and varied. She was at the centre of reformist thought in France in the first half of the sixteenth century and published a number of religious works which blended eccentric personal mysticism with intellectually rigorous evangelism.[2] She took the risk and, for a woman of her time, the considerable liberty of publishing theologically contentious works, one of which, her *Miroir de l'âme pechereuse* (1531), was blacklisted by the University of Paris. Her reputation for alternative thinking led her to be characterised as a heretical preacher in a satire staged by students at the Collège de Navarre in 1533 (Jourda 177-80). And where her religious works and opinions were typified by outspokenness and intellectual curiosity, her most famous secular work also crossed boundaries of convention and genre which no woman before her had breached.

The *Heptaméron*, a novella sequence that cites Boccaccio's *Decamerone* as its model, departs from

the almost exclusively religious themes of the rest of her literary output. Like the *Decamerone*, where a group of ten young people flee a plague-ridden Florence for the restorative countryside and daily games of story-telling, the *Heptaméron* assumes the curative power of secular narrative. The characters in the frame tale, who are all returning from a visit to a spa town in the Pyrenees, get stranded by floods and retreat to a monastery until the waters subside. One of them, Parlamente, states that "si nous n'avons quelque occupation plaisante et vertueuse, nous sommes en dangier de demeurer malades" (7). The pastime will serve the body as much as the spirit. Parlamente's husband Hircan announces, "fault choisir quelque passetemps qui ne soit dommageable à l'âme, soit plaisant au corps" (8). The group decide to spend each day telling racy stories.

In the tradition of fabliau and of the *Decamerone*, many of the tales involve trickery, sexual betrayal and deceit on the part of husbands, wives, lovers and priests from all ranks of society. They provide an unforgettable image of the Renaissance of popular imagination: a place of unbridled *id* while revenge, rape, bloody murder, necrophilia and broad, scatological humour are all par for the course. Where the piety of Marguerite's mystical works is irreproachable according to Renaissance ideals of femininity, the scurrilousness of the *Heptaméron* is positively risqué. However the frame tale of the *Heptaméron* - its most vivid and polished part - insists on fashioning women as exemplars of proper conduct. Parlamente, typically, contrasts masculine violence with feminine piety.

> ... si nous pechons par orgueil, nul tiers n'en a dommage, ny nostre corps et noz mains n'ens demeurent souillées. Mais vostre plaisir gist à déshonorer les femmes, et vostre honneur à tuer les hommes en guerre: qui sont deux poinctz formellement contraires à la loy de Dieu. (221)

The frame tale grants moral and intellectual authority to two women in particular. The oldest member of the group, Oisille, reads to the others from the scriptures every morning and night, and constantly checks their licence and exuberance. Parlamente, meanwhile, is a hard-headed and high-minded champion of women's superior virtues, their "doulceur, patience et chasteté" (301).

Yet it is also Parlamente who initiates the storytelling pastime that gives rise to such a licentious portrait of human mores. She backs up her choice by invoking the authority of real people: François Ier,

the Dauphin, the Dauphine and Marguerite de Navarre herself.

> ... je crois qu'il y a nulle de vous qui n'ait lu les cent Nouvelles de Bocace, du lieu où il estoit, nouvellement traduictes d'ytalien en françois, que le roy François, premier de son nom, monseigneur le Daulphin, madame la Daulphine, madame Marguerite, font tant de cas. Et, à l'heure, j'oy les deux dames dessus nommées, avecq plusieurs autres de la court, qui se delibererent d'en faire autant, sinon en une chose differente de Bocace: c'est de n'escripre nulle nouvelle qui ne soit veritable histoire. (9)

Marguerite, in a characteristic metafictional conceit, has Parlamente identify Marguerite herself as one of the originators of the idea. The genesis of the game is further encoded as feminine when she says "les deux dames" instigated it. Moreover, her foregrounding of historicity - almost all of the novellas have had their real-life sources identified - suggests that the scene she describes at the French court was a real occurrence.[3] In this light, the authority of women within the frame tale group, and the fact that they preside over a ritualised form of risqué gossip, echoes the realities of the French court in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Marguerite's life experience provided many precedents for the ascendancy which she accords women in the *Heptaméron*. After her father, Charles d'Angoulême, died when she was two years old, her mother, Louise de Savoie, devoted herself almost exclusively to her children's education and was both dogged and successful in her ambition for François's political career (Jacquart 13). Louise later came to exercise considerable influence in France's foreign affairs. She was twice made regent, and was given a powerful voice in parliament (Knecht 113). Two further French queens, Catherine de Médicis and Anne de Bretagne, provided examples of the political, social and intellectual influence women could wield at court and beyond. Catherine injected a dose of glittering Italian culture into French court life, a trend that was taken to its extreme by François Ier and amplified by his sister, albeit in a more decorous way (Crane 434-79). Marguerite had considerable influence in the court of François Ier as well as at her own court at Nérac, which became a refuge for evangelical reformers. In the context of her political and intellectual abilities, and of her brother's love for Italian fashions and manners, it is not surprising that Marguerite played "à la cour et dans notre littérature, le rôle des grandes dames d'Urbin ou de Ferrare dont elle admirait le goût exquis, l'intelligence et la sensibilité" (Jourda 1080). It also follows that the frame tale of

the *Heptaméron*, a woman-led scene of courtly parleying, gives a palpable presence to this dimension of French aristocratic life in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Marguerite's description of the royal group's decision to play a game modelled on Boccaccio captures this society's proclivity for modelling life from Italian culture. More than any French monarch before or since, François Ier prided himself on his Italianate cultivation of the fine arts as the medium, *par excellence*, of pleasure rather than piety. The Italianisation of the French court was accompanied by a shift in women's role. Court women played a central part in an atmosphere of sumptuous display, with François requesting that they dress gorgeously "all'italiana, con riche veste che Sua Maestà portò de Italia" (Knecht 116). If the seventeenth-century historian Brantôme's portrait of François' court even remotely echoes its reality, splendour and sophistication went hand in hand with sexual licence and intrigue, and the association of *cortigiane* with ladies of easy virtue was not just lubricious tale-telling.[4]

The publication of Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* in 1528 furnished a theoretical model for the French court in its newly enhanced sense of itself as a centre of cultural and political life. In particular, *Il cortegiano*'s allocation of a whole book to the role of ladies at court - and its discussion of the sexual double standard in the context of a witty parlour game geared to enhance the mechanics of flirtation - must have contributed to the shift in attitudes. A woman is placed in charge of the proceedings. In describing Elizabetta Gonzaga's overseeing of her guests' recreation, Castiglione captures the erotic charge of the gathering. Commenting on the atmosphere of "concordia di voluntà" which she created, he writes,

> Il medesimo era tra le donne, con le quali si aveva liberissimo ed onestissimo commerzio; ché a ciascuno era licito parlare, sedere, scherzare e ridere con chi gli parea: ma tanta era la riverenzia che si portava al voler della signora Duchessa, che la medesima liberta era grandissimo freno. (22)

The Duchess provides the setting for this commerce of the sexes but she also affirms its boundaries. Castiglione's emphasis on her restraining influence bespeaks an underlying anxiety. The Duchess' virtue is the moral base that legitimates all the dizzying repartee which follows: "... parea che tutti alla qualità e forma di lei temperasse; onde ciascuno questo stile imitare si sforzava, pigliando quasi una norma di bei costumi dalla presenzia d'una tanta e così virtuosa signora" (22). Clearly, the Duchess' pre-eminence and

the book's pro-feminist arguments provided ballast for according respect to the female sex in the pursuit of a refined ideal.[5] Women were the mainstay of court life: while male members were drawn away on political appointments and to war, women provided a base of social continuity and cohesiveness. They were well placed to fashion the life of the court according to their own interests and it is unsurprising that the new courtliness in France was associated with feminism.

The *Heptaméron* capitalises on this link. Like *Il cortegiano* it provides a guide to manners and conduct in aristocratic society and incorporates arguments for and against the female sex. However, these arguments pervade Marguerite's work more entirely than Castiglione's. Marguerite's purpose, unquestionably, is to uphold the interests of feminine honour and virtue. Castiglione toys with the question and treats it as a fashionable set-piece for learned debate. Famously, none of the women in *Il cortegiano* actually takes part in the debating and storytelling games. The *Heptaméron*, by contrast, exactly matches five male storytellers to five female storytellers, suggesting a deeper allegiance to the idea that "au jeu nous sommes tous esgaulx" (10).

Both Marguerite and Castiglione are concerned to mark out the boundaries of feminine virtue in upper class society. Yet Castiglione is primarily taken up with a masculine ideal and tends to relegate women to the role of objects of desire. In book III of *Il cortegiano* the exemplary pro-feminist Magnifico Giuliano *undresses* the ideal lady of the court in the very moment of introducing her. "Signora, se io la tenessi per bella, la mostrarei senza altri ornamenti e di quel modo che volse veder Paris le tre dee" (261). He goes on to pay court to feminine modesty as well as to women's role in inventing the ideal of the *donna di palazzo* by requesting the ladies present to help him to "attire" her. However, none of the women does take part in the debate. His gesture, which both defers to women and emphasises the pre-eminence of a masculine perspective, is echoed by the author himself. Although Castiglione gallantly has the Duchess of Urbino elect Emilia Pia to preside over the activities of the group, Emilia opts out of participating in the game of narration.

For all this, the role of the *donna di palazzo* is by no means merely decorative. The pro-feminist Magnifico places notable emphasis on her wit and vivacity.

> Dico che a quella che vive in corte parmi convenirsi sopra ogni altra cosa una certa affabilità piacevole... accompagnando coi costumi placidi e modesti e con quella che sempre ha da componer tutte le sue azioni una pronta vivacità d'ingegno, donde si mostri aliena da ogni grosseria; ma con tal maniera di bontà, che si faccia estimar non men pudica, prudente ed umana, che piacevole, arguta e discreta; e però le bisogna tener una certa mediocrità difficile e quasi composta di cose contrarie, e giunger a certi termini a punto, ma non passargli. (266)

The court lady is caught between the contrary requirements of modesty and assertiveness. The demand that she have a "pronta vivacità d'ingegno" signals her role as stimulating companion and, in Ann Jones' words, "erotic catalyst" (*The Currency of Eros* 16). The *donna di palazzo* must above all encourage the male courtier to hone his powers of seduction, his wit and his charm by being a mirror image. She must be intelligent, informed and verbal in line with the aspirations of humanist culture. This evolving type of femininity is very much in evidence in Shakespeare's comedies. Mary Williams makes a comment which reflects on the contradictory ideals of a whole age: "Obviously, what is wanted is a woman who is both chaste *and* light. She must be one worthy of veneration for her virtue... and yet at the same time she must have the spirit and sensuality of a courtesan" (44-5).

Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*, written over 100 years earlier than *Il cortegiano* and the *Heptaméron*, puts this in context. Like the two later works, it incorporates a defence of feminine virtue into a treatise on upper class decorum. Even more than the *Heptaméron* it puts women at its centre. It testifies to a marked expansion of the boundaries of women's consumption and production of certain types of narrative by the time that Marguerite was writing. Marguerite presents her tales as exempla and places particular emphasis on the virtue or vice of the female protagonists. In this, she conforms to Christine's belief that stories for women should concern "dames et damoiselles qui se sont bien governees, comment il leur en est bien pris et l'onneur qu'elles en ont eu, et par le contraire, comment mal est ensuivi a celles qui folement se sont portees" (93). However, the sexual intriguing and ribald shenanigans of some of Marguerite's tales evidently contradict Christine's banning of women's access to stories of "indecency and lubricity" (58). And where Christine makes a sharp distinction between the pleasure that is allowable to women when they are alone together and the sober self-restraint which they must exercise in mixed-sex company, Marguerite's work actually represents a group of men and women participating together in

divertissements of an undoubtedly titillatory nature.[6]

Marguerite's allowance for women to take pleasure in the innuendo-filled game of storytelling goes against the grain of Castiglione as well as de Pizan. While the Magnifico, clearly, is in thrall to a more playful model of femininity and of courtly society than de Pizan, he eventually returns to the same outer limits of female behaviour as she does. Like her, he associates female laughter with sexual indecorum. He claims that "risi dissoluti" are accompanied by "la loquacità, insolenzia e tai costumi scurili fanno segno d'essere" (268). In much the same vein, de Pizan advises that women "dient leurs paroles simplement et coyement, et s'esbatent et solacent, soit en dances ou autres esbatemens, gracieusement et sans lubrece, ne soyent baudes, saillans, ne effraiees en paroles, contenances, maintien, n'en ris, et ne voisent la teste levee comme cers ramages" (73). Where de Pizan, who has women's interests at heart, at least vouchsafes them the freedom of laughter when alone with one another, the Magnifico only sees the court lady in the context of a male audience. He describes men's reaction to women who delight in tales of other women's love affairs: "le tengono in mala opinione ed hanno lor pochissimo riguardo" (267), and that their laughter and gestures "fanno testimonio che allor senton sommo piacere" (267). He seems to fear women's vicarious arousal, a "wantonness" akin to that of women who read romances.[7]

The women in the frame tale of the *Heptaméron* tell stories of amorous intrigue about people they know, and many of them are meant to make the audience laugh. The metatextual aspect of this only amplifies the way Marguerite is deviating from Castiglione's model. The frame tale characters' names are anagrammatic echoes of real people known to Marguerite. Likewise, the tales are almost all accounts of historical incidents and of people known to the historical story-tellers. As a roman à clef, the *Heptaméron* thus firmly implicates real-life women - as well as those in the frame tale - in the "wantonness" of gossip about their peers.[8] Their skill in this pastime is even a cause for celebration. When the young widow Longarine is asked to provide a light-hearted story to relieve the gloom of Oisille's tales about the pious self-sacrifice of virtuous women, she reacts in a thoroughly undemure way. "En se prenant bien fort à rire" (43), she launches into a scurrilous tale of marital trickery and infidelity. Her capacity for comedy is approvingly referred to at least one more time again (202), as is that of the youngest member of the group,

Nomerfide (87, 250), who, of all those present, displays the most pronounced penchant for scatological tales.

Longarine and Nomerfide overstep one further boundary of restraint which the Magnifico lays down for women. He asserts that a properly modest women should make herself "aliena d'ogni grosseria" (266). Indeed he suggests not only that they avoid "parole dishoneste" but that they blush when others use them (267). Nomerfide's "grossiereté" and Longarine's signs of intemperate pleasure are somewhat at odds with a concern for linguistic delicacy in the *Heptaméron*. There is a doubleness of motive at work which is compensated for by the rationale that, even if women find bad language amusing, they ought to pretend not to (335). It is similar to the Magnifico's injunction that women manufacture blushes. These reflections occur in the context of a scatological tale told by Simontault. When Hircan comments that "les parolles ne sont jamais puantes" (334), Oisille claims the moral high ground by saying that some words - inevitably, words which refer to the body's functions - corrupt the soul. The equation of language with the body leads directly into a discussion about women and laughter. Words which acknowledge the body provide an improper release of pleasure, therefore female laughter at suggestive puns and stories is a form of unchastity. Yet in spite of such self-advertising prudery, the morally impeccable Parlamente suggests a way for female laughter/ bodiliness to escape social censorship.

> Il est vray que toute personne est encline à rire, ou quant elle veoit quelcun tresbucher, ou quant on dict quelque mot sans propos, comme *souvent advient que la langue fourche en parlant* et faict dire ung mot pour l'autre, ce qui advient aux plus saiges et mieulx parlantes. (335) (my emphasis)

In acknowledging the slip of the tongue "qui advient aux plus saiges et mieulx parlantes," she furnishes a kind of halfway house between the mutually exclusive requirements of erotic suggestion and chastity in courtly ladies. Women's taste for bawdy, and their indulging it through wordplay so highly valued in early modern courts, is sanctioned. But such puns are constructed as unwitting rather than intentional, so that codes of feminine propriety can still be upheld.[9]

Certain sorts of linguistic duplicity are gendered as feminine. The tension between untrammelled expression and virtuous restraint goes to the heart of the *Heptaméron*. It permeates

discussions between the frame tale characters as well as many of the tales themselves. Broadly speaking, there is a split between the stories and the attitudes to them promoted within the frame tale. Marguerite's earlier critics responded to this with considerable unease. Busson saw the contradiction as of a piece with her entire *oeuvre*: "ce que je trouve *étonnant* dans l'*Heptaméron*... c'est la prétention de l'écrivain à tirer de ces récits licentieux des conclusions morales, c'est l'opposition aussi entre ce livre et les autres écrits de la princesse" (135).[10] Marguerite's passion for wresting exemplary adages from the tales has been seen as a sixteenth-century aberration. Mignon writes, "la reine de Navarre, sacrifiant à la mode du temps, 'moralise,' elle aussi" (157).[11] Lucien Febvre identifies two, apparently contradictory Marguerites: firstly the queen of Navarre has been viewed as a grand society lady and gay *mondaine* and the *Heptaméron* as a set of charming anecdotes in the tradition of *galanteries gauloises*. Secondly, she has been seen as the serious-minded reformer whose true concerns are revealed in her placement of the pious Oisille at the apex of her work (11-12). Febvre's own contribution to the debate, his book *Amour sacré, amour profane*, is structured around the split between Marguerite's worldliness and piety, and seeks to reconcile it by asserting that her ultimate unity lies in her Christian faith. Marguerite's subsequent critics have also wrestled with her contradictions, and have tended to argue that they are caused by the epistemological uncertainties of Renaissance culture.[12]

In a sense, however, the comments of Marguerite's nineteenth-century critics are the most telling. Sainte-Beuve's condemnation of the *Heptaméron* as "licence et grossièreté" (18-19) is directly linked to his amazement at a woman and a queen having written bawdy stories at all. In 1914 Abel Lefranc had the opposite response to Saint-Beuve, but one rooted in similar assumptions about women.[13] He purified Marguerite by making her into France's arch-Neoplatonist: "elle fut même, à l'origine, le promoteur exclusif de la propagande... exposé dans les cercles polis dont elle était l'âme et l'inspiratrice" (81).[14] She becomes high-minded dominatrix to the male intellectuals gathered at her court in Nérac, and Abel Lefranc, in preferring literary critical gallantry over patriarchal disapproval, completely loses sight of her worldliness, her humour and her taste for a raunchy story. Behind Saint-Beuve's and Lefranc's reactions lie assumptions about women and writing with which Marguerite herself would have been contending. The

dissonance between her pious tone and the content of many of the tales is the result of an uneasy match between the requirements of feminine virtue and the scurrilousness of the genre in which she is writing.

Francesco de Sanctis describes the earthiness of the novella and the society which indulged it in no uncertain terms: "as a general rule the novella was plebeian and obscene... It was the same with the courts: even the most civilised of the courts were gross and licentious at bottom, under all the politeness of their forms" (459). For all this licentiousness, or perhaps because of it, the novella is a genre which pays considerable attention to women. It does so from a materialist viewpoint which both de-idealises them and allows them a significant degree of practical agency. As a descendant of fabliau, the novella privileges plots about adultery which have a pro-feminist element in displaying the sharpness of women's wit and reserving most of their mockery for cuckolded husbands. Yet such tales also function as misogynistic exempla of women's lubricity and deceit. Differently from the tradition of lyric poetry, the Boccaccian tale revels in female characters who are articulate, red-blooded, active shapers of their own fortunes.

However, the question of Marguerite's genre models is complicated by the fact that her tales are more closely related to Bandello's than, as her prologue would have us believe, Boccaccio's.[15] Like Bandello's, her tales tend to be more journalistic than literary; thinly-veiled ruling class scandals centred on trickery, intrigue and marital disharmony. Where Marguerite elects to "n'escripre nulle nouvelle qui ne soit pas veritable histoire" (9), Bandello defines his subject matter as "gli accidenti che a la giornata accadono, così de le cose d'amore come d'altri avvenimenti" (5). These "cose d'amore" are by turns a literature of seduction and chastisement. Tales of women who defend their chastity to the death match tales of adulterous wives and court affairs. In an important sense, Bandello prefigures the historian Brantôme who, while he revelled in sexual gossip about "les dames galantes" in the reign of François Ier, wrote another book eulogising the virtues of the queens and princesses of Renaissance France. While Bandello and Brantôme appear to privilege historical narratives about real women, their tales are imbued with the forms of literary history. The first part of Brantôme's *Les Dames* is clearly in the tradition of the literary defence of women which cites the heroic deeds and achievements of great ladies from ancient history or the recent past. The second part borrows from fabliau in having its opening *discours* deal with "les dames

qui font l'amour et leurs maris cocus." The split agenda is also visible in Marguerite de Navarre's tales of women virtuous and vicious.

The question of female licence is at stake here, at a number of levels. The numerous links between the courts of sixteenth-century France and Italy, of which the ubiquitous Bandello was an example, accorded *il novellare*, the art of storytelling, a new cachet as a social grace. Art, in the form of the *Decamerone* and *Il libro del cortegiano*, gave a new legitimacy not only to this practice but to women's right to participate in it. At the same time, the fashion for literary defences of women may have atoned for the new atmosphere of licence, placing a check on women's freedom to participate as freely as men in the forming of courtly culture. They must take care of their reputations and above all seek praise for their virtue. In its frequently-reiterated ideal of feminine "doulceur, patience et chasteté" (301) the *Heptaméron* seems to try and hold many of the implications of its own genre, and of the society which shaped it, at bay. Emile-V. Telle has shown that the *Heptaméron* was a direct participant in the early modern *Querelle des femmes* and that Marguerite used it to uphold the interests of feminine honour and virtue. However Telle, like Febvre, is interested in demonstrating the fundamental unity of the *Heptaméron*. While he recognises the sublimatory cast of Marguerite's thought, he does not perceive any tension between this agenda and its expression in the novella form.

Ultimately, the contradictions of the *Heptaméron* result from a dissonance between the reality of aristocratic women's lives and the theory of their transcendence or bridling of the body. Temperance and chastity were the ideal, but unsatisfactory arranged marriages and illicit affairs were the reality; especially in the self-consciously "Italian" atmosphere of the French court. The *Heptaméron* is caught between promulgating an ideal and painting a realistic portrait of Marguerite's life and times. For all its professed frankness, its championing of feminine virtue makes it a work of gaps and silences. Significantly, while the French court was privy to an openly conducted adulterous affair between Diane of Poitiers' and Henri II (Jacquart 388), no such state of affairs is represented in the *Heptaméron*. Marguerite attempts to incorporate contemporary pro-feminist arguments into an aesthetic of realism and a tradition of bawdy folk tale, but the two aims are in conflict. However, in emphasising the documentary truth of her tales she

elects to write an essentially worldly work. The "lowbrow" materialist perspective of the novella is capable of surfacing the politics of the female body in a way which the mystical meditation cannot. The strictures of virtuous femininity are tested against the workings-out of the natural will in a Christian patriarchy that largely prohibits it.

The novella genre and the engendering of desire

Recent feminist critics have, unlike Marguerite's earlier critics, have been concerned with questions of authorship and authority and have made her gender central rather than peripheral to the work. The quest to discern Marguerite's championing of the desiring feminine subject in the *Heptaméron* has usually ended up emphasising the restraints imposed on its expression.[16] In fact, the tension between speech and silence - and the gaps and silences contained within speech - are a central dialectic in the work. A comparison between Marguerite and Boccaccio will foreground the specifically literary sexual ideology that engages her in a discontinuous and contradictory discourse of desire.

In his prologue to the *Decamerone* Boccaccio uses the conventions of romance to identify his target audience as female. In the tradition of the invocation to "the Rose" in the *Roman de la rose*, Boccaccio asserts that his work is predicated on his own desire for a lady. He has known what it is to love and, now that he has recovered from its torment, he is determined to offer solace to other lovers by offering them literary distraction from their brooding. The lovers are identified as female and Boccaccio's gallant tone is imbued with the erotic feeling of his own experience in love. He claims that the work is written "in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano" (42) and suggests that "ad Amore... rendano grazie" (42) - love, after all, has endowed him with "il potere attendere a' loro piaceri" (42). Cupid and Boccaccio here merge, with Boccaccio an agent of sexual as much as narrative pleasure. The authority of his word is slyly offered as a function of his sexual prowess and predicated upon a notion of women's sexuality and their desire for stories of love.[17]

The chivalry of Boccaccio's dedication conceals a more negative understanding of women's desire,

one which agrees with the medieval perception of women as the libidinous sex. Victoria Kirkham claims that in the prologue "we hear an authorial voice who speaks not for the lovelorn but the lustful" (333). She shows that Boccaccio is echoing Ovid in his description of women who indulge their idleness with dreams of love, citing Andreas Capellanus and the *Roman de la rose* for further evidence of the association. While Boccaccio's female audience seem to loll and languish in a passive, self-enclosed dream world, the tradition within which he is writing assumes the destructive effects of love bred in "otium" and the basic aggressivity of the female libido (Kirkham 338-39). Equally, women within the fabliau genre, like the Wife of Bath in Chaucer, tend to be ruled by very material desires and to be both determined and successful in their efforts at gratification.

In this context, Boccaccio's deference to female modesty in his conclusion to the *Decamerone* is an ironic fiction. He ventriloquises female modesty as much as he ventriloquises female desire. "Saranno per avventura alcune di voi che diranno che io abbia nello scriver queste novelle troppo licenzia usata" (978)... "Saranno similmente di quelle che diranno qui esserne alcune, che non essendoci sarebbe stato assai meglio..." (981). He has his female audience raise objections only so he can dispense with them. The ultimate end of this is to identify women even more firmly with sexuality. Defending the length and loquacity of his work, he says, "Le cose brievi si convengon molto meglio agli studianti, li quali non per passare ma per utilmente adoperare il tempo faticano, che a voi, donne alle quali tanto del tempo avanza quanto negli amorosi piaceri non ispendente" (982). The self-serving sexual teleology of male ventriloquism of the female voice is held up to view in the third novella of day five. Ricciardo, a young man of Pistoia, has declared his love to a married woman but she, "per seguire il comandamento fattole dal marito, tacesse" (305). Subsequently Ricciardo "prese nuovo consiglio, e cominciò in forma della donna, udendolo ella, a rispondere a sé medesimo in cotal guisa" (305). He makes a long speech to her on her own behalf, alluding to her anxieties about her "onestà" only to discount them. They quickly become lovers.

The structuring of female desire as a function of the male voice suggests that the *Decamerone* was not in fact written for women but for men. This is borne out by Boccaccio's own warning to a friend not to let his wife or daughters near the work:

> I cannot praise your having allowed the honorable ladies of your household to read my trifles ("nugas meas"), rather I beg you not to do so again. You know how much there is in those writings that offends honesty, how much stimulation from the unwelcome Venus, how much encouragement to vice even for the most tried character... I will not always find someone to stand up and excuse me by saying, "He wrote this in his youth, compelled by the authority of one more powerful" ("Iuvenis scripsit, et maioris coactus imperio").[18]

He voices the familiar idea of secular narrative as sexual sedition literature which is peculiarly harmful to women. For men, the work is coded differently. When Boccaccio compares his work to Galeotto in *Lancelot du lac* he is archly suggesting it may function as a go-between, as a tool for male lovers to soften up their ladies. Its lore of sexual conquest may teach men a thing or two. Thus, the objections to the *Decamerone*'s lewdness which Bocaccio places in the mouths of his female audience are actually a way of telling his *male* audience that "when she says no she means yes"... For the women in the stories are by and large sexually available and not much concerned with questions of honour.

Marguerite de Navarre's authorial self-positioning in the *Heptaméron* contrasts strikingly with Boccaccio's. The fullness of Boccaccio's authorial presence in the prologue is directly linked to his passionate enunciation of his experience in love. Marguerite's single use of the first person is subsumed in the fiction of the frame tale itself, and in it she takes up a position of modesty and probity: "Ma fin n'est de vous declarer la scituation ne la vertu desdits baings, mais seullement de racompter ce qui sert à la matiere que je veulx escripre" (1). Above all, she does not position herself as a subject of desire. Indeed, if Boccaccio's magisterial authorial self-positioning follows from his role as a lover, then Navarre's more interstitial and elusive authorial presence is linked to the problematic nature of the expression of female desire and authority in a morally dubious genre such as the novella.[19]

The *Heptaméron* can be seen as a rebuttal of the assumptions about women which are encoded in the *Decamerone* and an internalisation of its contradictory demand that women concern themselves with tales of love but detach themselves from their own desire, that they be both sexually available and incorruptibly modest. The otiose, amorous languour of Boccaccio's female audience is replaced with vigorous defences of female virtue by the women in the frame tale. Indeed, Marguerite explicitly corrects the Boccaccian assumption of feminine idleness.[20] Parlamente is a woman who "n'estoit jamais oisifve

ni melencolicque" (6) and her husband Hircan asserts the need for a pastime to replace not only the men's usual occupations of hunting and hawking but the women's activities of housework and needlework. These are not the idle wives of literary convention so much as the industrious wives of the early modern conduct book. The setting of Boccaccio's frame tale suggests a harmonious courtly dance of pleasure, an aestheticised naturalism sealed off from moral and religious concerns. Marguerite, by contrast, plants her storytellers firmly in a monastery and engages them in heated debates about the ethical meaning of the tales. Boccaccio's characterisation of his work as a form of distraction, as entertainment literature, is laid at the door of his "female" audience. Navarre, by contrast, makes her tales into moral exempla and underlines their role as literature for edification; in particular, as edification for women. Boccaccio dramatises female sexual desire in the interests of a male audience and is not concerned to examine the demands of female virtue: Navarre dramatises the conflict - and the relation - between the two.

The first novellas are set up as competing examples of the nature of women: their *folie* (madness, desire) or their *sagesse* (wisdom, obedience). Where the former connotes sexual incontinence, lawlessness and pleasure, the latter connotes gentleness, obedience and the ability to be able to hold one's tongue.[21] Marguerite sets up Oisille, "la saige," as a kind of female super-ego whose age, widowhood and piety place her above the quintessentially youthful *folie* of sexual desire. Oisille is initially elected as arbiter of the group's entertainments because of her age and experience. Parlamente says to her: "Madame, je m'esbahy que vous qui avez tant d'experience et qui maintenant à nous, femmes, tenez lieu de mere, ne regardez quelque passetemps pour adoucir l'ennuy que nous porterons durant notre longue demeure" (6-7). Oisille's parental authority is enhanced by her spiritual authority in reading to the group from the scriptures each morning. She is the character in the frame tale who most consistently advocates obedience; the obedience of humans to God's law, children to their parents and wives to their husbands.

In comparison with Boccaccio and other women writers of the sixteenth century, Marguerite is conservative. Carla Freccero sums up her motives thus: "her context as a woman with a prominent and highly integrated role in society, that of wife, queen, diplomat and sister to the king of France, determines the impossibility of her remaining within such a tradition without rewriting desire, rewriting the motives

of this literature of seduction" ("Rewriting the Rhetoric," 310). Marguerite's context, according to Freccero, is the reason for the "rhetoric of transcendence" which Oisille embodies. But Marguerite's genre, and the spirit of play, pleasure and licence which accompany it, militate against such a neat reduction of her motive.

Feminine *folie* in the *Heptaméron* is given a convincing and sympathetic voice. Nomerfide, the youngest member of the group, embodies the spirit of pleasure at large in Boccaccio's youthful storytellers and the Renaissance French court. A tug between principles is polemicised. Where Oisille defends female honour, Nomerfide speaks up for the claims of pleasure. Where Oisille recommends sublimation of the human in the divine, Nomerfide advises the open expression of emotion. It is Oisille who accuses Nomerfide of the folly of youth (87) and she does indeed represent an impulse towards licence. Boccaccio, fully aware of the mating ritual that his frame tale implies, nonchalantly alludes to the licence which may infuse a "holiday" community of men and women (14). Marguerite's tack is different. As in Christine de Pizan, who extols the necessity of an older woman, "prudente, bonne, et devote, a qui on aura baillié par grant fiance le gouvernement de la joenne dame" (92), Oisille functions in the *Heptaméron* as a chaperone and upholds the integrity of feminine virtue.

Oisille narrates the first tale to be told by a woman in the *Heptaméron*; a tale of exemplary femininity which resembles a saint's legend. She chooses the story as a way of countering the view of women presented by Simontault, who narrates the first novella. Simontault's story about a doubly adulterous woman who engineers the murder of one of her lovers is intended as a slur on the female sex. He announces that his intention is to "faire ung recueil de tous les mauvais tours que les femmes ont faictz aux povres hommes..." (9) to revenge himself on women who do not reciprocate his love. Oisille announces her intention to tell a tale of a woman "dont la vertu puisse desmentir sa mauvaise opinion" (16). The difference between masculine and feminine outlooks is polemicised and is based on a divided vision of women's concupiscence or chastity.

Oisille's tale is about a woman who endures mortal wounds rather than give in to rape. She dies praying, and we are told that her fellow townswomen, on hearing of her death,

> ne faillirent à faire leur debvoir de l'honnorer autant qu'il leur estoit possible, se tenans bien heureuses d'estre de la ville où une femme sy vertueuse avoit esté trouvée. Les folles et legieres, voyans l'honneur qu'on faisoit à ce corps, se delibererent de changer leur vye en myeulx. (21)

In addition we are informed that each woman in the audience "pensa en elle mesmes que, si la fortune leur advenoit pareille, ilz mectroient peine de l'ensuyvre en son martire" (19). "Les folles et les legieres" who are prompted to change their ways by the heroine's example gainsay Simontault's tale. In the latter, the wife is identified as "legiere" and her "fol amour" is the first sign of her moral dissipation. In the former, the female vice of incontinence is remedied by example, deepening the identification which Oisille actively solicits from her female audience. She has, almost to the letter, followed Christine de Pizan's outline for tales about "dames et damoiselles qui se sont bien governees, comment il leur en est bien pris et l'onneur qu'elles en ont eu, et par le contraire, comment mal est ensuivi a celles qui folement se sont portees" (93).

Significantly, Marguerite's opposition between male and female points of view works at the level of genre as well. Where novella 1 is fabliauesque in that it is about a woman who is duplicitous and mercenary and outwits her husband, novella 2 is like a saint's legend. The female body is mortified in the name of transcendence rather than pleasured in the name of wordly profit, reorienting the worldview of the novella genre itself. The fabliau's proverbial "finesse de femme" (357) is shifted in favour of woman as heroic victim and justly aggrieved party.

The *Heptaméron* appears to polarise honour and pleasure, and it does so by making the pursuit of pleasure - the central topos of the fabliau itself - an almost exclusively masculine prerogative. Parlamente says that women "qui sont vaincues de plaisir ne se doibvent plus se nommer femmes, mais hommes, desquelz la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur" (245). An opposition between men's animality and women's spirituality is set up. Where Oisille and Parlamente champion female piety, patience and loving-kindness, Hircan, Saffredent and Simontault prioritise the pleasures of the flesh, associating the male sexual drive with military conquest and advocating rape as a means of achieving prowess.

Within a system of signification defined by masculine desire, rape is associated with pleasure.

Patricia Cholakin, in her study of the meaning of rape in Marguerite de Navarre, writes that "in the literary traditions of early modern France, rape and seduction amounted to the same thing" (12).[22] She describes how the etymology of the word, "rape," suggests a confusion between pleasure and violence.

> The French *elle est ravie* can be translated either as "she is ravished" or "she is delighted;" and in English, the word *rapture*, which contains *rape*, also connotes sexual pleasure. Thus *rape/rapt* carries within itself the (paradoxical) presumption of women's rapturous collaboration with their attackers. (13)

While Cholakin makes this point to illustrate the lack of a language and a legal definition for rape as seen from a woman's point of view, it also cuts the other way. Where rape is associated with sexuality more than power or violence, with rape and pleasure functioning as semantically blurred concepts, female defence against "rape" is equally a defence against sexuality itself.

It is telling that the rapist in Oisille's tale is said to be possessed by "love;" an "amour que bestialle." Oisille is not simply opposing victimisation with violence in the tale; she is contrasting two types of love, one animal and the other spiritual. The bestiality of the rapist's "love" is opposed to the heroine's adherence to spiritual values; a more authentic form of love, which seeks to lead him away from sin by the force of Christian reason.

> Tout ainsy que ung bon gendarme, quant il veoit son sang, est plus eschauffé à se venger de ses ennemis et d'acquerir l'honneur, ainsi son chaste cueur se renforca doublement à courir et fuyr des mains de ce malheureux, en luy tenant les meilleurs propoz qu'elle povoit, pour cuyder par quelque moyen le reduire à congnoistre ses fautes. (17)

The construction of the heroine as a soldier acquiring military honour puts her in the vanguard of the forces of female virtue which Oisille and Parlamente seek to fashion through spiritualising and intellectualising the meaning of female love. Thus Parlamente claims that "l'amour de la femme, bien fondée sur Dieu et sur honneur, est... juste et raisonnable" (174). The occasion of rape is as much a vector of female honour as a sign of unwarranted male violence. The heroine of Oisille's story is a paragon of femininity because her death at the hands of her rapist puts her honour beyond doubt. The fact that he has to inflict knife wounds on her to weaken her beyond the possibility of further resistance provides incontrovertible proof of it.[23]

The fourth novella drives home notions of feminine virtue by means of another rape tale. This tale,

however, abandons the mythification of female martyrdom in favour of a more realistic and wily definition of virtue. The story describes an attempted rape which the victim is dissuaded from publicising because "la plus part diront qu'il a esté bien difficile que ung gentil homme ayt faict une telle entreprinse, si la dame ne luy en donne grande occasion" (32). Unlike the pious heroine of Oisille's tale, the princess is a woman who knows how to enjoy herself. Her capacity for pleasure muddies the waters of her virtue. That "certa mediocrità difficile" which Castiglione recommends the *donna di palazzo* is sketched in by the narrator's qualificatory description of the princess, "qui estoit la plus joyeuse et meilleure compaignie qu'il estoit possible, toutesfois saige et femme de bien" (28). She is paid court to by a young gentleman and we are informed that

> le voyant tant beau et honneste comme il estoit, elle luy pardonna aisement sa grand audace. Et monstroit bien qu'elle ne prenoit point desplaisir, quant il parloit à elle, en luy disant souvent qu'il ne tinst plus de telz propos. (28)

The princess' simultaneous demonstrations of pleasure in his company and reproofs of his advances replay the contradictions in Castiglione's description. Here, however, the lady is a subject rather than an object of social anxiety. When warned that people will not believe she has been raped, the princess "cogneut... que à très juste cause elle seroit blasmée, veue la bonne et privée chere qu'elle avoit tousjours faict au gentil homme" (32). The tale unflinchingly anatomises women's vulnerability in a society where their "joyeuse et meilleure compaignie" is always already cause for concern. Yet it also advises a cautious, worldly-wise circumspection which is at the base of the frame tale, with its vociferously virtuous women and its cynical, wolfish men.

In the *Heptaméron* male and female subject positions are repeatedly polarised in order to mark out the boundaries of female honour. Sexuality is viewed as a masculine form of aggression against which women must defend themselves. This construction of desire threatens to force women into the position of "stony asexuality" which Margaret King claims was the price learned women of the fifteenth century had to pay for their transgression of gender roles ("Book-lined Cells" 78). The "temple of chastity" which King takes as the metaphor justifying the activity of these learned women borrows from the metaphor of woman as a fortress under siege, an image which the *Roman de la rose* had reified in the literary and sexual

imagination of the early moderns. Jean de Meung's work haunts the *Heptaméron*. Where Saffredent cites it as proof of the ubiquitousness of sexual desire (228), Longarine uses it as an example of men's "mensonge, ypocrisie et fiction, qui sont les moyens de vaincre leur enemys" - their 'enemies' being women (203). Marguerite here uses Longarine to argue against Jean de Meung's cynical picture of women, using similar arguments to those of Christine de Pizan a hundred years earlier in her *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*.[24] However, as with Christine, the form of Marguerite's argument is straitjacketed by the polarised terms of the *Querelle des femmes*, which obsessionally define women's worth in terms of their sexuality, countering the image of the concupiscent woman by alternately blaming men and elevating the virtue of the female sex.

The image of the fortress under siege is ubiquitous in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly in treatises on conduct and it is also basic to the sexual dynamic of the *Heptaméron*.[25] Saffredent, talking of male sexual conquest, claims, "oncques place bien assaillye ne fut, qu'elle ne fust prinse" (53) and Geburon in the same context admits, "j'ay autres fois veus assieger des places et prendre par force" (142). The militarisation of sexuality as a battle between opposing forces, with the attacking force as masculine and the defending force as feminine, constructs a subject position for women as either impassive or physically ruptured and mortified. Oisille's gloss on the mule-driver's wife of novella 2 provides a model for all women: "telle s'estime femme de bien, qui n'a pas encore sceu comme ceste cy resister jusques au sang" (21). Her conception of resistance as a moral proving-ground rather than a response necessitated by masculine sexual aggression is echoed by another sixteenth-century woman, Anne de Beaujeu, queen of France, in a letter of instruction to her daughter. Writing to her daughter of chastity she asks, "however beautifully and well guarded a castle may be, if it has never been assaulted, what reason is there to praise it?" (130).[26] Within this somewhat perverse logic, it is necessary that a woman be assaulted in order for her worth to be proved, which in turn suggests that sex must be invited only to be repelled. Thus sexual desire and the desire for honour - defined as the resistance of sexual desire - are confusingly intertwined.

The dialectic of desire and resistance

In the *Roman de la rose* the rosebud and the fortress which defends her are devoid of individual agency and desire. In Marguerite de Navarre, however, the fortress of female honour is a defence against desire from within as much as from without. In novella 10 we are told of a lady who tries to resist her love:

> La honte qui accompaigne les dames le plus qu'elle peult, la garda pour quelque temps de monstrer sa volunté. Si est-ce que à la fin la forteresse du cueur où l'honneur demeure, fut ruynée de telle sorte que la pauvre dame s'accorda en ce dont elle n'avoit poinct esté discordante. (138)

The suppression of the body is within the command of the female subject, who is not merely a monumental obstacle to another's desire. Her moral self-determinability is marked by whether she wins or loses the battle of besiegement from within.

The pretext for the discussion of the court lady in *Il cortegiano* is precisely that of women's moral self-determinability. Towards the end of the second book, Ottaviano Fregoso argues that women's inferiority makes it necessary that the discipline of chastity be imposed on them from the outside, by force:

> ... essendo le donne animali imperfettissimi e di poca o niuna dignità a rispetto degli omini, bisognava, poiché da sé non erano capaci di far atto alcun virtuoso, che con la vergogna e timor d'infamia si ponesse loro un freno, che quasi per forza in esse introducesse qualche bona qualità. (246)

In book III, Cesare Gonzaga both defends women and promulgates a humanistic model of inner-directed virtue by arguing exactly the opposite:

> ... e certo è che d'altro freno non sono ritenute, che da quello che esse stesse si mettono; e che sia vero, la più parte di quelle che son custodite con troppo stretta guardia, o battute da mariti o padri, son men pudiche che quelle che hanno qualche libertà. (313)

Women's dignity amounts to their ability to control their own chastity themselves.

Marguerite de Navarre celebrates the ideal. Where male humanists' understanding of the classical *virtù* to which men aspire emphasises stoical resistance to the vagaries of political fortune, Marguerite makes stoical fortitude in women a question of resistance to the vagaries of sexual desire. Geburon comments approvingly on the ancient philosophers,

> dont la tristesse et la joye est quasi poinct sentie; au moins, n'en monstroient-ilz nul semblant, tant ilz estimoient grand vertu se vaincre eulx-mesmes et leur passion. (253)

Parlamente and Longarine both echo this sentiment in relation to virtuous women who refuse to give rein to their desire.[27] This moral agenda means, of course, that the desire of virtuous women in the tales is peculiarly hard to read.

Novella 42 describes a prince's pursuit of a young woman who is his social inferior. He tries to gain her audience through various mediators and then by insinuating himself into her household and her bed, and finally by offering her cash presents. She resists all his moves with eloquent apostrophes to her chastity and to the fact that he is of a higher rank than her and will only use her. Parlamente, the narrator of the tale, comments to the women in the audience, "je vous prie que, à son exemple, nous demorions victorieuses de nous-mesmes, car c'est la plus louable victoire que nous puissions avoir" (294). The viewpoint is backed up by Longarine in the same discussion: "il fault estimer la vertu dont la plus grande est à vaincre son cueur" (295). In making these comments, both acknowledge that the young heroine of the tale has actually desired. In the tale itself her desire is barely indicated. She speaks of the prince's attractions at a theoretical level when she addresses him: "je ne suis poinct si sotte, Monseigneur, ni si aveuglée, que je ne voie et congnoisse bien la beaulté et graces que Dieu a mises en vous; et que je ne tienne la plus heureuse du monde celle qui possedera le corps et l'amour d'un tel prince" (290). And when she says, "ce n'est faulte d'amour qui me faict fuir vostre presence" (291), her love could as easily be that of a subject for her prince as a woman for a man. She is not, properly speaking, a subject of desire at all.

Where, out of concern for feminine modesty, Marguerite de Navarre is circumspect in her language of female desire, it is the language of repression that provides a register for women's sexuality. Novella 10 is perhaps the most bodily of all the tales because it dramatises the frustration rather than the expression of desire.[28] Parlamente, the narrator, introduces it with a familiar gloss. The tale is about an exemplary woman: "bien aymante, bien requise, pressée et importunée, et toutesfois femme de bien, victorieuse de son cueur, de son corps, d'amour et de son amy" (54). It is a classic chivalric tale in describing the love of a landless knight, Amadour, for a woman of much higher birth. His deeds of military prowess as a gentleman who has to win "par le moyen de la vertu, ce que les loys du pais refusoient" (57) parallel his ingenuity and perseverance as a lover. On falling in love with Floride,

Amadour, who is a soldier in the service of the Viceroy of Catalonia, manages to insinuate himself into the court of her mother, the Countess of Aranda, by marrying one of Floride's ladies-in-waiting. From here on, the tale tracks a series of sexual solicitations and deferrals between Amadour and Floride which serve to underline the welling-up and the damming of "folle amour" (74) - a build-up of repression and need which eventually reaches tragic breaking-point.

Amadour is constantly going off to war only to return and introduce himself further into the affections of Floride under cover of being married to her best friend. Floride is in love with the son of the Infante of Fortune, but is eventually betrothed to a man she does not love, the Duke of Cardona. The Infante, meanwhile, is taken ill and dies. Her disappointment inclines her towards Amadour, who has already confessed his love to her. When his wife Avaturada dies, Amadour falls ill. Floride comes to visit him in his sickbed, which provides the occasion for his first attempt to rape her. She subsequently withdraws from intimacy with him and, after three years away at war, he returns determined to secure "le fruit de [son] labeur" (78). She disfigures her face in an attempt to make him fall out of love with her, but he still attempts to rape her and she cries out for help. Her mother arrives on the scene and, while Amadour lies his way out of the situation, Floride refrains from revealing the truth because she still loves him and does not want to hurt his reputation. Eventually, in a kind of parody of the mutually exclusive dictates of honour for the male and the female sex respectively, he dies on the battlefield, his military prowess secure, and she withdraws to a convent, her sexual honour intact.

Floride's virtue is defined by her verbal caution and, ultimately, her silence, which defend her against the watchfulness of court culture. Indications of her desire throughout the narrative incorporate figures of masking, disfigurement and disavowal. In psychoanalytic terms, disavowal is the mechanism by which a thing is simultaneously admitted and denied. In his essay "On Negativity" Freud uses the example of the patient who says to the analyst, "now you'll think I mean to say something insulting, but really I've no such intention." Freud comments, "we realise that it is a rejection, by projection, of what has just come up" (19: 235). This tendency to draw attention to female sexuality by denying it is typical of the *Heptaméron*.

Floride's perceptions of Amadour's desire are a way of denying her own, even as they are echoes of the attraction she feels. The displacement mechanism is similar to Freud's description of the structure of projection. When Amadour first declares his love to Floride in terms of loyal service, she responds with a scepticism that recognises the underlying venality of his motives. She acknowledges that he already has her "bonne grace," as they have been close friends for a long time, and that his rhetoric is therefore redundant:

> Puis que ainsy est, Amadour, que vous demandez de moy que ce que vous en avez, pourquoy est-ce que vous me faictes une si grande et longue harangue? ...Si vous avez ce que vous demandez, qui vous contrainct d'en parler sy affectionnement? (63)

The final word connotes an experience of the body rather than of the soul, as does the physical shock suggested by "estonnée."[29] Floride's apparently cool analysis of Amadour serves to effect a subtle but not fully achieved displacement. The *excess* which she detects in his rhetoric ("pourquoy... une *si* grande et longue harangue?" - "...qui vous contrainct d'en parler *sy* affectionnement?") informs her own reception of his speech. When Amadour comes to the end of his declaration of love, Floride, "oyant ung propos non accoustumé, commancea à changer de couleur et baisser les oeils comme femme estonnée" (64). The blush, a totemically feminine sign of ambivalent desire, marks modesty and guilt even as it provides a visceral sign of sexual arousal. Marguerite herself makes the connection between desire and the reddened face when she describes Amadour's reaction to Floride's presence: "le feu caché en son cueur le brusloit si fort qu'il ne pouvoit empescher que la couleur ne luy montast au visaige" (61). In both cases, the body speaks where words cannot.

When Amadour comes to the end of the second part of his speech Marguerite closely echoes Floride's first reaction - her blushing at "*ung propos non accoustumé*" (my emphasis) - in her subsequent response. "Floride, tant contante qu'elle n'en pouvoit plus porter, commencea en son cueur à sentir *quelquechose plus qu'elle n'avoit accoustumé*" (65) (my emphasis). The unaccustomed, because sexual, quality of Amadour's words in the first instance is echoed in her own response. If what is customary is what is considered socially legitimate, it is, precisely, Floride's own desire in both instances that is "non accoustumé." Amadour's words, after all, constitute a conventionally courtly declaration of love. What

Floride feels is a "quelque chose plus," an excess which she cannot admit to or verbalise. The words "tant contante qu'elle n'en pouvait plus porter" reiterate the sense of excess while "contante," in its mixture of primness and sexual satisfaction, straddles the corporeal and the spiritual and contains its own escape clause.

Indications of Floride's desire are always characterised by some form of masking. Where the meaning of "contentement" is nicely ambivalent and her blush at Amadour's declaration is succeeded by a lowered gaze, she manages to hide her reddened face when Amadour returns from war: "...Elle... descendit par ung escallier tant obscur que nul ne pouvoit congnoistre si elle changeoit de couleur" (69).

But even as the body is masked in novella 10, it takes on a hyperbolic quality. The form of this fits with Freud's definition of negation and disavowal as "a lifting of the repression though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed" (19:236). Floride twice undergoes physical transformations which are graphically violent. When she learns that she must marry the Duke of Cardonne, she contains her feelings "...si fort, que les larmes, par force retirées en son cueur, feirent sortir le sang par le nez en telle abondance, que la vie fut en dangier de s'en aller quant et quant..." (69). The bleeding echoes her blush in that it involves a reddening of the face.[30] It is, like the blush, a doubly-coded sign involving sexuality and its negation. It both symbolises Floride's incipient loss of virginity - the acknowledgement, then, of sexuality - and her repression of sexual desire in being unable to marry the man she wanted to.

The logical culmination of this process of simultaneous bodily self-suppression and expression occurs when Floride injures her own face with a stone in a chapel. "[Floride] print une pierre qui estoit en la chapelle, et s'en donna par le visaige si grand coup, que la bouche, le nez et les oeilz en estoient tout difformez" (77). The body's brutal repression only succeeds in exaggerating its presence and mocking the sublimatory symbolism of the chapel. While the ostensible reason for Floride's action is the destruction of her own beauty so that Amadour will not desire her any more, it is equally an attempt to destroy her own desire. It does not stop him from once more attempting rape as a way of avenging her rejection of him and finding release. He undergoes a [illegible]ing physiological transformation. Significantly, the change is viewed from Floride's perspective:

> Quant Floride veit son visaige et ses oeilz tant alterez, que le plus beau tainct du monde estoit rouge comme feu, et plus doulx et plaisant regard si orrible et furieux qu'il sembloit que ung feu très ardent estincellast dans son cueur et son visaige. (78)

The reddened face she sees, full of the "fureur et concupiscence" which Parlamente ascribes to male desire, provides a distorted reflection of her own. It is the culmination of the moment early in the tale when Amadour's "feu caché en son cueur le brusloit si fort qu'il ne pouvoit empescher que la couleur ne luy montast au visaige" (61). Finally, Floride's name connotes floridity, the red of forbidden fruit - the "fruit" that Amadour believes to be the rightful reward of all his "labour" (78).

Novella 10 suggests that the needs of the body must be repressed because of their violence; and that the more they are repressed, the more violent their ultimate expression. The expression of desire becomes synonymous with its repression - a reddening of the face that extends from various kinds of blushing to various kinds of bleeding - and repression is at its most extreme in Floride. Thus, as Floride destroys the face of her own/Amadour's desire, she exposes it. In each instance it is the face, as synechdoche for the body, that is transformed into an image of violence.[31] Equally, it is the face which is constantly dissembling itself in the rest of the tale. Floride's hidden blushes, averted gaze and "dissimulé visaige" (81) before Amadour match his own "fainct visaige" (75) before her.[32]

The tale repeatedly suggests that the demands of the body cannot be integrated into language. In the scene where Amadour first meets Floride, physical desire directly opposes language; he is unable to speak. The fact that this contradicts his reputation for eloquence is emphasised. In the scene of Amadour's first rape attempt, the opposition between language and the body - reason and bestiality - is further drawn out. Amadour,

> en faisant le demy mort et sans parler, s'essaya chercher ce que l'honneur des dames deffend. Quant Floride... luy demanda que c'estoit qu'il vouloit... Amadour, craignant d'ouyr sa response, qu'il scavoit bien ne povoir estre que chaste et honneste, sans luy dire riens, poursuivit, avecq toute la force qu'il luy fut possible, ce qu'il cherchoit. (72)

This sense that the functioning of the body and of language are at one and the same time dangerously allied and mutually exclusive springs from Marguerite de Navarre's acculturation as a woman and from her desire to defend women's honour. Colette Winn describes how "notions de vertu et d'honneur sont, quand il s'agit de la femme, fréquemment liées au concept du 'non-parler'" ("La loi du 'non-parler'" 158). The demand

for secrecy in affairs of the heart, a theme frequently reiterated in the *Heptaméron*, is made in the interests of women. Tales 9 and 13, which eulogise a man's refusal to tell his love, both stress that he does so out of concern for his lady's honour. Because of the association of female silence with virtue, Winn argues that "l'affirmation du moi pour la femme ne pouvait se faire que dans le silence" (166). Yet, if anything, novella 10 polemicises the fact that the silencing of desire engages the destruction of the "moi." It demonstrates the destruction of that body which is not so separate from the ideal self as the Cartesians would wish.

In the course of the tale Floride retreats increasingly into the realm of the "non-parler." Her withdrawal is the logical development of the *sagesse*, the docile obedience, for which she is praised. Once she penetrates the duplicity of Amadour's language and his true pursuit of "folle amour" Floride, "la saige," attempts to curtail speech not only with him but with her other intimates at court, for fear they will discover either her love for him or his attempts to dishonour her. She can neither give voice to her desire nor blame the man she loves for deceiving her. The second time he attempts to rape her, her cry brings her mother to the room. Amadour, with typical verbal facility, explains her distress away. Floride does not expose him, in spite of the fact that his explanation creates a rift between herself and her mother. When, at the end of the tale, she withdraws to a convent "sans en parler à mere ni à belle-mere" (83), her silencing is complete.

The moral of Parlamente's tale is one which she repeatedly invokes: women should not be beguiled by men's courtly flattery, as it always conceals a sexual motive. "Une femme ne doibt jamais faire semblant d'entendre où l'homme veult venir, ny encores, quant il le declaire, de le povoir croire" (115). The male characters in the frame tale repeatedly testify to the venality of the language of courtly love. Saffredent talks of

> ... des termes dont nous avons accoustumé tromper les plus fines et d'estre escoutez des plus saiges. Car qui est celle qui nous fermera ses oreilles quant nous commencerons à l'honneur et la vertu? Mais, si nous leur monstrons nostre cueur tel qu'il est, il y en a beaucoup de bien venuz entre les dames, de qui elles ne tiendront compte. Mais nous couvrons nostre diable du plus bel ange que nous pouvons trouver. Et, soubz ceste couverture, avant que d'estre congneuz, recepvons beaucoup de bonnes cheres. (96)

This negativity about language is bound up with the view that language always, in one way or another, compromises women's honour. However, the *Heptaméron* also tries to integrate women's desire, honour and use of words. The limitations and contradictions involved in this process are as telling as its occasional successes.

In novella 26 a woman heroically attempts to sublimate her desire by upholding a language of Christian reason and virtue. The plot presents a familiar dialectic between *sagesse* and *folie*. Its antagonism between two women and two types of love, one "folle" and the other "saige," is repeated within the psychology of the heroine of the tale, "la dame saige." Where "la dame folle" has a full-blown affair with the young hero, d'Avannes, the latter educates him in the ways of "honneste amour." Yet "la dame saige" is in some crucial respects moved by the assertiveness more usually ascribed to "wanton" women in the *Heptaméron*.

Significantly, she desires d'Avannes first rather than the other way round. The narrator puts this down to d'Avannes's youth; he is not yet sexually awakened. The fact that she is eight years older than him and married underlines her sexual maturity and experience. Because her husband has taken on himself the role of adoptive father to d'Avannes, her educative role is at least in part due to the fact that she is his adoptive mother. Her leadership has the odd effect of underlining the transgressiveness involved in their mutual desire, even as it legitimates the way she takes the lead in their relationship.

In another sexual role reversal, it is "la dame saige" who chooses the discourse which sets the keynote of the relationship. Her language of Christian piety allows her to play the role of the wooer legitimately; she is, to all intents and purposes, winning him over to virtuous love. On learning that d'Avannes is going to visit a monastery, Nostre Dame de Montserrat, she suspects that the real cause for his departure is another woman and cries, "Monsieur, monsieur, la Nostre Dame que vous adorez n'est pas hors des mutailles de ceste ville" (210). She is making a pun - availing herself of that "forking of language" which Parlamente sanctions in "[les] plus saiges et mieulx parlantes." Yet the adoration of which she speaks is sexual rather than spiritual and, in referring to "Nostre Dame" she refers to herself as well as the other woman. The importunate current of desire carried in her words is underlined by the narrator's

comment that she "ne se peut tenir de dire [ces mots]." And the sexual quality of their appeal is further underscored by d'Avannes's blush. He is placed in the position of the woman: "[Il] rougit si fort à ceste parolle, que, sans parler, il luy confessa la vérité" (210). Significantly, however, she does not declare her own desire, but *d'Avannes's*: "la dame que *vous* adorez" (my emphasis). Displacing her own desire onto him, "the repressed" is allowed into view but, as with Floride, in a way that negates it.

When d'Avannes returns from his "folle amour," the lady's first words to him are again marked as excessive and importunate: "Elle...ne se peut tenir de luy dire: 'Je ne scay, Monseigneur, comme il vat de vostre conscience, mais vostre corps n'a poinct amendé de ce pellerinaige" (213). The current of jealousy in her reproofs does not make them any the less just. Similarly, her desire to win him over to "honneste amour" is an honorable exercise. But when the narrator tells us that "elle esperoit tousjours que, après avoir passé ses premiers jours en follies, il se retireroit et contraindroit d'aymer honnestement, et, par ce moyen, seroit en tout à elle" (214), the final note of possessiveness is as much sexual as it is spiritual.

The lady's conversion of d'Avannes to the ways of "amour honneste" involves a highly self-conscious shifting of his discourse. When d'Avannes declares his pleasure in the lady's "preaching" (214) and his desire for her to lead him further along the path of virtue, we learn that she is "fort joyeuse de luy veoir tenir ce langaige" (214). Yet the lady's will to convert d'Avannes to a desexualised discourse covers the ambivalence of her own motives. When he cannily modulates a Christian argument that love for Christ's humanity leads to love for God into a Neoplatonic argument whereby the lady herself becomes the "plus parfaict corps" which leads to love for God, the lady experiences a pleasure ("contentement") that she dissimulates. She rejects his "théologie" on the grounds that it is a language of seduction, and replaces it with a Christian argument about the weakness of the flesh. Yet in admitting the weakness of her own flesh, she admits her own desire; and she does so in terms more graphic than any Neoplatonist would care to use: "soubz tel habit que le myen, ne pourroit la vertu estre conngneue telle qu'elle est" (215). The metaphor is one which Hircan, with his cynicism about female chastity, uses repeatedly as a weapon against women; in particular, in the discussion which immediately follows this tale - "leurs robbes sont si longues

et si bien tissues de dissimulation, que l'on ne peult congnoistre ce qui est dessoubz" (220).

The lady's effort to Christianise the discourse of love, then, is double-edged. She uses a spiritual argument which tantalisingly acknowledges the needs of the flesh and she declares her "affection" whilst she repudiates it. Returning to her preoccupation with finding the appropriate language with which to speak of her feelings, she says:

> Ceste affection ne sera declarée jusques ad ce que vostre cueur soit susceptible de la patience que l'amour vertueux commande. Et à l'heure, Monseigneur, je scay quel langaige il fault tenir... (215)

At a certain point, her language will be free from the taint of the flesh. As yet, however, it is not. Indeed, their discourse has only succeeded in further igniting d'Avannes's desire; the narrator talks of "le feu que la parolle avoyt commencé d'allumer au cueur du pauvre seigneur" (215). As arbiter of the discourse they use, "the speech" which is responsible for exacerbating his passion is as much hers as his.

The lady's passion only grows through repression. She suffers physical torment for repressing a desire which she has largely expressed as d'Avannes's rather than her own! She admonishes d'Avannes to "ne servez plus telles ymaiges, qui, en lieu de resusciter les mortz, font mourir les vivants" (213). Yet the idolatry of the flesh which "kills off the living" is precisely her own condition. She falls mortally ill because

> la vertu empeschoit son oeil et contenance de monstrer la flamme cachée, plus elle se augmentoit et devenoit mportable, en sorte que, ne povant porter *la guerre que l'amour et l'honneur faisoient en son cueur*, laquelle toutesfois avoit deliberé de jamays ne monstrer... tumba en une fievre... et au dedans brusloit incessament. (217) (my emphasis)

Her burning fever is a sign that she is at the mercy of passion. It demonstrates the failure of her sublimatory Christian discourse. Even as the moment of her death incorporates the agency of divine grace and she receives the sacrament "comme celle qui est sure de son salut" (219), it is clear that her death is the product of a failure to transcend the needs of the body. Marguerite is not the Neoplatonist some of her earlier critics would have us believe. The body, rather than being a Ficinian vehicle to higher love, remains insistently corporeal. While the tale advocates the Christian sublimation of desire, its narrative interest lies in its account of a prolonged and painful repression which hovers on the border of full-blown seduction.

Generally in the *Heptaméron*, religious solutions tend to be sought not so much for themselves as for the consolation they offer to those disappointed in love. Rather than celebrating the ascendancy of divine love, they mark the disablement of human love (Gelernt 69).

Nevertheless, a woman's desire is elevated and in some sense legitimated through her struggle against it.[33] The "langaige qu'il fault tenir" (215) turns out to be a language which testifies to the strength of the lady's desire rather than annihilating it, and her enunciation of desire ends up redounding to her credit. On the verge of death, "la dame saige" is able to declare her love for d'Avannes without any kind of venal motive being imputed to her. "Scachez que le *non* que si souvent je vous ay dict m'a faict tant de mal au prononcer, qu'il est cause de ma mort" (218). As in novella 13, which is about a sea-captain who keeps his love for a virtuous woman silent only to give final vent to it in a poem which plays on the themes of speech and silence, "le parler... apparaît comme une thérapeutique, une libération" (Winn "'La loi du non-parler'" 161). In writing of the therapeutic quality of speech, Colette Winn also notes that "la dichotomie parler-non-parler est souvent doublée de la dichotomie folie-raison" (167 n14). Novella 26 straddles the apparent binary of *sagesse* and *folie*, silence and speech. "La dame saige" would not be a symbol of moral grandeur if she had not found a way to articulate the "madness" of her love. It is as much the strength of female desire as the doggedness of its resistance that becomes a mark of greatness of spirit: for in "[les] plus grandes et vertueuses dames... habitent les plus grandes passions et plus saigement conduictes" (218).

Pride and the dame de cour

Yet where virtuous self-determination in women becomes a matter of sexual repression, it is also conceived as a form of folly and pride. This tension is particularly visible in the discourse of Parlamente, who oscillates between championing women who master their desire through the effort of the will and condemning humans' reliance on their own powers. "A dire la verité, dist Parlamente, il est impossible que la victoire de nous-mesmes se face par nous-mesmes, sans ung merveilleux orgueil" (253). "Scachez,

dist Parlamente, que le premier pas que l'homme marche en la confiance de soy-mesmes, s'esloigne d'autant de la confiance de Dieu" (234). Geburon agrees with her, pronouncing her observation "saige."

The latter two comments are made in a context of female *fol amour*. They are made in the light of novella 30, a cautionary tale about a widow who takes considerable pride in her virtue but nevertheless succumbs to desire of the most illegitimate sort. The widow receives complaints from one of her serving girls that her son is trying to seduce her. She substitutes herself for the serving girl at an assignation between the two in order to test the girl's word and ends up becoming pregnant by her son. The narrator's comment on her capitulation to incestuous love is as follows: "tout ainsy que l'eaue par force retenue court avecq plus d'impetuosité quant on la laisse aller, que celle qui court ordinairement, ainsy ceste pauvre dame tourna sa gloire à la contraincte qu'elle donnoit son corps" (230). Like novellas 10 and 26 this tale accentuates the connection between the intensity of women's desire and its repression, suggesting that *folie* will always overcome *sagesse* and punishing the hubristic self-will of the woman's pretensions to virtue with a fall into vice. The tale is told by Hircan and comprises an anti-feminist argument which he makes along with other male characters in the frame tale, Saffredent and Simontault. They hold that female virtue is a hypocritical mask for venality and a form of worldly pride.

Throughout the *Heptaméron*, negative views of human pride are referred specifically to women, as are the Christian virtues of patience and long-suffering. Parlamente and Oisille champion these virtues in women, and their demand that "les personnes se submectent à la volunté de Dieu" (280) comprises an emphasis on the social authority of parents and elders above individual will and desire. Oisille speaks approvingly of two exemplary women who "ne vouloient rien faire à leur fantaisie, mais soubzmectoient le desir à bon conseil" (352). Dagoucin's feminised and Christian definition of virtue is not constituted by the active pursuit of personal honour, far less desire:

> Celluy est louable, qui, pour l'amour de la vertu seulle, faict oeuvre vertueuse, comme j'espere vous faire veoir par la patience de vertu d'une dame, qui ne serchoit aultre fin en toute sa bonne oeuvre, que l'honneur de Dieu et le salut de son mari. (266)

His emphasis on the lady's submitting her will to God and her husband echoes Hircan's. Hircan associates the problem of female pride and self-reliance with unregulated sexuality. Thus his concluding reflection

in the tale of the incestuous mother echoes the sentiments expressed by Oisille and Parlamente: "voylà, mes dames, comme il en prent à celles qui cuydent par leurs forces et vertu vaincre amour et nature avecq toutes les puissances que Dieu y a mises" (233). In the *Heptaméron* the tension between an impulse to glorify women's individual agency and to champion the submissive virtues in them derives from a conceptual link between female sexuality and hubris. Where virtuous reason is associated with willed rather than unwilled acts, women's "volunté" equally denotes the sexual drive that makes them walk abroad, commit adultery, bear illegitimate children, abandon their husbands. The female will to self-determination becomes associated with the sexual will.

The woman who self-consciously pursues virtue and dignity in the eyes of the world lays herself open to accusations of hypocrisy. In novellas 43 and 49, women who stand upon their dignity and virtue in public ingeniously manage to take lovers in private. Jambicque, the heroine of novella 43, haughtily condemns illicit love to all and sundry. Secretly, however, she solicits the attentions of a handsome "serviteur," never revealing her identity to him for fear of her reputation. When he finds out who she is and confronts her, Jambicque refuses to admit the truth and has the nerve to publicise his accusations as false, causing him to be expelled from the court. Novella 49 is about a woman who takes not one but three lovers, holding them captive in her room for days on end. Eventually each lover discovers he was not the only one to be so privileged. But when they collectively approach her, thinking to make her ashamed at being found out, "[elle] ny n'en changea de contenance: dont ilz furent tant estonnez, qu'ilz rapporterent en leur saing la honte qu'ilz luy avoient voulu faire" (322). Both heroines are described as proud in similar terms. Jambicque "parloit à l'homme... tout hault et avecq une grande audace" (296) and the countess of novella 49, we are told, "avoit-elle une grace avecq une audace tant bonne, qu'il n'estoit possible de plus, la parolle et la gravité de mesme, de sorte qu'il n'y avoit nul qui n'eust craincte à l'aborder" (318). In both cases the men involved end up feeling ashamed while the women escape being publicly exposed.

While the tales evidently present anti-feminist arguments because they suggest the hypocrisy of women's virtue, they also associate the protagonists' pride in their reputations with a brash confidence - "audacité" - that makes them capable of asserting their sexual will over men. Saffredent makes a similar

equation of the public, worldly characteristic of "ambition" in women with sexual self-determination:

> L'ambition des femmes est si grande, qu'elle ne se peut contanter d'en avoir ung seul [homme]. Mais j'ay oy dire que celles qui sont les plus saiges en ont voluntiers trois, c'est assavoir ung pour l'honneur, ung pour le profict et ung pour le plaisir. (340)

His example of the woman who selfishly solicits the "services" of several men is reminiscent of the countess in novella 49. Behind it lies the stereotype of the venal and self-determining "dame de cour," memorably portrayed by Bertrand la Borderie in a work which would have been known to Marguerite de Navarre.

Between 1541 and 1543 a number of French poets including Antoine Héroet, an associate of Marguerite's, published works which provided competing images of courtly, upper class women. The flurry of publications was sparked by Castiglione's portrait of the court lady in Book III of *Il cortegiano* (Gelernt 20). La Borderie's publication of *L'Amye de court* in 1541 both borrows from and contests Castiglione. The poem is a monologue spoken by the *amye* herself, an unmarried woman who frequents court circles, cultivating and receiving gifts from numerous admirers without falling in love with or singling out any one of them. Her self-satisfied regard for her own reputation and her emphasis on gaining authority over her lovers ("et nul ne l'ha sur moi") (136) are reminiscent of the heroines of novellas 43 and 49.

> Je commencois des ma jeunesse tendre
> Au foible esprit ja prevoir et entendre
> Que l'honneur grand et digne authorité
> Estoient en terre une felicité. (113)

Like them, she is sexually manipulative and sets great store by her worldly renown. Unlike them, she openly accepts the attentions of "serviteurs" and is not hypocritically prudish. While Jambicque and the countess in novellas 43 and 49, as well as the *amye* in la Borderie's work, are all figures of satire, they represent an assertiveness and independence which debunks the pieties of Neoplatonism and courtly love and instead emphasises worldly gratification from a woman's perspective.

As a woman who ventures out into society unmarried and unchaperoned, la Borderie's *amye* revels in her "liberté trop grande" (126). Court society here functions as a market-place where she does not merely wait to be chosen but exercises her own freedom of choice. The humanist pro-feminism made

fashionable by Castiglione is absorbed into a kind of courtly career open to female talent. Increasingly, court and early salon society provided a setting in which beautiful, witty and/or well-connected women could earn husbands, influence and even literary reputations through their own effort.

The *amye* is a woman aware of her own worth and determined to use it to get what she wants. This makes her critical of accepted gender roles. She is scathing about husbands' possessive rule over their wives and her frankly materialistic attitude to life comprises a realistic assessment of the motives and mechanics of the masculine rhetoric of love and service. Her regard for her own reputation impels her to desire admirers but to be sceptical of their protestations of devotion -

> Car je ne suis si legere et si folle
> D'aymer et croire une feinte parole,
> Sachant la Foy plus souvent est jurée,
> Et moins elle ha aux Amans de durée. (123)

Her philosophy contrasts markedly with the views expressed by her two literary 'competitors,' Charles Fontaine's *La Contr'amye de court* and Antoine Héroet's *La Parfaicte amye*. These works were direct responses to la Borderie. Both Fontaine's *contr'amye* and Héroet's *parfaicte amye* defend the ideal of love against the materialism and cynicism of the *amye de court*. The *parfaicte amye* gives voice to the Neoplatonic doctrine of love as a state of perfect spiritual reciprocity. Where the ideal of reciprocity might be thought to efface hierarchical distinctions between men and women, it is significant that Héroet's *amye* actually projects herself as a reflection of her husband's ideal:

> S'il veut beauté, belle lui semblerai.
> S'il veult l'esprit, divine lui serai.

Likewise, Fontaine's *contr'amye* lives up to an ideal of femininity which serves masculine interests. Her attack on the materialism of la Borderie's *amye* - characterised as "la nourrice/ d'Ambition" (24) - comprises a housewifely ideal of femininity. Her style of dress, "honnestement honteuse" (14), is contrasted with the luxury and artifice of the court lady. The examples of Penelope, Lucretia and Andromache - paragons of feminine modesty and self-sacrifice - are used to offset the *amye* (27). Finally, the *contr'amye*'s religious devotion to the God of love opposes the *amye*'s obsession with her worldly standing.

In this context, the *amye* is an example of the developing stereotype of courtly woman as subject of her own desire. Héroet's and Fontaine's counter-examples by no means capped the debate which Castiglione had set off. In 1545, Antoine du Moulin published a book which contained a satire of Héroet. In his version a lady who has striven to put the theories of the *parfaicte amye* into practice discovers, after a period of intense frustration, that the *amye de court* takes a more realistic view of things.

The worldliness of la Borderie's *amye* has more in common with the *Heptaméron* than with Fontaine and Héroet. Dagoucin - generally thought to be modelled on Héroet - is the one male character in the frame tale who sincerely believes in a courtly ideal of love. But he is constantly being gainsaid and frequently mocked by the other characters. Thus, when he sings the praises of the "non-parler," of a perfectly concealed love which has no motive of sexual gain or even reciprocity of affection, "Parlamente, *qui soupsonnait ceste fantaisie*, luy dist: 'Donnez-vous garde, Dagoucin; car j'en ay veu d'aultres que vous, qui ont mieulx aymé mourir que parler'" (48) (my emphasis). Both the men and the women in the frame tale testify to the uses of the rhetoric of love as a means of seduction. Their emphasis on the falsity of men's words is echoed by the *amye*'s emphasis on the "feinte parolle" of her "serviteurs."

Marguerite's late play, the *Comédie jouée au Mont de Marsan* (1548), gives the specific wisdom of the *mondaine* a hearing. It stages a debate between four female characters who represent different philosophies of life and suggests the necessity for their integration. While the *Comédie* contains no female apologist for *fin amor*, it accords a crucial role to the self-possessed and pleasure-loving *mondaine*. She opens the play with words which could as easily have been spoken by la Borderie's *amye du court*.

> J'ayme mon corps, demandez moy pourquoy:
> Pour ce que beau et plaisant je le voy...
> Je le pare et dore,
> Acoustre et decore
> De tous ornemens. (66)

The *mondaine*'s emphasis on the body is more insistent than *l'amye*'s: "mon corps est corps, je le sens vivement" (66). Yet she is not associated with greed, ambition or empty materialism. Rather, she provides a common-sensical corrective to two of the other characters; to the mystical raptures of La Ravie and the dogmatic anti-worldliness of La Superstitieuse. Where the play's fourth and most highly-rated character,

La Saige, has a doctrine "based on a reasonable harmony between the physical and the spiritual" (Gelernt 21). La Mondaine is first to convert to her views. She is able to do so because, unlike the other two characters, she is not afraid of the physical and worldly aspect of life. There are many parallels between La Mondaine and the *amye de court*. Differently from the *amye*, however, her way of approaching the world is seen as valid and natural rather than perverse and factitious.

La Mondaine reappears in less theoretical form in novellas 58 and 59 of the *Heptaméron*. Both novellas concern the same woman, a married lady who takes pleasure in participating in the life of the court of François Ier. The lady maintains the same amused and critical attitude to masculine venality as the *amye de court* and, like the *amye*, she has "plusieurs serviteurs... toutesfoys, en se mocquant de la plus grande partye" (357). Unlike the *amye*, however, she allows her heart to become involved with one of them. The tale sanctions her extra-marital affections for another man even as it takes revenge on his philandering with other women. The lady arranges an assignation with him only to frustrate his efforts to meet her. She ends up making him look like a fool before a group of court ladies. As amused witnesses to his embarrassment and exposure, they provide a very different model of female 'audience response' from that of the chastened townswomen in novella 2. Where the latter are strengthened in their virtue by the martyrdom of the mule driver's wife, the former take collective pleasure in a man's being exposed for his infidelity, even as they condone a woman's. Moreover the female characters in the frame tale applaud her actions and do not criticise her for having "serviteurs." Parlamente actually uses the tale as another occasion to warn against the fickleness of mens' words.

The attack on the double standard comprises support for women's right to pleasure. The role of the *mondaine* in several of the novellas, as well as the playful and worldly atmosphere of the frame-tale itself, eats away at the apparently rigid barrier between feminine honour and pleasure. A conclusion such as Patricia Cholakin's, that Marguerite's "experience of the female body is located, not as Cixous would like, in its *jouissance*, but in its vulnerability" (219), cannot take account of the ways in which Marguerite smuggles pleasure into virtue's temple.

Novella 58's condoning of a wife's right to pleasures independent of her husband's control is more

fully developed in the succeeding tale. Novella 59 also challenges the double standard whereby husbands assume their own right to philander at the same time as limiting their wives' independence. The lady's husband tries to seduce a chambermaid but he stops his wife from going to court because of her "gorgiaseté" - her extravagant expenditure - and his jealousy of her "serviteurs." The wife's "gorgiaseté" stands for her pleasure, as do her flirtatious relationships with her "serviteurs." The tale sets up a comparison with the different sensualities of husband and wife and takes the side of the wife's. Having engineered an assignation between husband and serving girl, she catches her husband "au criminel" and extracts promises from him to restore her to her former lifestyle. The narrator comments,

> Une femme belle et honneste n'est poinct moins vertueuse pour estre aymée, par ainsy qu'elle ne face ne dye chose qui soit contre son honneur; mais ung homme merite grande punition, qui prent la peyne de pourchasser une qui ne l'ayme poinct pour faire tort à sa femme et à sa conscience. (363)

Yet the wife's taste for extravagant clothing is a moot point. Lavish or becoming female dress - "gorgiaseté" - was commonly associated with sexual freedom in the sixteenth century, at least in part because of its association with a courtly culture of pleasure. In Francesco Barbaro's best-selling *De re uxoria* a virtuously domesticated ideal wife is advised to wear sober clothing as a mark of her chastity. In the same way, the appearance of Fontaine's *contr'amye* is "honnestement honteuse." Much of la Borderie's *amye*'s self-esteem and self-satisfaction comes from the jewellery and fine clothing she receives from her admirers. Predictably enough, Fontaine's *contr'amye* attacks this as a form of unchastity (19).

The semiotic undertow of female "gorgiaseté" provides more subversive humour in novella 8. Here, yet another wife is in the business of preventing her husband's infidelity and getting even with him. The equalising of their rights is graphically played out. The wife ends up unknowingly sleeping with her husband's friend and gaining great pleasure from it. The next morning Bornet, the husband, sees that his wife is "plus belle, plus *gorgiase* et plus joieuse qu'elle n'avoit accoustumé" (45). She is preening herself after her night of pleasure.

Like novella 59, the tale is about a wife who discovers that her husband is attempting to seduce a servant girl and who substitutes herself in for the maid. At the beginning of the tale the narrator homes

straight in on the sexual double standard. Bornet, "Combien qu'il voulust que [sa femme] luy gardast loyauté, si ne vouloit-il pas que la loy fust esgaile à tous deux" (43). His wife, on learning of her husband's intentions from the maid, persuades her to make an assignation with her husband and then substitutes herself in for the maid. The husband has boasted of the assignation to a friend, promising that the friend can have his "share" of her after he has finished. Mme. Bornet ends up being unfaithful to her husband and making things "esgalle à tous deux." But she escapes censure because she thinks she is sleeping with her husband. When the narrator puns on the substitution of roles - Mme. Bornet "avoit renoncé à l'auctorité de commander, pour le plaisir de servir" (44) - the joke is also on the loss of moral authority she has undergone "sans rien y perdre" (45), as she is happily unaware of her transgression.

The extra pleasure she gains from her husband's friend, "beaucoup plus fort et plus jeune que luy" (44), is gleefully emphasised: "Il y demoura bien plus longuement que non pas le mary; dont la femme s'esmerveilla fort car elle n'avoit point accoustumé d'avoir telles nuictées..." (45). The wife grows loquacious in describing the man's sexual enthusiasm for her husband's and the audience's benefit:

> Après que vous sailly dehors et puis encores retourné, sembloit que vous fussiez un diable sans ordre ni mesure. O malheureux! pensez quel aveuglement vous a prins de louer tant mon corps et mon embonpoinct, dont par sy longtemps vous avez esté jouyssant, sans en faire grand estime? (46)

Finally, Bornet's friend takes his wife's wedding ring from her. The narrator underlines the loss of honour this entails. The ring is

> chose que les femmes de ce pais gardent en grande superstition, et honorent fort une femme qui garde tel anneau jusques à la mort. Et, au contraire, si par fortune le perd, elle est desestimée, comme ayant donné sa foy à aultre que à son mary. (45)

The tightrope of honour that the wife walks without falling is provocatively held up to the audience's gaze.

While these attacks on the sexual double standard comprise a subversive emphasis on female pleasure, the ambivalence and half-saidness of the argument is part of its being made at all. Novella 15 offers the most powerful arguments of all against the double standard. The fact that the arguments are put in the mouth of an adulterous woman marks their transgressiveness. Yet her discourse unmistakeably extends and develops upon the logic of novellas 8 and 15. The story tells of a gentleman's neglect of his very young wife and his liaison with another woman. The wife eventually despairs of gaining her husband's

affection and starts to indulge in her own intrigues, but does not engage in a full-blown affair. When her husband finds her out, she makes him an impassioned speech in her own defence. She declares how long and well she has loved him, in spite of his treatment of her, and describes her growing sense of self-worth as she became an adult: "...Me voyant grande et estimée belle d'un chascun, fors que de vous seul, j'ai commencé à sentir si vivement le tort que vous me tenez" (122). Her speech is characterised by a fullness of description which suggests honesty. Everything she says agrees with what we know about her already. She describes the exact limit of her sexual transgression (kissing, no further) and compares it with the behaviour of her husband's mistress, suggesting that her own actions were no transgression at all, but in accordance with the dictates of God and reason - "...Celle que vous aymez ne se contente poinct de ce que Dieu et la raison commandent" (123). In doing so, she adduces the highest possible authority for her transgression in a context of closely-argued, logical thought and factual truth. Convincingly, she contrasts her own inexperience with her husband's experience, age and authority, claiming that his behaviour derives from the time-bound and fallible "laws of men" but that "the law of God" supplies her own perspective: "Et combien que la loy des hommes donne grande deshonneur aux femmes qui ayment autres que leurs mariz, si est-ce que la loy de Dieu n'exempte poinct les mariz qui ayment autres que leurs femmes" (123). At the beginning and end of her speech her fearlessness of punishment is underlined, suggesting that she is standing upon principle rather than speaking with any kind of ulterior or self-serving motive. In short, her moral courage is emphasised.

However, the denouement of the tale begins when the wife, after persuading her husband to forgive her, says to her attendant "Croyez, m'amye, qu'il n'est poinct ung meilleur mary que le mien, car il m'a creue à mon serment" (124). Her use of "serment" underlines the sacrilegious nature of her speech. She subsequently becomes a figure of fabliau, outwitting her husband in order to meet with her lover and then betraying her lover for another "serviteur."

Structurally and ideologically, the story is ambivalent. The lady's taking of "serviteurs" is given a justification which works on its own terms. The story's tropes of female transgression are ones which have occurred in tales of virtuous women. Where the lady of novella 15 gives her husband's ring to her

lover in full knowledge of what she is doing, the joke in novella 8 is that its heroine does this unwittingly so her revenge is provided with an excuse. Finally, the fact that the lady's will to sexual self-determination is matched by her very vocal defence of her virtue is paralleled by three other ladies of the court - Jambicque, the countess of novella 49, and Rolandine, a character whom Parlamente actually holds up as an example to the female sex. All of them signally transgress the law of feminine silence and sexual renunciation.

Rolandine exemplifies the integration of audacity and virtue in a female character. A lady of the court who has been prevented from marrying by her father and her queen because of greed and antipathy respectively, Rolandine falls in love with and secretly marries a man who is her social inferior. Forbidden contact with each other by the Queen, who suspects some kind of liaison, they contrive, very much in the tradition of medieval romance, to talk to each other through the facing windows in two separate buildings. Her husband goes there on the pretext of reading a book about the Knights of the Round Table and his obsession with this book leads to their being discovered. The association of romance literature with incitement to illicit love underlines the transgressive sexuality of their relationship even as Rolandine is shielded from condemnation because she maintains her chastity.[34] Yet the secrecy of their relationship and the various cunning ploys they engage in in order to be able to meet underline her overstepping of social authority, which is a sexual transgression as much as anything.

Where in novella 15 the lady's ultimate refusal to renounce her desire signifies her moral downfall, Rolandine's similar refusal marks her self-determination. With remarkable audacity, in view of the mutually exclusive claims of reason and feminine "will," she claims that her actions have above all been reasonable. Like the lady of novella 15, she lays claim to "le conseil de la raison que Dieu m'a donnée" (168). The moral difference between the two of them rests on Rolandine's marital fidelity and her chastity; she has refused to consummate the marriage until her father dies or gives his consent. However, while it is clear that the women are praised or blamed according to the final measure of their chastity, their dignity and proud vocal self-justification are directly connected to their will to sexual self-determination. The gulf between female virtue and female desire has been narrowed.

There is a continual tension in the *Heptaméron* between woman as heroic martyr and woman as agent of her own desire. The figure of Rolandine is important because it comprises both types. Her "audacité" is not so much a sign of excessive self-opinion, though it comprises an unshakeable self-certainty, as of heroism. In her, the transgressive individual will - the will to pleasure - is collapsed into a will to martyrdom. She says to the Queen, "je ne prandray moins de plaisir de la souffrir sans raison, que vous ferez à la me donner" (170). The conversion of Rolandine's secret marriage into a virtue is demonstrated by the tale itself as well as by Parlamente's gloss on it. When Rolandine is sent to be imprisoned for her actions, the narrator comments, "et combien qu'elle n'eut failly, la pugnition fut si grande et sa constance telle, qu'elle feit estimer sa faulte estre vertu" (172). Like a saint's, her humiliation inspires pity in people as they see her pass by. Yet, like a figure from fabliau, she has put tremendous energy into outsmarting her co-vivants in the interests of pursuing an illicit sexual liaison.

Novella 21 is usually read as a kind of phyrrhic victory for the forces of female desire because Rolandine could not be a symbol of moral integrity if she were not chaste.[35] Yet the degree to which Marguerite has bent the rules of proper feminine conduct by making Rolandine a heroine is underlined by the symbolisation of sexual transgression in the earlier part of the narrative and, most tellingly, by Parlamente's final comments on her own tale. Parlamente enjoins the women in the audience to follow the example of Rolandine in a way that shows she expects objections to be made: "et gardez-vous bien que nul ne dye que ceste damoiselle ait offensé son honneur" (174). It is similar to Longarine who, at the end of novella 8, emphasises that her adulterous heroine has in fact done nothing wrong; talking of the woman's husband, she says, "l'appeloit-on *coqu*, sans honte de sa femme" (47). The overlap between the chaste and unchaste audacious heroines of novellas 8, 15, 21, 43 and 49 suggests that Marguerite is testing the boundaries of feminine "virtue."

The tale, in constructing Rolandine both as self-willed heroine and suffering martyr, attempts to have it both ways. It is remarkable that the conservative Parlamente speaks up for Rolandine's defiance of social and parental authority. Yet the defensiveness of her concluding comment - "et gardez-vous bien que nul ne dye que ceste damoiselle ait offensé son honneur" (174) - implies a sense of conflict. The

conflict was Marguerite's own. Rolandine's speech of self-defence before the Queen incorporates material from a petition by Marguerite's own daughter Jeanne d'Albret. In it she claimed that she had been treated with gross injustice by her mother. Jeanne d'Albret had been contracted to marry the Duke of Clèves to serve the political interests of her uncle, François Ier. According to Lucien Febvre, Marguerite objected to the match, saying that her daughter was too young to marry, but did so to no avail. In the end, Marguerite fell into line with dynastic interest and became the agent of her daughter's oppression. Jeanne d'Albret claimed that her mother had had her whipped into submission. This incident seems to have irreparably damaged Marguerite's relations with her daughter.

If the tale of Rolandine is a compensating fiction for the crushing of Jeanne d'Albret's will, novella 40 is one for Rolandine's chastity. This tale is also narrated by Parlamente and concerns Rolandine's aunt. The aunt, like her niece, is the victim of a tight-pursed male relative who keeps her single against her will and, like her niece, she ends up marrying in secret. Differently from Rolandine, however, she consummates the marriage. In this instance, Parlamente is sternly disapproving:

> Je prie à Dieu, mesdames, que cest exemple vous soit si profitable, que nul de vous ayt envye de soy marier, pour son plaisir, sans le consentement de ceulx à qui on doibt porter obeissance. (277)

Likewise, the story itself punishes the aunt by having her husband murdered and her brother immure her in "ung chasteau au meillieu d'une forest, auquel il la meist; et defendit que aucun ne parlast à elle" (277). The aunt capitalises on her imprisonment and enforced silence by becoming a hermit, "vivant en telle patience et austerité, que après sa mort chacun y couroit comme à une saincte" (277). She chooses this way of life in spite of the fact that her brother ultimately relents and suggests that she marry again. Her self-imposed sainthood is based in a desire to revenge herself on her brother, whose offer she turns down in this manner:

> ... elle luy manda qu'il luy en avoit donné ung si mauvais desjeuner, qu'elle ne vouloit plus souper de telle viande et qu'elle esperoit vivre de telle sorte qu'il ne seroit poinct l'homicide du second mary. (277)

The tale ends on a note of bitterness rather than redemption, invoking a concatenation of ruined female lives: "à la fin, l'heritaige demoura, come vous avez oy en l'autre compte, à sa fille Rolandine, laquelle

avoit succedé à la prison faicte pour sa tante" (277).

But while Parlamente disavows her heroine's right "au plaisir que homme et femme mariez peuvent prendre ensemble" (275), Nomerfide speaks at greater length and with greater conviction than at any other point in the *Heptaméron* on the priority of pleasure over the self-inflicted punishment and pain which furnishes proof of feminine virtue:

> ... qui a ung bon jour en l'an, n'est pas toute sa vie malheureuse. Elle eut le plaisir de voir et de parler longuement à celluy qu'elle aymoit plus qu'elle-mesmes; et puis, en eut la jouissance par mariage, sans scrupule de conscience. (277)

She suggests that pleasure and fulfilment in love are the point of living, even if they are of short duration. She also asserts complete parity between "bliss" on earth and in heaven.

> ... je tiens heureux ceulx qui ne demeurent poinct longuement aux faulxbourgs, et qui, de la félicité qui se peult seulle nommer en ce monde *félicité*, volent soubdain à celle qui est eternelle. (278)

When Longarine checks Nomerfide's verbal flow by reminding her of the aunt's "honte... et sa prison" (279), Nomerfide replies that "la personne qui ayme parfaictement d'un amour joinct au commandement de son Dieu, ne congnoist honte ni deshonneur" (279). Her support for the claims of individual desire over those of external authority develops upon the logic of Rolandine's story.

The "forking of language"

Nomerfide's point of view is of a piece with youth and folly. While it does not get as much of a hearing as the more repressive opinions of Parlamente and Oisille, the bulk of the tales in the *Heptaméron* do revolve around the pursuit of pleasure and the circumventing of social authority. Comedy subverts the elevated heroics of chastity and chaste thinking. The pleasure of the stories is that they hold the folly of human nature up to view and in some sense indulge it. Yet this indulgence is usually palmed off on the men. Typically, the male characters in the frame tale of the *Heptaméron* hold to a fabliauesque view of human nature and construct women in this mould. Cunning ruses are favoured over noble ideals, and the pursuit of gratification over the moral rewards of self-restraint and repression. Hircan voices the traditional,

misogynist, profoundly fabliauesque and Boccaccian view that "le plaisir et la folie... sont deux grands advocatz pour les dames" (301). It is of course a vision of femininity which serves the interests of men. If women are as venal in their desires as men claim they are, then they are as sexually available as men would wish. Predictably enough, novellas 43 and 49, which argue that women mask their desire with a rhetoric of virtue, are narrated by men. Yet the tales' emphasis on women's desire to secure their public reputations is very different from Boccaccio. They articulate the contradictions in women's role from a peculiarly feminine perspective by drawing attention to the impossibility of the demands of honour and the inadmissibility of the demands of the flesh. They expose the double standard whereby it is women rather than men who are forced to conceal the fact that they desire.

Novella 26, the tale of "la dame saige" and "la dame folle," is told by a man, Saffredent. It too is coloured by the masculinist view that women's piety masks their sexual desire. But it has a kind of undecidability of perspective which is absent from novellas 43 and 49. "La dame saige" is possessed by the *folie* of desire. But the ostensible opposition between her moral nature and that of "la dame folle" takes on a further reversibility. Both desire d'Avannes and both take up public stances which conceal it. Where "la dame folle" becomes a better wife during her affair with d'Avannes, contenting herself with household chores and simple clothing because she is satisfied, "la dame saige," that model wife, dies from repression of her passion. There is thus an element of irony to Saffredent's comment,

> Voyla, mes dames, la difference d'une folle et saige dame, auxquelles se monstrent les differentz effectz d'amour, dont l'une en receut mort glorieuse et louable, et l'autre, renommée honteuse et infame, qui feit sa vie trop longue. (219-20)

Indeed Parlamente, like Saffredent, suggests that the rhetoric of piety may work as a fraudulent cover-up for female lust. She warns that the "virtuous" love embarked upon "soubz couleur de parler de Dieu" may lead only to the "amour vitieuse" (260) of the body. Ennasuite remarks, "votre loy est si aspre qu'elle ne durera pas" (261) - to which Parlamente replies, "je le scay bien" (261). The cynical, naturalistic perspective of Saffredent, Simontault and Hircan provides relief from the "harsh law" of female virtue which the women attempt to uphold. It is above all the men who admit that women have bodies and who suggest that their bodies are in conflict with the ways they are supposed to behave.

Female narrators in the frame tale also take up the fabliauesque model of women's "finesse" in the pursuit of pleasure, though they do so in a more circumspect fashion. Novellas 8, 15 and 59, all of which attack the double sexual standard, are narrated by Longarine, who is twice identified by the other characters as a truth-teller. Longarine's realism and humour balances out the seriousness of Oisille and Parlamente, and finds expression in tales closer in spirit to Boccaccio than the saint's legend to which Oisille, with her "zeal for tales in praise of virtuous women," is so attached.

Storytelling exists on a boundary between *folie* and *sagesse*, scurrilous gossip and moral instruction, between the incipiently sexual "exercice corporel" that Hircan suggests for pastime and the pious devotions advocated by Oisille. Hircan compares storytelling to activities the group would pursue at home "qui nous faict oblier mil folles pensées" (8), implying that it provides a purposeful distraction from the idleness that solicits desire and fantasy. Yet Nomerfide, "la plus folle," is the character who most eagerly forgoes Oisille's devotions so as to return to the pleasures of narrative. Parlamente, finally, mediates between these conflicting demands, arguing for an occupation that is both "plaisante et vertueuse."[36]

But language in a fallen world, and particularly in a genre such as the novella, is always used by speakers to further their own interests and desires. In the context of the frame tale it is, as much as anything, a medium for the gallant "conversation" (a loaded word in the sixteenth century) that threatens women's honour if it is not kept firmly in check.[37] The wheels of civility are a more potent agent of seduction than the boorish fortress-storming to which Saffredent, Hircan and Simontault are so attached. Geburon, employing the usual military seduction metaphor, describes the ways of the "parlamente" as an alternative to those of force:

> J'ay autres fois veu assieger des places et prendre par force, pourcequ'il n'estoit possible de faire parler par argent ne par menasses ceulx qui les gardoient; car on dict que place qui *parlamente* est demy gaignée. (142) (my emphasis)

The "parlamente" was a verbal negotiation to create a truce in a war or other kind of *contretemps*. Significantly, Marguerite herself had experience of such diplomatic processes. Her role in bringing about the *Paix des dames*, a truce between the emperor Charles V and the French king, was the crowning glory

of her political career. The mediation of separate interests also comes over in the frame tale to the *Heptaméron*, where verbal negotiation in the "sex war" and negotiations of a more bantering, flirtatious nature meet.

Geburon's pun on the character of Parlamente picks up on Marguerite's role as author. The author links her name, "Marguerite," which means "pearl," with Parlamente's name, which contains within it the word "perle." By identifying herself with Parlamente, Marguerite signifies the doubleness of her role. She is both defender of women's honour and fabricant of their pleasure, attempting to inculcate proper conduct in a genre that celebrates the art of courtly flirtation.[38] Parlamente continually speaks out against the kind of sexual rapprochement through language which Geburon implies, even though her name elects her as the doyenne of secular storytelling, which is "parler [d']amour." Finally, the "passe temps" which she elects is like Beatrice's and Benedick's "merry war of wits" in *Much Ado about Nothing*, a game of frictional banter that mediates desire; for, as Geburon points out, "place qui parlamente est demi-gaignée." In one further twist of signification, Parlamente's name even suggests doubt as to the possibility of integrating morality into language: "parler est mentir." For all her claim to forgo "la beaulté de la rethoricque" so as to ensure the stories' truth, Marguerite is hyper-conscious of the slipperiness of language. Rhetoric, that means of seduction, is inexorably the medium of the *Heptaméron*. But rhetoric, from both a masculine and a feminine perspective, involves the dissimulation of desire and the novella genre is, as much as in Boccaccio or Bandello, a medium of cunning pleasure.

The elevation of women's honour in the *Heptaméron* partakes of a larger logic; the pleasure of narrative entertainment and banter, with all its covert ways. Novella 62, a classic of Navarrean self-reflexivity, suggests that the author's role is as much one of flirtation as it is in *Il decamerone*. The difference is that the author does not openly position herself as a subject of sexual desire but covertly reveals herself as a subject of narrative pleasure. The narratee of the novella, it is hinted, is the historical author herself. She is a royal lady connected to François Ier who is known for her ability to enjoy a good story, and to tell one too. The accent is on the pleasure she takes in both these activities. This "royal lady" is told a supposedly second-hand tale of rape, only to have the narrator inadvertently reveal that she herself

was the victim.

The narrator does not make her story into an account of brutal violation and heroic resistance. She tells her tale in order to amuse. Married, it is pointed out, to an older husband, raped by a keen young gallant, she is literally revealed after the event:

> '...Arrivant quelques des chambrieres, [il] se leva hastivement. Et ne s'en fust personne aperceu, sinon l'esperon qui s'estoit attaché au linceul de dessus l'emporta tout entier; et demeura la damoiselle toute nue sur son lict.' (378)

Subsequently, when she says to the royal lady, "jamais femme ne fut si estonnée que moy, quant je me trouvay toute nue" (378), she is revealed at two more diegetic levels, that of the novella and that of the frame tale respectively.

The royal lady's hearty laughter contrasts with the frame tale narrator's biblical gloss on the story. And while the royal lady takes pleasure in this act of sexual revelation (a pleasure which, we must infer, is that of the historical author also), Parlamente (that other figure for the historical author) *rejects* the validity of such pleasure even as she draws attention to it! "...Quand on a prins grand desplaisir à l'euvre, l'on en prent aussi à la memoire, pour laquelle effacer Lucresse se tua; et ceste sotte a voullu faire rire les aultres" (379). Is this not a convoluted form of Freud's "rejection, by projection, of an idea that has just come up... A lifting of repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed" (235-36)?

In bringing up Lucretia, Parlamente is invoking a key Renaissance exemplum. Lucretia, who committed suicide rather than live with the shame of rape, embodies that "resistance jusqu'au sang" which Oisille set up as an ideal of feminine conduct in novella 2. However, Parlamente here implies that 'Lucretia' can be a figure of covertly enjoyed pleasure as much as of heroic suffering. She can function as a moral exemplum or a figure of fabliau. For in a world where a woman's soliciting of sex is a crime (and in a work which seeks to secure women's probity), "rape" may constitute a language for a pleasure which cannot speak its name. Equally, the cunning involved in storytelling may translate into the cunning involved in a desire which is always already involved in dissimulation.

Novella 62 is a telling example of that revelation of the body in language which occurs through

a slip of the tongue. Earlier on, Parlamente identified the mechanism and made allowances for it: "...Souvent advient que la langue fourche en parlant et faict dire ung mot pour l'autre, ce qui advient aux plus saiges et mieux parlantes" (335). This self-consciousness about the "forking" of language provides a potent gloss on the whole of the *Heptaméron*. It is of direct relevance that the comment is made about women, and in a context where a language of the body is at stake. One may think of the forking of meaning in "Parlamente." One may also think of Ennasuite's remark on Parlamente's distinction between virtuous and vicious love, that "votre loy est si aspre qu'elle ne durera pas," and the simple response - "je le scay bien" (261).

Women's language will of necessity be double, since discourses of the body are forbidden them. Marguerite's dissemination of her historical self throughout the *Heptaméron* in a number of guises is an example of this ambivalence about the nature of female speech. The more explicitly Marguerite sows herself into the text as a historical agent, the more she does so in ways that make her a defender of chastity. Novella 22 is the tale of Marie Héroet, a nun who resists the sexual approaches of a Prior only to be publicly accused by him of lecherousness. It is the Queen of Navarre who takes action against the Prior on the nun's behalf - no shame here. Novella 72 is also about a gullible nun who is made pregnant by a wily cleric. Once more, the nun tells her story to the Queen of Navarre who has him duly punished.

Deborah Losse has pointed out that we "risk negating the diegetic authority of the other nine story-tellers" and forgetting "that Marguerite de Navarre is, after all, the creative force behind all of the *devisants*" (223). The high-minded and impeccably chaste Parlamente, with her models of feminine piety and self-sacrifice, is too easily identified with the historical author's views. It is significant that novella 4 recounts an event which happened to Marguerite herself but suppresses her identity.[39] This tale of an attempted rape by a young gallant of a "lady of high birth" reveals its own narrative process in its content. The princess, a *mondaine* who is "la plus joyeuse et meilleure compaigne, toutesfois saige et femme de bien" (28), does not hide the pleasure she takes in the company of a young gallant at court. After his attempt to rape her, the princess's lady-in-waiting advises her against publicising the event because people will assume that she gave him encouragement. The princess admits that she did indeed do so: "à très juste

cause elle seroit blasmée, veue la bonne et privée chere qu'elle avoit tousjours faicte au gentil homme" (32). She suppresses the story to protect her own reputation even as Marguerite suppresses her identity as the historical agent of the story.

The fact that both Parlamente and Longarine admit to the necessity for women's hypocrisy is key to Marguerite's attitude to language. When Simontaut accuses women of wearing masks "pour rire en liberté autant qu'elles s'estoient courroucées en fainctes" (335), Parlamente replies, "Encore valloit-il mieulx faire ainsy... que de donner à congnoistre que l'on trouvast le propos plaisant" (335). Similarly, Longarine claims that "...Où elle default, se fault ayder de l'ypocrisie, comme nous faisons de pantoufles pour faire oblier nos petitesse" (335).

In the *Heptaméron* the relation between sexuality and virtue in women is as tension-filled as the relation between women and men. Marguerite's position does not preclude but problematises female desire. Where laughter is an index of pleasure, female laughter in the *Heptaméron* is a very serious business and comes in for some intensive analysis. By contrast, female laughter in Boccaccio is seen from a distanced perspective. Usually accompanied by blushing, it is constructed as sexually alluring. After the fifth novella of day 5 - which ends, like so many of Boccaccio's novellas, on a note of bawdy - we are told that:

> La novella di Dioneo raccontata, prima con un poco di vergogna punse i cuori delle donne ascoltanti e con onesto rossore ne' loro visi apparito ne diedon segno; e poi quella, l'una l'altra guardando, appena del ridere potendosi astenere, sogghignando ascoltarano. Ma venuta di questa la fine, poiché lui con alquante dolci parolette ebber morso, volendo mostrare che simili novelle non fosser tra donne da raccontare... (Iv 97)

The coy complicity of the women turns their modesty into a form of sexual display for male viewers. Because their blushing is undifferentiated, it appears as a general function of their sex. And the fact that their verbal rebukes are "dolci" empties the situation, and the emotions at play, of real conflict.

In the *Heptaméron*, blushing as well as laughter is a far more fraught activity. In the opening scene, Hircan makes his wife blush by intimating that sex with her is the pastime he would prefer to any other. Her blush, like the blushing of Boccaccio's ladies in response to sexual innuendo, is accompanied by laughter. But laughter here, as in the scene where Longarine advocates that women hide their pleasure in low jokes, has a contradictory quality:

> Parlamente commenca à rougir, pensant qu'il parlast pour elle, et, un peu en collere et demy en riant, luy dist: 'Hircan, peult estre celle que vous pensez qui en debvoit estre la plus marrye auroit bien de quoy se recompenser s'il luy plaisoit...' (8-9)

Her comment to Hircan is as ambivalent as her angry laughter. She may be saying that, though she *should* be angry ("celle... qui en debvoit estre la plus marrye") at his suggestion, the "recompense" she'll obtain will, precisely, be sexual. Alternatively, she may be saying that she will get her own back at him. Either way, her reaction has a contradictory quality that is not present in Boccaccio's women. The combination of laughter with anger suggests a complex mix of defensiveness and pleasure; a sexual friction arising from the sparring of two characters rather than the viewer-oriented *frisson* offered up by Boccaccio's blushing ladies.

The moment encapsulates the dynamics of gender relations within the frame tale, where the "wind-up" is a form of sexual banter. After novella 8 - Longarine's account of female sexual gratification and husbandly shame, offered as a challenge to the sexual arrogance of Saffredent and Hircan - this exchange occurs;

> 'Vrayement,' ce dist Geburon, 'vous estes une bonne dame qui, en lieu de faire rire la compaignye, comme vous aviez promis, mectez ces deux pauvres gens [Hircan and Saffredent] en collere.'
> 'C'est tout ung,' dist Longarine; 'Mais qu'ilz ne viennent poinct à tirer leurs espées, leur collere ne fera que redoubler nostre rire.' (47)

A comment by Hircan later in the frame tale suggests that his "anger" at her tale and at her mockery of him would have been mingled with pleasure: "les plus saiges [femmes] sont celles qui prennent autant de passetemps à se mocquer des oeuvres de leurs mariz, comme les mariz de les tromper secretement..." (397). We are back in the world of fabliau once more, where the combative wit of women is their most alluring quality. Ruse, traditionally ascribed to women for misogynistic reasons, particularly within the fabliau genre, is a quality Simontault praises:

> ...Ce nom-là de *fines*, qu'elles [les femmes en général] ont acquis à leurs despens, faict plus hardiment venir les serviteurs à leur obeissance, que la beaulté. Car ung des plus grans plaisirs qui sont entre ceulx qui ayment, c'est de conduire leur amityé finement. (341)

He stresses the mutual pleasure involved in cunning and, most importantly of all, wit. Likewise a

reciprocity is produced by all the banter. In such a battle of wits there is a shared system of values and rules, which militates against Parlamente's and Oisille's hierarchically organised distinctions between men and women. Indeed, the game of storytelling itself is a form of banter; the characters use their tales to disprove, punish or embarrass one another.

Finally, blushing is a form of flirtation, not merely an involuntary reaction but a covert message or acknowledgement. When Simontault, who has been identified as Parlamente's "serviteur" (5), hints at his desire for her, she conceals her blush with a cough. Communication of a quasi-sexual nature has passed between Simontault and another man's wife. The narrator underlines the intentionality of the act of communication and concealment: "à ceste parolle, Parlamente l'entendit très bien, qui se print à tousser; parquoy Hircan ne s'appercut de la couleur qui luy venoit aux joues..." (10). In the light of early modern dictums against a wife's communicating with any man other than her husband, the moment carries a subversive frisson of transgression. It develops upon the clandestine thrill of the blush by suggesting that all acts of communication may be encoded with secret intimacy and thus mean different things to different people.

This is brought out in two further scenes which hint at sexual relationships between characters in the frame tale. In the scene where Hircan suggests that sex would be the best "passetemps" for whiling away the hours at the monastery, an ambiguity is allowed to enter his apparently one-on-one interchange with his wife. We are told, "Parlamente commenca à rougir, *pensant qu'il parlast pour elle*" (8) (my emphasis). With whom else would he be playing games of sexual innuendo, if not his wife? Subsequent interactions between Hircan and Nomerfide, as well as numerous references to his roving sexual appetite, bear out the implication that it could be a number of the women present. This provoking of curiosity about the characters' sexual intriguing provides the erotic dimension of the frame tale. Hircan does not refer directly to his wife but to "quelcun de la compaignie," and he subsequently underlines the misconstruability of his words by saying, "ma femme a... bien entendu la glose de mon propos" (9).

Novella 3 is followed by another scene that invites the reader to indulge in speculation as to who is involved with whom, and in what way and to what extent. Ennasuite teases Saffredent about his declining

appetite for love, which suggests that she knows more about his appetites than she should (if she were as modest and high-minded as some of the exemplary women in the novellas). He is piqued and refutes her suggestion. The narrator then says,

> Il est vray que, durant ce propos, ung de la compaignye se print bien fort à rire, sachant que celle qui prenoit les parolles de Saffredent à son adventaige, n'estoit pas tant aymée de luy, qu'il en eust voullu souffrir cornes, honte ou dommaige. Et quant Saffredent apperceut que celle qui ryoit l'entendoit, il s'en tint trop content... (27)

"Ung de la compaignye" could be any woman in the group apart from Ennasuite, and "celle qui prenoit les parolles de Saffredent à son adventaige" could be any one of them at all: the reader's knowledge that Saffredent is the "serviteur" of either Longarine or Parlamente may spur him or her to speculation, but the play of covert assumptions and messages is complex and elusive enough that identities and motives are left open-ended. What *is* clear is that "celle qui prenoit les parolles de Saffredent à son adventaige" desires to be desired by him, and that the woman who laughs at the futility of her hopes is the woman Saffredent is *really* interested in. This woman's *laughter*, precisely, constitutes a covert acknowledgement that his message of desire has reached the person for whom it is intended; thus, "quant Saffredent apperceut que celle qui ryoit l'entendoit, il s'en tint trop content." Reader, narrator and characters are here mutually involved in the pleasurable game of "finesse de femme."

NOTES

1.The definitive books on the life and works of Marguerite de Navarre are Pierre Jourda's *Marguerite d'Angoulême*, Emile-V. Telle's *L'Oeuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême* and Lucien Febvre's *Autour de l'Heptaméron*.

2.The other works Marguerite published in her lifetime were *Miroir de l'âme pechereuse* (1531), *Marguerite de la Marguerite des Princesses* (1547) and *Suyte des Marguerites* (1547). On her religious thought and her connections with reformist and evangelical thinkers, see Pierre Jourda 140-44, 169-97. See also Gary Ferguson, *Mirroring Belief: Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry*.

3.Pierre Jourda discusses the stories' historicity at some length (766-86).

4.I am referring here to the second part of Pierre de Brantôme's *Les Dames*, now more usually known as *Les Dames galantes*. The book devotes a large amount of space to the sexual intriguing of grand ladies associated with the court of François Ier.

5.Contemporary feminist critics have tended to emphasise the sexual repressiveness of *Il libro del cortegiano*. See, for instance, Valeria Finucci's *The Lady Vanishes*, Carla Freccero's "Politics and Aesthetics in Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*," Giuseppa Battisti's "La Donna, le Donne," Adriana Chemello's "Donna di palazzo" and Ann Jones' "Nets and Bridles." However, it is clear that the ideal of the court lady and the deference that was due to her may have had a liberating effect in comparison with the ideals of wifely submissiveness and enclosure within the home promoted by works like Barbaro's *De re uxoria* and Leon Battista Alberti's *I libri della famiglia*.

6.For a discussion of the vogue for Italian "parlour games" in the sixteenth century, see T.F. Crane, *Italian Social Customs of the Sixteenth Century*, 263-322. Thomas Greene discusses this "slightly risky" (46) form of play in "*Il libro del cortegiano* and the Choice of a Game."

7.Michael B. Kline in *Rabelais and the Age of Printing* looks at the church's view that courtly romance incited its readers to lust. Susan Noakes' "On the Superficiality of Women" makes some very suggestive associations of romance with undisciplined female reading.

8.Discussions of the storytellers' identities include Betty Davis' *The Story-Tellers in Marguerite de Navarre's 'Heptaméron'*, J. Palermo's "L'Historicité des devisants de *l'Heptaméron*," Nicole Cazauran's *L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (28-33), Lucien Febvre's *Amour sacré, amour profane* (184-87) and Marcel Tetel's "*L'Heptaméron*: Première nouvelle et fonction des devisants." Pierre Jourda, in *Marguerite d'Angoulême, duchesse d'Alençon*, discusses the historicity of the stories (766-86) as well as that of the storytellers (740-66).

9.In view of the predilection for wordplay in sixteenth-century courtly games, the line between permissible and impermissible levels of erotic suggestion in mixed-sex company was evidently of some concern. Girolamo Bargagli's *Dialogo de' giuochi* shows this. See T.F. Crane, 271.

10.Busson, *Les Sources du rationalisme*. Quoted in Jules Gelernt, *World of Many Loves*, 59.

11.M. Mignon *Les Affinités intellectuelles de l'Italie et de la France* (Paris: Hachette, 1923). Quoted in Jules Gelernt, 59.

12.Widely differing attempts to reconcile Marguerite's contradictions are John D. Lyons, "The *Heptaméron* and the Foundation of Critical Narrative," Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's 'Heptaméron'* and John D. Bernard, "Sexual Oppression and Social Justice."

13.Ann Jones and Nancy Vickers, in "Canon, Rule and the Restoration Renaissance," view Sainte-Beuve's alternately deferential and patronising treatment of Marguerite de Navarre and Louise Labé in the light of his literary, sexual and royalist politics.

14.See Abel Lefranc, *Grands écrivains francais*, 79-137 and 139-247. Further advocates of Marguerite's Neoplatonism are Philippe de Lajarte, T.F. Crane (449-452) and Pierre Jourda (371-75). Jules Gelernt writes convincingly on Marguerite's anti-Platonistic attempts to integrate ideal and real love, 56-65.

15.K.H. Hartley's *Bandello and the Heptaméron* demonstrates that while Marguerite derived the form of her work from Boccaccio (that is to say, the organising of the individual stories around a frame tale), she derived its content of "scandals... thinly disguised" (8) from Bandello.

16.Margaret Ferguson's "Recreating the Rules of the Game" sets Marguerite in a critical context of "subtle... *depreciation*" (154) and goes on to illustrate how Marguerite herself counteracts the belittlement of the female writer by integrating images of female authority into her text. Carla Freccero's "Rewriting the Rhetoric of Desire" makes Rolandine in novella 21 symptomatic of Marguerite's drive towards a vocabulary of transcendence: "by rewriting the motives of desire, by appealing to absolute authority, her rhetoric triumphs" (309). Colette Winn's "La dynamique appellative" focusses on female anonymity. Winn's "La loi du 'non-parler'" and Patricia Cholakin's *Rape and Writing in the 'Heptaméron'* also emphasise the silencing of women's discourses of the body.

17.Carla Freccero's "Rewriting the Rhetoric of Desire" compares "Bocaccio's motive of seduction" with Marguerite de Navarre's narrative strategies (300-302).

18.Quoted in Victoria Kirkham, "Boccaccio's Dedication to Women in Love" 334, from a letter written in 1373 to Maghinardo Cavalcanti. (*Opere latine minori*, A.F. Massèra, Bari, 1928. 211).

19.For discussions of Marguerite's reaction to Boccaccio's prologue, see Elizabeth Wright's "Marguerite Reads Giovanni: Gender and Narration in the *Heptaméron* and the *Decameron*" and John D. Bernard's "Realism and Closure in the *Heptaméron*." See also Lance K. Donaldson-Evans on the French Decamerons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The most interesting essays that place Marguerite's voice in the context of Boccaccio and other male writers are Margaret Ferguson's "Recreating the Rules of the Game" and Deborah Losse's "Authorial and Narrative Voice in the *Heptaméron*." Losse in particular notes Marguerite's "posture of restraint."

20.Lucien Febvre writes in *Amour sacré, amour profane* on the "pastime" in Marguerite de Navarre and some other sixteenth- century writers, 189. The traditional wisdom that female idleness leads to immorality is instinct in Christine de Pizan's insistence in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* on the necessity for ladies to "avoid idleness by setting about doing some work or task" (103).

21.Colette Winn's "La loi du non-parler" shows how in the *Heptaméron* wisdom is equated with silence and folly with outspokenness, and that this emphasis is bound up in the notion that women maintain their honour through remaining silent.

22.Mary J. Baker in "Rape, Attempted Rape and Seduction in the *Heptaméron*" writes of the conceptual overlap between rape and seduction in Marguerite's work. More than Patricia Cholakin (*Rape and Writing in the 'Heptaméron'*), she is prepared to say that Marguerite reveals the complicity of some of her female protagonists in their "rape." See also Carla Freccero, "Rape's Disfiguring Figures."

23.In book III of *Il cortegiano* the Magnifico cites exemplary women, the majority of whom are suicides who respond to forced marriages or rape not by seeking revenge or justice but by directing such violence towards themselves.

24.In the *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* Christine de Pizan attacks the sweet-talking male courtier as a hypocrite who, for all his gallant protestations, only wants to dishonour ladies. See *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 145-49.

25.There are numerous examples of the conceptual linkages between female sexuality, fortresses and besiegement. Castiglione writes, "non è ròcca tanto espugnabile né così ben diffesa, che essendo combattuta con la millesima parte delle machine ed insidie, che per espugnar il constante animo d'una donna s'adoprano, non si rendesse al primo assalto" (320). Richard Brathwaite, in equating women's garrulity with their sexuality, describes the teeth as a "garrison" for the tongue (*The English Gentlewoman*. London, 1613. 88. Quoted in Ann Jones, *The Currency of Eros*, 25). The founding metaphor of Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* is that of the walled city which guards women's honour. It is also the founding metaphor of François Billon's *Le Fort inexpugnable de l'honneur du sexe feminin* (Paris: d'Allyer, 1555). Imagery of woman as a fortress under siege also crops up in La Borderie's *Amye de cour* (116-19) and in Charles Fontaine's *La Contr'Amye du cour* (19), and is ubiquitous in Shakespeare.

26.Anne de Beaujeu, *Les Enseignements d'Anne d France à sa fille Susanne de Bourbon* (Ed. A. M. Chazard. Moulins: C. des Rosiers, 1878. 130). Quoted in Ann Jones, *The Currency of Eros*, 15.

27.Novellas 9 and 13 depict men who maintain silence about their love, but this is seen as an exception to the rule. Their taciturnity is expressed as a sincere concern for the virtue of the women they love. In this sense, these heroes are in fact *women*: the overwhelming argument of the *Heptaméron* is that while women are concerned to preserve their honour men only desire to take it away.

28.See Laurence Mall, "'Pierres ou Bestes,'" on the covertness of Floride's desire in novella 10 and the issue of sexual repression. Mall stresses "la similitude, le parallèle entre hommes et femmes dans le domaine d'une répression sexuelle qui a la religion pour base" (190). However, his essay draws attention to the point which I am making, which is that repression is at its most intense in Floride.

29.Huguet's *Dictionnaire de la langue Française du 16è siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1925) gives synonyms for Floride's vocabulary of response to Amadour that bear out the impression of violent feeling. "Affection" is given as "sensation, ce qu'on éprouve, émotion, passion, sentiment." "Affecter" is given as "désirer, rechercher, prétendre à." For "estonner" Huguet provides the synonyms "ébranler, étourdir, paralyser."

30.See Jonathan Hart, "'Till Forging Nature be Condemned of Treason,'" for a commentary on similar erotic imagery in Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," in particular when Venus stains her face with Adonis' blood.

31.The use of the face as synecdoche for the body goes from troubadour poetry through to the Renaissance sonnet, where the lover's sexual desire is centred in the face of the beloved and the eyes.

32.I am indebted to Carla Freccero's "Rape's Disfiguring Figures," which contains a brilliant analysis of novella 21's deployment of the face - "figure" in French - as a rhetorical figure. Floride's self-mutilation becomes "a gesture of feminine self-representation in the text" (239), the figure simultaneously of victimhood and of a desire turned against itself.

33.Nicole Cazauran comments aptly in *L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre*: "cette vertu de chasteté est pour les femmes ce qu'est la hardiesse pour les hommes, l'occasion de s'affirmer et de se révéler dans toute leur grandeur" (205).

34.See Carla Freccero's "Rewriting the Rhetoric of Desire" (307) on the relevance of "ce beau livre" in novella 21 and the perception of Chrétien de Troyes's *romans* as "incitement literature" from Dante onwards.

35.Carla Freccero argues most forcefully for the negation of Rolandine's desire in "Rewriting the Rhetoric of Desire in the *Heptaméron*." She claims that "the tale accomplishes the integration of the woman and of her voice into society and history through the renunciation of desire and its replacement by a rhetoric of transcendence" (310).

36. On Parlamente as mediator, see Margaret Ferguson, "Recreating the Rules," 183-4.

37. Ann Jones in "Nets and Bridles" draws attention to Guazzo's *La civil conversatione*, where a character named William assumes that "la conversatione delle donne" means talk about sex (290). She points out that here "'conversation,' like 'intercourse,' has two meanings: with men it is civil; with women it is sexual" (44).

38. For discussions of Parlamente as Marguerite's self-representation, see Maurice Tetel's "*L'Heptaméron*: première nouvelle et fonction des devisants" and Philippe Delajarte's "Le Prologue de *l'Heptameron* et le processus de production de l'oeuvre." See also Paul Chilton on the punning of Parlamente's name in his introduction to *The Heptameron*, 38.

39. The evidence for this is summed up in Patricia Cholakin's *Rape and Writing*, 9-11. Brantôme claims that he heard the story from his grandmother. She was the lady-in-waiting who held Marguerite's inkwell for her when she was travelling in her palanquin while writing the *Heptaméron*.

CHAPTER TWO

Mary Wroth's 'Urania': "Childish modesty which would a vertue prove in showing modest love"

> Women's honours especially theirs most admired (the admiration working against itselfe) are so nice to be touched, as they are like little Sluses, that but opened, let in Rivers, and Oceans of discourses, and so blots never to be salved any more then a Flood can be withstood, or turned backe.
> (*The Countess of Montgomerie's Urania* 508)

Mary Wroth incurred scandal and censure when she wrote *Urania*, the first known romance by a woman in English. Yet she wrote it in the reflected glory of her uncle's *Arcadia* and a family tradition of patronage and literary production which was among other things remarkable for its inclusion of women. Her aunt Mary Sidney was even written into the production of *Arcadia*. In dedicating the romance to his sister, Sidney drew on the time-honoured assumption that the genre was fitted to a female audience and even suggested that her role as reader and commentator was germane to its being written in the first place:

> Your dear self can best witness the manner [of composition], being done in loose sheets of paper, most of it in your presence; the rest by sheets sent to you as fast as they were done.
> (*New Arcadia* lix-lxii)

After his death, the Countess of Pembroke wrote herself still further into the romance by becoming its editor.

When Sir Philip Sidney's sister and niece became literary women, their activity was conditioned by notions of exemplarity in a peculiarly intense way. Sidney, held up as an example to his siblings from childhood, became the nation's model and hero when he died in 1586. Mary Sidney's career as a patron and as disseminator of her brother's ideas began after his death, and was motivated by her desire to keep the family flame alight (Hannay 59-63). Her publication of his "Defence of Poetry," "Arcadia" and "Astrophil and Stella" ensured that Sidney's methods of sophisticating English literature in line with French and Italian genre models fed directly into the mainstream of English literature. Her "schoole" of poets, translators, playwrights and clerics at Wilton furthered the commemoration of Sidney and the dignifying of English literature. It combined the intellectual seriousness of the Italian academy with the courtly values

of her brother's writing: as well as being described as a "schoole" and a "college" for "learned and ingeniose persons," Wilton was compared to Castiglione's apotheosis of social grace, the court of Urbino.[1]

The Countess of Pembroke was the greatest of a generation of Tudor grand ladies whose patronage of writers was spurred by their humanistic education and ideals, and perhaps also by Elizabeth I's example of female influence.[2] At least thirty books were dedicated to her. Typically, they would refer to her family connections. The most famous commemoration of the Countess is Spenser's in "Colin Clout's Come Home Again":

> Urania, sister unto Astrofell,
> In whose brave mynd, as in a golden cofer,
> All heavenly gifts and riches locked are:
> More rich then pearles of Ynde, or gold of Opher,
> And in her sex more wonderfull and rare. (541)

In Greek myth Urania is a muse and a goddess of spiritual love, while in Sidney's *Arcadia* she figures as a shepherdess. The Countess' spiritual and intellectual qualities as writer and friend to writers are celebrated, but she is also made into a product of her brother's imagination. The image persisted. Barnaby Barnes sued for Mary Sidney's patronage with a sonnet which paid tribute to her "late sainted brother" and identified her as the "Muses cheefe comfort, of the muses hatch'te:/ On whom Urania hath so long time watch'te" (132). Likewise, Nathaniel Baxter dedicated his poem "Sir Philip Sidney's Ourania" to Mary Sidney in the name of her brother, "great Astrophill" (A2), and associated her with Ourania as the symbol of Sidneyan literary prowess.

In entitling her prose romance *Urania*, Mary Wroth alluded directly to her family's tradition of literary achievement. Her uncle's and aunt's association with the avant garde of Elizabethan letters must have been a source of confidence; certainly, she advertised her connections on *Urania*'s title page. The tradition extended further than merely the activities of Mary and Philip Sidney. Wroth's father Robert Sidney was a poet and her mother Barbara Gamage was a patron, as were several members of the Gamage family.[3] Her cousin and iover William Herbert was joint dedicatee of Shakespeare's first folio, patron to Jonson, and himself a poet. Jonson in turn made much of Mary Wroth and of the fact that she was a Sidney. The only play he ever dedicated to a woman, *The Alchemist*, he dedicated to Mary Wroth, praising

her literary judgement because it was that of a Sidney. And in a poem addressed to her, Jonson reiterated his point by asserting that it was sufficient praise simply to "say you are/ A Sidney" (58).

But it is "Urania, sister unto Astrofell," Wroth's aunt Mary Sidney, whose literary identity provides the most instructive comparison with Wroth's own. For both of them, writing was shaped as much by secondariness and caution as by the privilege and relative emancipation of their rank and literary culture. Mary Sidney, while amending and rewriting sections of her brother's prose romance, did not publicise the fact. Her other works were translations of Petrarch's *Trionfi* and the Psalms of David. The latter were an exemplary form of literary activity for a woman of her class and education, uniting the modest stance of the translator with post-Reformation patriotism and Protestant piety.[4] Mary Sidney, repeatedly invoked as the inconsolably mourning sister of her model brother by her contemporaries, was the dedicatee of numerous religious works which framed her and her "little court" at Wilton in religious terms and addressed her with sober reverence and respect.[5] Nicholas Breton casts her as a rather dour and morally elevated figure who, when "the poets came, and brought in their inventions/... well... knew their fancies were but fained" (Hannay 136). Commenting on Breton's description of her in his work, Margaret Hannay writes "the countess is presented with all the wonders of the world but she is not seduced" (136). The only poems addressed to her which have a strain of erotic feeling are Samuel Daniel's "Delia" poems: yet Delia is presented as "a modeste mayde, deckt with a blush of honour" and distinguished by "Chastitie" (sigB3v). She is an unseduceable figure, if fetchingly so, and her position and reputation remain intact.

Ben Jonson, however, in a sonnet which finds no parallel in any of his other poems dedicated to great ladies, declares himself to be seduced by Mary Wroth.

> I, that have been a lover, and could show it,
> Though not in these, in rhythms not wholly dumb,
> Since I exscribe your sonnets, am become
> A better lover, and much better poet.
> Nor is my muse, or I ashamed to owe it
> To those true numerous graces, whereof some
> But charm the senses, others overcome
> Both brains and hearts; and mine now best do know it:
> For in your verse all Cupid's armory,
> His flames, his shafts, his quiver and his bow,

> His very eyes are yours to overthrow.
> But then his mother's sweets you so apply,
> Her joys, her smiles, her loves, as readers take
> For Venus' ceston every line you make. (175)

Jonson's opening lines are raffishly suggestive. After setting out his own credentials at the level of sexual rather than poetic prowess, he goes on to speak of Mary Wroth's love sonnets in the same vein. Not only is Wroth's verse availed of "all Cupid's armory," it is also possessed of the "sweets" of Cupid's mother, Venus. Jonson declares himself charmed, overcome, overthrown. He caps it all with the statement that her every line is like a girdle from the goddess of love: "For Venus' ceston every line you make." In the fourteenth book of Homer's *Iliad*, such a girdle is said to have the power to arouse passion in anyone who views it. As Mary Ellen Lamb has wryly commented, "the content of Wroth's sonnet sequence, which consists largely of sad poems by an abandoned woman narrator written in conventions that were by then old-fashioned, does not account for the intensity of this erotic reaction" (155).

While the flirtatiousness of Jonson's response to Wroth's poetry can be taken as courtly flattery, its tone of sexual suggestion seems to be provoked by an assumption that Wroth was "asking for it" in penning love sonnets. Her audacity in not only writing but publishing love poetry is underlined by the fact that no Englishwoman for the next fifty years - that is, no Englishwoman until the disreputable Aphra Behn, in the heyday of Restoration libertinism - published poems about sexual love under her own name. There was a general consensus that Wroth's romance and the love poems that accompanied it were *risqué*. Sir Aston Cokayne commented in his poem "A Remedy for Love" that "The Lady *Wrothe's Urania* is repleat/ With elegancies, but too full of heat."[6] And Sir Edward Denny, enraged by *Urania* because he was satirised in it, underlined Mary Wroth's breach of appropriate subject matter and gender decorum when he adjured her to

> redeeme the tym with writing as large a volume of heavenly layes and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toyes that at the last you may followe the rare, and pious, example of your vertuous and learned aunt.[7]

In choosing to write a neo-Greek pastoral romance post-scripted by a sonnet sequence in the second decade of the seventeenth century, Mary Wroth was being anachronistically Elizabethan. Yet in

drawing on the illustrious literary precedent of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* she was legitimating an act of writing that was, for an Englishwoman of her time, nothing short of trailblazing. Drawing on the secularised Petrarchan poetics of the late Renaissance and eschewing the religious content that women writers continued to prefer almost exclusively for the next half a century, *Urania* is almost exclusively about sexual love. While it is chaste and restrained beside other Renaissance romances - notably the *Arcadia* - it nevertheless teems with women who love, and who confess their love in poetry as well as in speech. It shows considerable sympathy for married women who desire men other than their husbands; it describes lesbian love with a decorous compassion quite absent from Sidney's rambunctious sketches; and it represents female desire in a way which both marginalises male desire and points up the constraints on women's exercise of their own. Rather than providing the inspiration for male poetic subjectivity, Mary Wroth's Urania represents a woman's right to her own subjectivity; and her own desire. Deriving legitimacy from the Sidneyan literary tradition, she also marks a break with it.

Beside her niece's writing, Mary Sidney's oeuvre is pious and restrained. Her identification with literary causes appears to have as its *raison d'être* the subsuming of her identity in her brother's. Yet Mary Sidney's literary trajectory in some senses parallels that of her more overtly provocative niece. As well as publishing Philip Sidney's works, the Countess of Pembroke promulgated the production of Senecan-style historical tragedies and placed herself firmly in the avant-garde of English letters by activating her brother's demand for an elevated drama of "notable moralitie" and "stately speeches." When in 1592 she published her own translation of Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine*, she took what was an "unusually aggressive step for an Elizabethan noblewoman" (Waller 107). Finally, her piety did not stop her from translating works in which women voice their own desire. In doing so she predicts some of the attitudes to be found in *Urania*.

Mary Sidney's *Tragedie of Antonie* sets up a familiar dialectic between the corrosive effects of Anthony's and Cleopatra's pleasure and the heroism of their devotion to each other. In the play, Cleopatra's desire comes centre-stage. Estranged from the Egyptian queen, Anthony blames her for luring him away from Rome and discourses with his Roman friends on "the hurtfull workes of pleasure" (II iv).

Cleopatra, by contrast, repeatedly proclaims the constancy of her love. In the final act, after Anthony has committed suicide, she gives voice to a longing elevated by the fact that it cannot be consummated and ennobled by her invocations to loving beyond the grave. It is doubtful that Mary Sidney would have translated lines such as these if they were spoken about a man who was still alive;

> But kisse him now, what rests me more to doe?
> Then let me kisse you, you faire eies, my light,
> Front seat of honour, face most fierce, most faire!
> O neck, o armes, o hands, o breast where death
> (O mischiefe) comes to choake up vitall breath.
> A thousand kisses, thousand thousand more
> Let you my mouth for honors farewell give:
> That in this office weake my limmes may growe,
> Fainting on you, and fourth my soule may flow.
> (V n.pag)

Sensuality is given rein but, as with Petrarchan desire, the unattainability of the beloved ensures that love takes on a spiritual cast.

This pattern is repeated in Mary Sidney's translation of Petrarch's "Trionfo della morte." Here, the silent and elusive Laura, having "foy'led the mightie foe" of lust, meets her death. This moment of heavenly apotheosis emphasises Laura's chastity "more whitelie pure,/ Than snow on wyndless hill" (67). She then reappears to Petrarch in a vision and tells how she virtuously suppressed her desire while alive. When she treated him with aloofness and disdain, she was not merely repelling his passion but concealing her own.

> Thou sawe'st what was without, not what within,
> And as the brake the wanton steede doeth tame,
> So this did thee from thy disorders winne.
> A thousand times wrath in my face did flame,
> My heart meane-while with love did inlie burne,
> But never will, my reason overcame. (76)

The gesture of closure is doubly inscribed. Not only does Laura's virtue conquer her desire but we only find out that she has desired *after* she is dead, so that any too-titillating play between coldness and availability is kept at one remove. Nevertheless, Laura admits to her secret pleasure in loving Petrarch:

> S'al mondo tu piacesti agli occhi miei,
> Questo mi taccio; pur quel dolce nodo
> mi piacque assai che intorno al cor avei;

e piacemi il bel nome, se vero odo,
che lunge e presso col tuo dir m'acquisti. (88-89)

Mary Sidney, in her translation of these lines, goes one better. Where Petrarch makes Laura admit to her pleasure in the fame she gained from his poems - "piacemi il bel nome" - Mary Sidney reiterates the point that Laura took pleasure in the *flame* of her desire: "And wel lykes (if true it be) my flame" (77). In terms of the rhyme scheme as well as the accuracy of the translation, "fame" would have fitted perfectly. This 'slip of the tongue' resembles "la langue fourchant" which Marguerite de Navarre defined as a right (or rite) of femininity in the *Heptaméron*. Here, however, it is a function of translation - a form favoured by Renaissance women, as they could protect their reputations by writing in the image of another's authority. The original text acts as a kind of shield. Where Mary Sidney speaks through the voices of desiring women in "The Triumph of Death" and *The Tragedie of Antonie* she ensures that neither woman can be construed as making a sexual overture. Love is sealed off, spiritualised and sanctified by death.

Referring to the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Petrarch, Gary Waller claims,

> The combination of high romantic love and the *ubi sunt* theme - a combination found, as we have seen, in the *Antonie* - seemingly appealed strongly to the Countess of Pembroke. It reflects, one might speculate, her own deeply idealised love for her brother, the impossibility of its consummation and the realisation that his poetic inspiration for her is the only real and lasting fruit of her love. (144)

Yet the twin themes of a constant love that can never reach fruition and a love that finds its *raison d'être* in concealment pervade Mary Wroth's *Urania* as well. There had also been the precedent of Pamela's virtuous suppression of her desire in Sidney's *Arcadia*. The thematic continuity suggests the workings of literary convention and of social as much as personal forces. Mary Wroth's and Mary Sidney's construction of female desire as rigorously bounded by death and silence was inevitably affected by cultural constraints on the expression of female desire in the first place.

The genres chosen by each of them testify to a shift as well as a continuity in the culture of aristocratic women in Tudor and Jacobean England. To use the generic distinction made by Nicholas Udall in 1548, Mary Wroth embraced a literature of continentalised "courtly dalliance" over the sober and humanistically "virtuous exercises of reading and writing" pursued by her aunt's generation.[8] Differently

from her aunt, she participated in a court society where women took part in theatrical performances that directly contravened the ideal of female silence and invisibility. In Mary Wroth's writing, an urge towards self-display is balanced against the ideal of self-concealment to which her aunt's writing bears witness. Queen Anne's penchant for masques performed by ladies of the court countered the Puritan sobriety of the previous generation of aristocratic women. Mary Wroth appeared in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *Masque of Beauty* (1608) at the court of James I, and was specifically praised for her gracefulness on stage. She was in all likelihood present at other masques staged by Jonson between 1606 and 1611.[9] In another literary act unprecedented in a woman of her generation - or, as far we know, in any woman for the next thirty years - she actually wrote a courtly play, *Love's Victorie*.[10] The manuscript was owned by Sir Edward Dering, who had put on theatricals at his house. Friends and neighbours had taken part in these; probably in the early 1620's, when *Love's Victorie* was itself written. It is possible that Wroth appeared in a performance of her own play at Dering's.[11]

The masques of Jonson - whose literary, theatrical and personal links with Mary Wroth were manifold - suggest with peculiar force the ways in which new elements of licence towards women's role in court society were offset against ideas of order, rectitude and virtue. As Stephen Orgel has pointed out, masques "created heroic roles for the leaders of society" and did not merely involve members of the court in the lowly activity of actorly impersonation (*The Illusion of Power* 39). Rather, masques offered them a chance to act out idealised versions of their true selves. When Orgel makes this comment he is talking of kings and queens rather than the nobility. Still, spectacles such as Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*, a heroic masque designed for Queen Anne and her ladies, testify to new roles of symbolic empowerment for noblewomen within a medium whose intoxicating and transforming effects were recognised and feared.

Masques were traditionally associated with the "licentiousness" of their Italian counterparts (*The Jonsonian Masque* 27). Jonson's own masques contain within themselves a strain of anti-theatricalism (Barish 152). Associating masques with frivolity and ostentation, he actually praised Mary Wroth's husband for avoiding them (*Poems* 91-2)! And Sir Dudley Carleton, after seeing *The Masque of Blackness* - in which Lady Wroth herself appeared - suggested that the women players were not ennobled but debased by

their adoption of theatrical personae and costumery: "their apparell was rich, but too light and curtezan-like for such great ones."[12] His view of the female masquers as courtesan-like displays the most durable of prejudices against the theatre. William Prynne's Puritan diatribe of 1633 inveighs against the theatre's "effeminate lust-provoking Musicke" and "over-costly effeminate, strange, meretricious, lust-exciting apparell," testifying to a common perception of the theatre as a place of sensuality and sexual arousal (Barish 86). Where the male actor's deviance stems from his capacity to seduce his audience, the female actor is doubly deviant because her seductiveness defies the rule of feminine modesty. And where the theatre has traditionally been feared and reviled for its transgression of limits, of social codes and stable identities, women who went on stage - even if only in the controlled context of the court masque - may have enjoyed a sense of unleashed potential that temporarily demolished the constraints of "proper" femininity.

Wroth frequently uses images of stage spectacle in *Urania*. Several masques take place in the romance, and plot-turning magical occurrences take place within theatres. The prophet of *Urania*, Mellissea, who has a Prospero-like ability to engineer the actions of the other characters through her magic, writes and stages her own masques. That Wroth associated herself as author with this activity is evident when in the manuscript continuation of *Urania* she describes the romance as a play in which a "new seane must be found and fram'd" for an immodest woman-lover to act.[13] The immodesty of the woman lover is key, as is the implied immodesty of the romance itself. Desire and femininity are here conceived of as performance, and performance is conceived of as a breach of femininity. Thus the prince Antisius' usurping step-mother, of "passions immoderate and ungovernable" (59), is described in the act of trying to seduce a gentleman as "a delicate play-boy act[ing] a woman's part" (60).

Yet the masque is also a figure for public recognition, acclaim and pleasure. In one of the most vivid and plangent passages in the romance, Wroth describes life at court as a masque. Lindamira, a thinly-veiled representation of Wroth herself, has enjoyed the favour of her queen, only to find herself thrown into pastoral obscurity but without knowing why.[14] The narrator describes her "returning like one in a gay Masque, the night pass'd, they are in their old clothes againe, and no appearance of what was" (424). If

the "gay Masque" of being in the public eye is associated by Lindamira with pleasure, might not the immodest self-display of romance authorship also be a form of gratification for Wroth, herself exiled from court in the country?

Certainly, in publishing *Urania* she made a public spectacle of herself. The romance, which was among other things a *roman à clef*, attracted attention from members of the Jacobean court. Wroth's incorporation of thinly-disguised incidents and personalities from the court provoked anger and recrimination and seems to have been the calculated provocation of an embittered ex-courtier who wanted the world to know she still existed.[15] She alluded to the private scandals of a number of influential families. Although only one of her contemporaries, Lord Denny, accused her of referring to him personally in *Urania*, John Chamberlain claimed she had offended others besides Denny: "Many others she makes bold with, and they say she takes great libertie or rather licence to traduce whom she please, and thinckes she daunces in a net."[16] Wroth also criticised the Jacobean court and bemoaned the way it had mistreated her by speaking through the persona of Pamphilia, who is constantly out of sympathy with the "painted outsides" and "fauning, smiling face" (*Poems* 96) of court life. Unsurprisingly, sales of the book were stopped soon after it was published.

Arguably, it was not just *Urania*'s penchant for rehashing scandals but the fact that it was about sexual love which made its publication into an act of protest. Wroth's fall from favour was in all likelihood linked to her affair with her first cousin, William Herbert, by whom she had two illegitimate children.[17] Yet for all her contentiousness, unconventionality and even exhibitionism, Mary Wroth places a high value on the quality of discretion in *Urania*. The Lindamira episode is instructive. Here, Wroth is self-revealing by means of an analogue which veils its real reference at the same time as hinting at it. Pamphilia, who was recognised by Wroth's contemporaries as a figure for the author herself, recounts the story of another woman, Lindamira, only for her narratee Dorolina to conclude that the tale is "something more exactly related then a fixion, yet her discretion taught her to be no inquisitor" (429). The comment underlines the fact that Lindamira is really Pamphilia; who is ultimately Mary Wroth. It also suggests *shared* assumptions about the uses of narrative as a covert form of communication not unlike that of the lovers in the frame

tale of the *Heptaméron*. The circumspection is essentially courtly. George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie* writes that "the Courtly figure *Allegoria*, is... when we speake one thing, and thinke another, and that our words and meanings meete not" (186). He conjures up a world where knowing indirection is an accepted part of social discourse. Wroth, like Marguerite de Navarre, is comfortable in the mode of the veiled reference.

Discretion, which is here another word for tact, is a decorous upper class virtue. It is also, specifically, a virtue of feminine conduct. Gaspare in *Il libro del cortegiano* recommends discretion to the female sex (273) and the Magnifico provides the rationale for it. The court lady

> deve ancor esser più circunspetta ed aver più riguardo di non dar occasion che di sé si dica male, e far di modo che non solamente non sia macchiata di colpa, ma di suspizione, perché la donna non ha tante vie di difendirsi dalle false calunnie, come ha l'omo. (265)

Discretion is a byproduct of that most valued of feminine virtues, an unblemished sexual reputation. Unsurprisingly, then, the paragon Pamphilia is introduced early on as "the most silent and discreetly retir'd of any Princesse" (50). Yet, as Mary Ellen Lamb has observed, Pamphilia's is a peculiarly "noisy silence" (187). She writes passionate love sonnets as a way of giving vent to feelings she does not want to display publically, even though people in the romance do end up reading - and energetically admiring - her poems. Likewise, the poetry collection "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus" was read by Wroth's contemporaries. Working in the tradition of the pseudonymous sonnet sequence that her uncle helped promote, Wroth did not stop at leaving her sonnets in manuscript form but actually published them, thereby courting the class and sexual debasement attendant upon "vulgar fame." However, in embedding the love poetry of Pamphilia in a narrative fiction that emphasised her struggle for secrecy, Wroth found a way to stage both desire and authorship with an appearance of modesty and decorum. Where Pamphilia characteristically masks her inner turmoil in the service of modest discretion, Wroth coyly enters the public gaze as a love poet by means of a strenuous discourse on secrecy. The value she places on discretion is highlighted by the example of female sonneteers on the continent such as Louise Labé and Gaspara Stampa, who appended their names to published lyric poetry where they expressed desire in a comparatively uncensored fashion.

In Mary Wroth's writing, a flaunting of accepted gender decorum is accompanied by a strong

emphasis on what cannot be said and must not be shown in matters of private passion. At the same time, the mechanics of discretion are exposed to view. Women's modesty, a much-favoured virtue in the romance, is the ability "to discern men's understandings by their arguments, but no way to show it by [their] own speech" (7). Modesty is a decorous pretence not unlike Doralina's discretion which "taught her to be no inquisitor." There is a kind of double think at work. Allegory is also used - immodestly - as a vehicle for complaint and for the celebration of the heroine's virtuous long-suffering. The main female character in the romance, Pamphilia, is a paragon of self-restraint who nevertheless gets to expose the extremity of her passion by means of poetic outpourings which she keeps secret from other characters in the romance but not from its readers. Characters in *Urania* frequently inveigh against the fickleness of men, a fickleness borne out by events and brought into focus by characters such as Pamphilia whose moral superiority is not discreetly retired but foregrounded. The virtue of the heroine disbars her from pleasure but gives her the right to speak, which is in itself a kind of pleasure.

Mary Wroth's mix of complaint, pro-women polemic and semi-veiled self-display must be set in the context of Jacobean women's rebellion against restraints on their education and social freedom. The atmosphere of restraint was exacerbated by the king's personal dislike for women and his promotion of repressive measures against their claiming of masculine liberties (Warnicke 194-5). The measures seem in some instances to have had the opposite effect: Wroth's 'frowardness' is characteristic of other women writers of the period. Joseph Swetnam's 1615 pamphlet, *The Arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women*, sparked a prominent controversy in which three women took up literary cudgels against misogyny.[18] Before 1615 there had only been one female-authored defence of women, written by Jane Anger in 1589. Yet in 1620, the year before *Urania*'s publication and only three years after the Swetnam debate, another literary-sexual battle erupted. This time the controversy over women centred on their adoption of masculine clothing styles. The flamboyance of these fashions, associated with city women and loose city living, was glorified in the pamphlet *Haec Vir; or, the Womanish Man* as a symbol of women's freedom. This stereotype of aggressive, dynamic femininity was also celebrated in Dekker's and Middleton's 1610 play *The Roaring Girl*. Women's claims to the right to be active and visible, whether

in the closed world of the court masque, the public domain of the city street or the realm of printed polemic, was accompanied by compensating claims to superior virtue.[19]

Elizabethan romances and the inculcation of virtue

Women's polemical defence and celebration of their sex during James I's reign was rooted in the medieval *Querelle des femmes* and in the humanist ideas of virtue and fame that had taken hold in the previous generation. The Countess of Pembroke was one out of a number of Elizabethan patronesses whose interest in creating monuments to the glory of their families was linked to the personal glory they gained from having their names associated with cultural artifacts. Mary Sidney was preoccupied by the fate of her reputation and renown after death just like any Elizabethan man, and her dissemination of her brother's works and ideas furthered her own fame as much as his.[20] Her predilection for written tributes to her virtue, and male writers' eagerness to shower them upon her, find many echoes in the novella collections and romances that were dedicated to women from the fifteen fifties to eighties.[21] Robert Greene, the popularity of whose romances made Thomas Nashe dub him "the Homer of women," offered his tale *Penelope's Web* "as a monument" to the virtue of the countesses of Cumberland and Warwick (5:142). In a rhetorical move typical of Elizabethan romance writers, Greene makes the virtue of Penelope mirror their own and in the same breath strikes a note of warning and instruction. He announces that the stories shall function as a "Christall Myrrour of faeminine perfection... breeding a kind of delight, but with repentance" (5:142).

Tipping the balance of Sidney's Horatian formula for writing, Greene's romances emphasise profit over pleasure. The vogue for addressing edifying narratives about love, courtship and constancy to a female audience owes much to Bandello's more bawdy and cynical tales, which came to England via Belleforest's and Boaistuau's French translations (first published in Paris in 1559). The popular Bandellian novella collections of George Pettie and Barnaby Rich, published in 1576 and 1581 respectively, used the medieval convention of addressing a female audience and emphasised the glory women could gain from making

themselves examples of virtue. The earliest collections of exclusively Bandellian tales translated from the French was Geoffry Fenton's *Certaine Tragicall Discourses* (1567), which was dedicated to Mary Sidney. The inculcation of female chastity and its elevation to the level of heroic cause are already visible. René Pruvost, commenting on Elizabethan romance writers' moralisation and sentimentalisation of Bandello's tales, writes of Fenton that "perhaps nothing is so striking in this respect as the words through which his heroines announce their resolve of leading honest, chaste lives" (193). Pruvost shows that English novella collections had more in common with the "rhetorical and edifying love" (200) promoted by Bandello's French translators than with the Italian writer's fabliau-based realism, humour and penchant for clever adulteresses. The English writers expanded on the moralism of the French, so that Marguerite de Navarre's praise of feminine virtue, her ideals of the restraint of the passions and of refined feeling, manners and language are taken one step further.

Elizabethan romance authors increasingly concentrated on targeting a female audience, something already visible in embryonic form in Fenton's dedicatory address to Mary Sidney. The very first English novella collection, William Painter's 1566 *Palace of Pleasure*, was an eclectic mix of well-used antique and contemporary tales which he did not see fit to address to women. Nor, as his title's emphasis on pleasure suggests, did he think it necessary to moralise in his dedication. His *Palace of Pleasure* stood on its own as a set of self-justifying histories. Geoffry Fenton's 1567 dedication begins with the same sweepingly humanistic approach, defending the stories because they are historical and the study of history breeds wisdom. When he goes on to reflect that his dedicatee and implied audience is female, however, he mentions the duties of wives to their husbands and maids to their chastity, defending the stories against charges of "vanytyes or fonde practises in love." The tales' function shifts once their audience is gendered as female, and the universal lessons of history are substituted for the inculcation of sexual virtue.

Linda Woodbridge has suggested that Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* was shaped by an awareness of a ready female readership that had been stimulated by the popular controversy over women in the preceding decade (117). Five years earlier, the controversy had produced several tracts that were highly successful in market terms. Typically, polemicists pitted examples of the self-sacrificing Good Woman

(Lucretia, Alcestis, Griselde) against examples of the licentious Bad Woman (Semiramis, Medea, Sappho). These examples, and the structure of thought they express, feed directly into Elizabethan romances and novellas. Thus it is of no surprise that Geoffry Fenton, George Pettie and Barnabe Rich penned conduct literature; nor that Rich wrote a defence of women; nor that their fiction often incorporates set pieces from the formal controversy.[22] And it is of no surprise that these works were filled with injunctions to chastity. The theme begins to infuse the romance genre and change its structure as the chivalric virtues of the medieval knight fade from view and authors take it upon themselves alternately to flatter and reprimand a bourgeois audience of aspiring 'gentlewomen' with images of their own refinement and virtue.

Celebration of women's chastity is mingled with the promotion of high-toned courtship rituals in scenes that derive from Marguerite de Navarre, Castiglione and, ultimately, Boccaccio. Where George Whetstone's 1576 story collection *The Rocke of Regard* rather unimaginatively dedicates one separate section out of four to the virtue of ladies, his 1582 *Heptameron of Civill Discourses* obtains a greater sense of involvement by using a frame tale to organise its story material. Four men and women are gathered at a Christmas house party and decide to spend their nights telling stories as a group and their days paired off in couples discussing the niceties of love theory. The scenario -in particular the pairing off of couples - is geared to courtship and flirtation. It also offers a fantasy to men and women aspiring to higher social status by assembling "sundrie well courted Gentlemen and Gentlewomen" in Europe's centre for refined manners, Italy. Its themes derive from literary convention; one day is spent on the *Querelle des femmes*, discussing "whether woman be capable of reaching as great perfection as man." They also derive from the kind of Protestant marriage theory that could incorporate the concerns of a bourgeois audience; other days are spent on tales which illustrate "the respective advantages of the married and the single state; whether it is good for parents not to consult the inclination of their children when marrying them; which should be the main consideration in the choice of wife, with a warning against rash marriages," and so on.

The mingling of moral instruction and practical advice with discourses of courtliness and courtship is visible in further novella collections. For moral instruction, themes of suffering and punishment are pointedly drawn to the attention of a female audience. George Pettie's narrator in *A Petite Pallace of Pettie*

his Pleasure (1576) moralises Pasiphae's "lewde" love for Minos thus:

> Women ought to spin with Penelope, to spill with Camma, to kill with Lucrece, to be slaundred with Susanna, with Savoy, and with others, to indure any torment, rather then to lose one jote of their chastity and honesty. (227)

His examples from antiquity and the Old Testament privilege heroic virtue over romantic desire. Lucretia is almost invariably cited as an instance of high moral achievement in Elizabethan romances. Her example provides female readers with fantasies of public acclaim and recognition. However, Rich and Pettie also pay court to their female audience in tones of sexual suggestion. Before launching into his tale of the wayward Scilla, Pettie's narrator comments,

> But, gentlewomen, bicause most of you bee maydes (I meane at least taken so) I will manifest unto you the mischiefe of love by the example of a mayde, in that estate (though I hope not every way) like unto your selves, that admonished thereby, you may avoyde the like inconvenience in your selves. (147-8)

By turns flirted with and "admonished," Pettie's audience are kept in the lens of a male gaze. By and large, however, it is a gaze which reflects flattering images of women back to themselves.

Where narratives traditionally associated with pleasure rather than profit were embellished with sententious prefaces, asides and concluding comments, in a writer as focussed on his audience as Robert Greene their actual structure was changed to more closely accommodate the concern with sexual morality.[23] Greene, that "Homer of women," is particularly adept in his presentation of the female sex. His romances herald the eighteenth-century novel of "Virtue Rewarded" in their emphasis on the superiority of women's sexual virtue over men's. Greene's adaptation of the plot of Lyly's *Euphues* in his compulsively readable novel *Mamillia* illustrates the shift in values. He reversed the gender roles of Lyly's narrative about a man entangled with a fickle woman, elevating and naturalising the constancy of women by detailing its psychology in the heroines' protracted speeches of self-doubt and examination. Greene updates his heroines and places the antique heroism of female suicides such as Lucretia and Alcestis - whose attractions as role models for female readers could after all only be limited - at the margin of his roster of exemplarity. Penelope and Mamillia, the protagonists of the two romances most pointedly aimed at women readers, are exemplars of the domestic and wifely virtues of the contemporary conduct book:

of obedience, self-bridled desire and patient, judicious fidelity. More than other romance authors Greene adopts a tone of propriety, purging his tales of the satisfactions of fabliau. A character in *Perimedes* catches the self-conscious idealisation of this approach: "women are more glorious objects, and therefore have all men's eyes attentively bent upon them" (7:79). It is above all the showing that is important. Greene uses the image of the mirror more insistently than any of the other authors, incorporating it into the structure of his stories and taking advantage of its power as a metaphor for subjective identification as well as objective representation.[24] Where the mirror is closely associated with the reflection of moral example rather than of reality, Greene's narratives take on an expressly demonstrative, performative quality at the same time as they emphasise women's internalisation of the rules of virtue.

Greene's *Mamillia*, introduced as "A Mirrour or looking-glasse for the Ladies of Englande," demonstrates the virtue of the heroine by testing it. Mamillia falls in love with the courtly seducer Pharicles and resolves to resist him at all costs. As she says - in the characteristically self-distanced and self-policing tone of a Greene heroine - "the cloth is never tryed till it come to the wearing" (2:28). The ethos of *Mamillia* replicates the idea of the trial in the tale of Susannah and the elders and extends it to novel length. The narrative, in emphasising the hero's lack of these qualities, enhances the sense of moral superiority female readers may derive from identifying with the heroine's continence and constancy. Pharicles is "not faythful enough, a disease in men," suffering from lust: "a disease I doubt nowadayes reignes in many Italian gentlemen" (2:20, 35). He errs away from Mamillia and into the arms of the incautious Publia, only to be courted by the "monstrous" courtesan Clarynda - whose desire is also referred to as a disease, and who also happens to be Italian. But Mamillia eventually rescues Pharicles from death, winning him back to the path of virtue through the example of her own loyalty. The tale apologises for male mistreatment of women even as it flatters women into believing that they have power over men's behaviour and are the more virtuous sex. The parallels with Marguerite de Navarre's tale of "la dame saige" are numerous. Missing, however, is the protracted heroism of the female protagonist's restraint of her own desire.

Men's need to curb their lusting nature and women's role in tempering their "fury" is a theme that recurs in Elizabethan romances and novella collections, as it does in the *Heptaméron*. The most well-known

instance is Musidorus' attempted rape of Pamela in the *Old Arcadia* and his subsequent trial. Musidorus and Pyrocles are both punished for contravening the aristocratic code of chivalry, which - differently from its medieval incarnation - revolves not around the defence of women in mortal danger but around the defence of women's sexual honour and their reputations. Finally, where marriage is now love's goal, the protracted rapprochements and reversals of the novel of courtship begin to be visible, as well as the central role of women's deferrals of desire and their decision-making process.

As in Marguerite de Navarre, promoting women's virtue is conceived as promoting their interests, even though the glory a woman might derive from committing suicide in order to preserve her chastity is of a peculiar kind. Happily, the Elizabethan vogue for celebrating the chastity, patience and long-suffering of the female sex entails a more subversive and a more pragmatic emphasis on women's interests. Greene's Mamillia announces that marriage is "restraint of libertie" (2:50). George Pettie and Barnaby Rich repeatedly criticise "the covetous cruelty of... parents" whose greed prevents them from giving their daughters dowries and enabling them to marry (116). Typically, Protestant arguments against the commercial bartering of bride and groom are enlisted in support of arguments for women's right to choose a spouse freely, while women's defence of their chastity involves arguments against men's abuse of power on other levels.[25] In Pettie's "Sinorix and Camma" the chief governor of Sienna, in order to have his wicked way with a married woman, has her husband killed. As in Marguerite de Navarre's story of the prince and the village girl, sexual harrassment is associated with power of rank and office, while the upstanding sexual virtue of the lower-status woman represents a pro-feminist strain of egalitarianism (286-94).

Romance narrators, in their attempt to represent the interests of a female audience, habitually adopt a position of complicity with women's desires. Punitive moralising can shift with surprising rapidity into solidarity with women against authority.[26] George Pettie and Barnaby Rich, whose narratorial addresses to their women readers are particularly insistent, shift between bullying flirtation and sympathy with the audience they are wooing. George Pettie's tale "Scilla and Minos" describes Scilla's rejection of her father's choice of suitor for her and her pursuit of the man she loves. In terms which closely echo

Nomerfide's comments in the *Heptaméron* on the pleasure derived from the fulfillment of individual desire, she declares that she will not

> ... prefer the common wealth before mine owne private will: for that is onely I must marrie, which if I do to my liking, I am like to live pleasantly, if otherwise I am sure to live sowerly all the dayes of my life. (150)

Scilla proceeds to cut off her father's golden hair "whereon dependeth the stay of his state and the puissance of his power" and present it to King Minos, the object of her desire (161). He is unmoved, yet she still swims after his boat and in doing so drowns. The fact that, Delilah-like, she cuts off her father's beard, accentuates her rebellion. She pursues Minos even after he has rejected her, which adds to the image of willfulness. Thus her death, as Pettie does not fail to point out, comes as a just retribution for her various breaches of conduct:

> I am by this story chiefly to admonish you that you pull not of your fathers haire that is, yt you pul not their harts out of their bodies, in marriage with those who are not meet for you. (164-5)

But no sooner has Pettie confidently announced the story's moral than he switches tack:

> But (Soveraigne) now your father is gone, I will give you more sound advice: I will admonish you all not to pull of your owne haire, that is not to binde your selves to the froward fansi of your politique parents. (165)

Then he switches tack again:

> But, mum, *lupus in fabula*. I must (I say) admonish you yt as your parents gave you your bodies, so they may dispose of them.[27] (165)

In prefacing his last warning with the phrase "lupus in fabula" -"talk of the devil" - he suggests that he is only revising his opinion because someone (an irate parent, presumably) may overhear what he is saying. The story, then, is mock-cautionary. Its heroine's preference for her "owne private will" is slyly condoned, and a covert pact is set up between narrator and reader.

Romance authors writing for a female audience seem increasingly concerned not to alienate them. Where Painter and Fenton are unequivocal in their moralising, George Pettie sits on the fence. His comment on the story of Tereus and Progne is that,

> It were hard here, Gentlewoman, for you to give sentence, who more offended or the husband or the wife... in him such treason, in her such treachery; in him such falsness,

in her such furiousness; in him such devilish desire, in her such vengeful ire... (70)

Similarly he apportions blame equally between another doomed couple, Sinorix and Camma, taking care to praise the latter's chastity whilst condemning her cruelty.

The idealisation of virtue and sacrifice at times provides a cover for raunchier innuendoes. Barnaby Rich is illustrative: while Elizabethan writers borrowed very few of Bandello's fabliau-type tales, preferring stories of a more idealising and chivalric cast, Rich's "Phylotus and Emilia" is a signal exception to the rule and perfectly in keeping with his bluff attitude to the niceties of sexual conduct. In his *Farewell to Military Profession*, Rich - as the title suggests - is not wholly at ease with the idea of writing decorous stories for modest ladies. In a preface addressed to his female readers he describes his "Histories all treatyng (for reverence of you) of love" as "follies" (9-10). Casting himself as a blunt soldier unversed in the ways of talking to women, Rich creates a kind of licence for himself and for his female readers. In this context, his apology that "Of Two Brethren and their Wives," a story from Cinthio's *Gli hecatommithi* contains things "that might breede offence to your modest myndes" leaves him free to indulge his real bent (120). He tells the story of Doritie, a sharp-witted, unfaithful wife who prefers a soldier - like Rich himself - to all her other suitors. In posing the question whether it is "better to be married to an unfaithful woman or a scold" Rich cheerfully pronounces the former option superior because "the harte never greeves, what the eyes see not" (121). When one of Doritie's spurned lovers delivers an attack on women, Rich apologises and proceeds to make the soldier deliver a defence of them, identifying himself with the soldier as the ultimate ladies' man.

That Rich was a feminist hardly seems likely, but he probably perceived it was in his interests to be one. Clearly, his flattery and flirtatious manner might provide female readers with satisfactions that contravened the rule of chastity, silence and obedience. In this light, Roger Ascham's Puritan diatribes against the Italianisation of English culture have a point. Referring to Fenton's and Painter's collections, he inveighed against "books sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the soner to corrupt honest manners, dedicated over boldlie to vertuous and honorable personages, the easielier to beguile simple and innocent wittes" (75). He identifies the very real doubleness of purpose at play in works which

bruited their moral aims but nevertheless offered up sensational tales for their female audience's "pleasure." Ascham, who inveighed against the "bold bawdrye" of the *Morte d'Arthur*, was only the most loquacious and articulate of the many who viewed Italian tales as seduction manuals (74).

The seductiveness of the *double entendre*, the 'forking of language' which Marguerite de Navarre saw fit to defend, imbues the Elizabethan romance novella. Rich's signature epithet from his preface "To the right courteous gentlewomen, bothe of Englande and Irelande" became something of a saucy joke amongst his contemporaries. When he commended himself to his readers with the phrase "yours in the way of honesty" he was begging a question as to the virtue of his motives in writing (8). Shakespeare uses the joke in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Mistress Quickly assures Falstaff that she has refused bribes "in the way of honesty" (II.ii.74). However, the phrase is one in a battery of misarticulated formulations that suggest the very thing she is denying - i.e. that Mistress Page is a flirt. Thus to profess honesty is to profess its opposite, and - as Quickly's second malapropism suggests - to be a "fartuous civil modest wife" may not be very virtuous at all (II.ii.97).

Mistress Quickly's enthusiasm for the virtues of Mistress Page embraces a description of her friend's admirers from the court at Windsor: "Coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift; smelling so sweetly (all musk) and so rushling, I warrant you, in silk and gold; and all in such alligant terms" (II.ii.65-8). Her most effusive rhetoric is pressed into the service of a pseudo-aristocratic courtship fantasy, suggesting an imagination in the grip of euphuistic romance, with its upper class characters, its intricate courtship rituals and its conflation of highly ornamented language with courtship itself. In *The Guls Horne-Booke* - published in 1609, seven years after *The Merry Wives of Windsor* - Thomas Dekker describes fashionable ladies as "Arcadian and Euphuizd" (30). Mistress Quickly, in euphuising both herself and Mistress Page, launches herself breathlessly into an imaginative realm where sexual fantasy and social success go hand in hand. For all the bullying moralism of romance narrators, their tales were associated as much with the pleasure of ladies as with their improvement.

When Mistress Quickly goes on to describe her friend's daily existence, word-use of a bawdier sort comes into play;

> Do what she will, say what she will, take all, pay all, go to bed when she list, rise when she list, all is as she will. (II.ii.117-20)

"Will" carries the same double meaning as it does in the Shakespeare sonnets that play on the fact that the word stands for his proper name, his desire and his penis. Mistress Quickly suggests the roving errancy of movement of the woman who does what she pleases. Once again, there are connections with romance. Sir Thomas Overbury describes a chambermaid who

> ...reads *Greenes* works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Myrrour of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to run out of her selfe, and become a Ladie Errant.[28]

Women's reading of romances was frowned upon by the Elizabethans as it had been by generations before them. The assumption, in Edward Hake's words, that the girl "nouseled in amorous bookes, vaine stories and fonde trifling fancies... smelleth of naughtinesse even al hir lyfe after," is of great longevity.[29] The belief that women's reading of romances would lead to their enactment of them seems also to have played into a fear that such reading would produce writing. Thomas Powell in 1631 joined a throng of critics of Sidney's romance when he wrote that "instead of reading Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, let them [women] read the ground of good huswifery. I like not a female poetess at any hand."[30] The female reader is automatically assumed to be a writer. Powell's fear is borne out by the growth in women's authorship of romances. However, the immodest poetess has learned the lessons of good conduct.

The association of romances with the moral improvement of women is an early modern phenomenon. It was probably exacerbated by patriarchal anxieties at a growing female readership oriented as much toward entertainment literature as the pious books so assiduously recommended them. Linked at least since Castiglione with the delineation of aristocratic manners and linguistic good conduct, romance-novellas increasingly celebrated the heroic virtue of lovers, in particular of loyal women. Marguerite de Navarre's desire to make her work reflect feminine virtue suggests that female authors may also have influenced its development, while the subsequent popularity of the *Heptaméron* may have played a role in legitimating their writing of such tales.

It is not surprising that Margaret Tyler, the first female translator of chivalric romance into

English, defended women's prerogative to write as well as read romances by declaring that they inspired their readers to virtue. Making her appeal in 1578, Tyler echoed the tone of the virtue-provoking romances which were becoming so fashionable. The blurry line between novellas and romances may have enhanced the fashion. Antique heroines such as Penelope and Alcestis shade into Griseldas, Rolandines and, finally, into Robert Greene's Mamillia. Staunch virtue takes over from errantry. Thus in *The Whores Rhetorick*, written in 1683, the bawd Creswel announces her dislike of the genre, advising her initiate to avoid it:

> I am against your reading Romances, where constancy in love is cryed up as a vertue and dying Lovers make up a great part in the pageantry.[31]

Constancy and death immobilise desire on the one hand and preserve it on the other by delivering it from the mutability of lived time. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, "marble-constant" on the verge of death, raises her moral status by using this image of self-containment and durability (V.ii.240). Her moment of self-monumentalisation is typical of early modern attitudes to women, particularly in romances. The monumentalising of women is an argument for their virginal intactness, their coldness, their dignity and their unblemishable reputations.[32] Yet representative examples of monumentalised women in Shakespeare - Hero and Hermione - serve to dignify helplessness and passive suffering. They are commemorated as monuments in compensation for male cruelty. In Abbe Blum's words, "the woman is literally or figuratively enclosed by projected ideas, another's will" (101).

In this sense they deviate wildly from the self-will of so many of the questing heroines of Renaissance literature, in particular those of romance. In earlier Renaissance romance-epics such as *Orlando furioso* and *The Faerie Queene*, female knight errantry constitutes the apex of a generic tendency to ennoble female desire and aspiration. Like Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*, Bradamante in *Orlando furioso* is a heroic woman for whom desire is a legitimate quest rather than an immodest roving. The two of them go in search of love and glory as freely, apparently, as any man. The prose romances of Robert Greene and, subsequently, of Mary Wroth's *Urania*, mark a dramatic shift in emphasis. Marble-constant women come centre-stage "to be admired."[33] Yet their constancy is invested with the urgings of "private will."

The bridling of desire in 'Urania'

Mary Wroth's *Urania* is a telling response to the genre's mixed attitude of flattery and prohibition towards women. Male romance writers show a marked tendency to camp it up - jokes about cross-dressing and frivolous fashions suggest their uncertainty about the real value of romance's "feminine" distractions and about writing for women's entertainment at all.[34] *Urania*, by contrast, adopts a more sober tone. Wroth's emphasis on her heroine's moral struggle with desire suggests the internalisation of the genre's more repressive attitudes to female sexuality. The heroine, Pamphilia, spends most of her time attempting not to show that she loves Amphilanthus. She pens sonnets for release and is solitary and reflective. The inward, psychological nature of her struggle with desire is stressed throughout her sequence of confessional love sonnets, which concludes *Urania*.

While the narrative's second heroine, Urania, embodies some of the mobility of the lady errant, it is of a limited kind. Romance-style, Urania is outward-bound and on a search for her true identity. She has grown up as a shepherdess, but her discovery that she is not her parents' natural daughter is ripe with intimations that there are greater things in store. In accordance with the uncertainty of her fate, Urania shifts allegiance from one lover to another in the course of the romance. However, she makes the change by means of a magic potion administered by somebody else, which means that she is kept safe from imputations of inconstancy.

The "matchless" Pamphilia is at the apex of the narrative's hierarchy of feminine worth because of her constancy. Wroth's offsetting of Pamphilia's loyalty with the disloyalty of Amphilanthus, whom she loves, echoes the structure of Greene's "Mamillia" and suggests the power of Pamphilia's example to convert Amphilanthus as Mamillia converted Pharicles. Differently from Greene however, Wroth implies that male and female nature are incorrigibly different and that nothing, not even Pamphilia's matchlesssness, can make Amphilanthus constant. She presents a darker view of masculinity and the effectiveness of female virtue. Nevertheless, Pamphilia's staunch love for Amphilanthus is idealised. Wroth's reflexive and polyvocal narrative style is used to refract images of Pamphilia's suffering in the

service of the constant ideal. Lendrina, who is said to be "the perfectest lover... who never yet saw storm to stir her thoughts" (406), reflects Pamphilia's monumental durability, as does "the Lady Pandora on the Rocke as hard as her fortune, and as white as her faith" (360). Polidorus' wife reacts to his absence by staging a beautiful near-death. She becomes "a living monument," lying "still, like her own monument curiously cut... the most peerless tomb their eyes had ever seen" (305).[35] Defined by her rigorous self-containment and her loyalty to one man, Pamphilia is a monument of and to feminine virtue. She reverses the errancy of women in the romance genre and displays the dignified continence of the virtuous woman who is bent on bridling her own desire.

The theme derives from the instructional emphasis of writers like Greene. Even as Greene overturns the medieval view that women are the more libidinous sex by emphasising the incontinence of men, he shows that the ideal woman *conquers* her desire. Thus in *Penelope's Web* people wonder "at the modestie of the young Ladie, that contrary to her naturall disposition could so well bridle her affections" (5:232). He repeatedly uses the image of the mirror to project his female characters outwards so that they seem to reflect his female audience. He also implies that the mirrored image of the self is an international artifact that is judged by society at large; is, in fact, formed in the lens of society's gaze. Thus Mamillia asks herself, "Shall they, who deemed thee a mirror of modestie, count thee a pattern of lightness?" (2:20). The narrative interest of the first book of *Mamillia* derives from the imminent danger in which Mamillia's chastity is placed. Will she give in to Pharicles' manifest charms or will she heed the warnings of friends and her own conscience? Will she succeed in winning Pharicles over to the ways of virtue in the course of the endless "parleyings" that play and replay the game of seduction and dissuasion? The fact that she strives to retain governance of reason and rectitude makes her a protagonist in the true sense of the word, a moral agent with whom readers can identify.

Replicated in Pamphilia, the trope of self-restraint finds many echoes in early modern conduct literature, which is permeated by metaphors of nets and bridles that represent the curbing of the female body.[36] Cesare Gonzaga's observation about women in *Il cortegiano* - "e certo è che d'altro freno non sono ritenute, che da quello che esse stesse si mettono" (313) - recognises that the internalisation of virtue

is more effective than its enforcement, as does Francesco Barbaro in his widely-published treatise *De re uxoria*.[37] Barbaro stresses women's "free will" in serving their husbands and restraining their own desires (201). They

> should not be shut up in their rooms as in a prison, but should be permitted to go out, and this privilege should be taken as evidence of their virtue and their propriety. (204)

Freedom of movement - controlled errancy - here marks the successful inculcation of chastity. But its worth as "evidence" of virtue is clearly open to question. Once domestic violence and imprisonment are foregone, the conviction that women's "will" is under control becomes precarious. Jean-Claude Carron has shown that unlike the Middle Ages, whose chivalric tradition strengthened the ideal of unblemished honour, the Renaissance tended to privilege the "external sign" over the "internal reality" of "honour." Yet in the representative and obsessional case of women, "la 'simple' chasteté ne suffit pas car elle ne peut pas témoigner en sa propre faveur" (271). Marguerite de Navarre's tale of Jambicque, whose proclamations of morality come to function as the proof of her dishonesty, bears witness to the belief that the more virtue is signified, the less it can be believed. Jokes about Barnaby Rich's honesty and Mistress Page's "fartuous" modesty bear out the point. Virtue - in particular, women's virtue - cannot and must not, it seems, speak for itself. Yet if this is the case, how can it be proved? To demonstrate a protracted struggle to bridle desire - the inner process rather than the finished product of virtue - is to prove virtue.[38] Mary Wroth makes Pamphilia into a figure of heroic pathos and stoical fortitude, a martyr of self-restraint. She is "most to be pittied, because her love was most, and most painfull to endure, as being haunted with two hellish Spirits of keeping it secret, and bairing the waight it selfe" (314).

Pamphilia's physical self-containment is a metaphor for her restraint in matters of personal desire and verbal expression:

> So stilly did she moove, as if the motion had not been in her, but that the earth did goe her course, and stirre, or as trees grow without sense of increase. (177)

This is a romanticised version of the restrained movement prescribed women in treatises on conduct. Castiglione's Magnifico remarks of his ideal court lady,

> ... non voglio ch'ella usi questi esercizi virili così robusti ed asperi, ma voglio che

> quegli ancora che son convenienti a donna faccia con riguardo, e con quella molle delicatura che avemo detto convenirsele. (270)

He says these words during a discussion in which the other debaters cite the muscular prowess of women from the ancient world and contemporary weapon-wielding viragos as noble examples of sporting women. The Magnifico, whose views about the ideal court lady dominate the debate, concludes that she should not play sports and thereby negates the relevance of pro-feminist models of the Amazon and virago. He even stresses that when dancing women should avoid movements that are too forceful and energetic. Where the Magnifico advocates a near-neurasthenic restraint of movement to serve as feminine complement to the courtier's manliness, Francesco Barbaro's "restraint of movement" suggests an almost total flattening of the expressive will in the interests of modesty, which women show when they "preserve an evenness and restraint in the movements of the eyes, in their walking, and in the movements of their bodies" (Castiglione 215, Barbaro 202). Women are inculcated with a humanistic ideal of virtuous dignity which freezes instinct and emulates the closed body of classical statuary, and Pamphilia's stillness is reminiscent of statuesque female suffering in Ariosto or Shakespeare.[39]

However, unlike the transcendent serenity of "Patience on a monument," who smiles at grief, Pamphilia's moments of greatest monumentality are also described as her moments of most turbulent inner activity.

> But while this quiet outwardly appear'd, her inward thoughts more busie were, and wrought, while this Song came into her mind... (177)

In general, the stiller Pamphilia is, the more likely she is to be in the throes of passion, creative inspiration, or grief. When Mellissea tells her her fortune she is depicted as silent and "fix'd like the heaven, while the world of her thoughts had motion in her grief" (160); and later, on hearing a similar presage of her fate, she is described as sitting without movement, "her colour not changing, nor any motion in her outward part, while the soule onely wrought in her" (192). Her stillness inscribes her liberty because it is a sign of self-government.

The linkages between suppressed desire and moral autonomy are conveyed in *Urania* through a pervasive employment of the metaphor of Love as a sovereign force. The problem of love is politicised

as a question of self-rule and an issue of control. The God or King of Love is locked in combat with the lover's will, and the struggle between desire and virtue is couched in political terms. Within the conventions of Petrarchism the lover swings between subjection to the sovereign force of passion and moments of triumphant self-sovereignty which position him as either having mastery over his passion, or as having gained mastery through it. In Pamphilia the forces of sovereignty and subjection in relation to desire are linked to the fact that she has a public role to fulfill not only as a modest lady but as a queen. When she hears the tale of Allarina, a shepherdess betrayed in love who subsequently becomes a nymph of Diana, Pamphilia recks her own inability to master her desire in these terms -

> Can thy great spirit permit thee to be bound, when such as Allarina can have strength to master and command even love itself? Scorne such servilitie, where subjects soveraignize; never let so mean a thing ore-rule thy greatest power; either command like thy self, or fall down vassall in despaire. (188)

Pamphilia's narrative challenge is to continue loving at a pitch of fervour unmatched by any other character in the romance and yet to retain the dignified self-rule befitting her station and the modesty befitting her gender.

The link between chastity and sovereignty in Pamphilia supports a parallel with Elizabeth I. The Tudor queen promulgated the idea that she had transcended her sexuality as a way of repudiating the stereotype of feminine weakness, consolidating her political control and justifying the fact that she was unmarried.[40] Elaine Beilin has pointed out an explicit parallel between Mary Wroth's chaste queen and Elizabeth I. When asked if she would marry, Elizabeth is said to have replied: "Yea, to satisfie you, I have already joyned my self in Marriage to an Husband, namely, the Kingdom of England."[41] On being asked the same question, Pamphilia answers, "his Maiestie had once married her before which was to the kingdome of *Pamphilia*, from which Husband shee could not bee divorced, nor ever would have other" (218). Beilin also points out that the figuration of Pamphilia as queen of constancy reflects Elizabeth's own iconography of constancy, and that the former's dress is depicted with "the elaborate glory and careful symbolism of Elizabeth's portraits" (242). Like the Tudor queen, Pamphilia, in suggesting that the welfare of the state takes precedence over the fulfillment of personal desire, reserves a space for personal freedom;

she will not be "sovereignis'd over" by a husband.

The most important linkage between the two women is their common suppression of their sexuality. Elizabeth, by drawing on the theory of the monarch's two bodies - the body politic that ruled and the body natural that was merely human - emphasised her body's status as a political rather than natural entity.[42] In doing so she exploited the gendering of the body politic as masculine so as to bypass the association of her femininity with weakness and indecision. In the case of Pamphilia, the supremacy of the transcendent body politic - the part of her that is "sovereign" - over the merely feminine body natural is localised as a personal struggle with desire. In a sense, Wroth allows Pamphilia to have her cake and eat it. The demands of the body natural are dramatised and even celebrated, but her sovereignty emphasises that feminine desire is ruled by virtue. Associations with the Tudor queen are harnessed to the cause of female *self-rule*.

The resistance of desire is an ongoing cause for celebration. When Pamphilia once again meets the chaste shepherdess Allarina and finds out that she has got married, she expresses disappointment at Allarina's lack of "resolution" (410). Allarina, justifying her defection from the ranks of chaste and self-defended female society, provides Pamphilia with this model of sovereignty in love:

> Deere Princesse... the greater your minde is, and the braver your spirit, the more, and stronger, are your passions, the violence of which though diversly cast, and determined, will turn stille to the government of love. (411)

Pamphilia's great soul makes it inevitable that she will love with an "absolute" will but also that she will govern her love with the iron authority of a monarch. Wroth is justifying the violence of her heroine's desire by matching it with an equally strong power of restraint.

Again, this echoes the way that Greene's Mamillia ends up speaking a great deal about her desire while talking about resisting it. Unlike the cool rationality of Mamillia, however, Pamphilia's self-control seems to legitimate the importunacy of her passion and, fortuitously, to increase it: her love is "like flames, the more pressed to rise the higher" (393). The intensity of this dialectic between release and restraint is brought to a head in Book III, where Pamphilia, overwhelmed by the prolonged absence and unreliability of Amphilanthus and beset by "violence of passion held in and having no vent" (397), bursts into tears in

public and then succumbs to a fainting fit. Although Urania advises her, "let passion since possessing you pour itself forth," it is clear that, where heroines are concerned, the violence of the body can only be portrayed as an unwilled aberration, a form of illness in line with Greene's "disease" of lust.

In Book II a character who is in some sense Pamphilia's alter ego makes her appearance. Nereana is queen of Stalamine; like Pamphilia, a sovereign subject. Pamphilia's "greatness" as queen is equated with the greatness of her passion for Amphilanthus, and a similar connection betwen social status and will is made in Nereana. But where Pamphilia governs her will in a sovereign manner, Nereana, precisely because she has always been "permitted" by her subjects "to have her fond desires without limiting her power" (165), is over-free in matters of sexual desire. She openly woos Steriamus, believing that the fact that she is a queen makes her irresistible, and refuses to take no for an answer. She follows him to the court of Arcadia even after he has reproved her for immodesty and fled her company.

For Nereana, as for Urania, love is a knight-like quest. Where Urania wishes to "adventure her loyalty" for Parselius, Nereana "affects hardest adventures" (164) on Steriamus' behalf. However, Nereana is a clear example of romance errancy run amok. When she turns up alone at Arcadia to claim her man before a public audience she is treated as a kind of deviant and comes in for a good deal of scrutiny. Urania claims "it is a rare thing to see so amorous a lady" (162) while Pamphilia takes on nothing less than a tone of reproof:

> In truth, I am sorry, that such a Lady should take so great and painfull a voyage, to so fond an end, being the first that ever I heard of, who ever took so Knight like a search in hand; men being us'd to follow scornfull Ladies, but you to wander after a passionate, or disdainfull Prince, it is a great pitie for you. (163)

The King, however, is impressed by the fact that Nereana has travelled alone in the pursuit of love, saying "it is a rare thing to be found in one of your sexe such constant fury, as to procure, and continue such a journey..." (163). Clearly, the freewheeling errancy of women in Ariosto and Spenser is no longer taken for granted. Gender roles are imposed with exactitude, and one of the most seductive and dynamic stereotypes of Renaissance literature, the "knight-like" heroine, is berated not, as in Ariosto or Spenser, for her inappropriate use of power, but for her lack of femininity in pursuing the object of her desire.

Nereana is described as "rare," "strange" and "unusual" for "one of [her] sex." Her primary fault

is her aberration from femininity. This is demeaningly brought into focus when she goes to Morea to compare herself with the "dainty" Pamphilia whom Steriamus prefers over her, only to be treated as a "Knight like" curiosity. In *Urania*, sexually forward women are frequently depicted as masculine. Antisius' stepmother, of passions "immoderate and ungovernable" (59), is presented in the act of trying to seduce a gentleman as "a delicate play-boy act[ing] a loving woman's part" (60). Luceania, who courts Amphilanthus, is described as being possessed of "exquisite wit and rare spirit, so perfect in them... as her perfections were stiled masculine" (134). And when in Book III a woman is represented as "more manly in her demeanour, and discourse, then the modestest of her sexe would venture to be... as she was a little too unlike a well-governed Lady" (351), the interconnectedness of modesty, self-government and femininity is made explicit.

Wroth frequently makes a connection between women who do not govern their desires and illegitimate political rule.[43] One of *Urania*'s lustful queens was compelling enough to provide the plot for a play by James Shirley, *The Politician* (1655). The play derived from Antisius' usurping stepmother, the queen of Romania, who plots against Antisius to secure the monarchy for her son only to find herself distracted by lust for the ambassador of Morea - to such an extent that she loses control of the country. As here, the issue of government by women always returns to the issue of self-government and to the restraint rather than exercise of agency. Legitimate government in a larger, political sense is merely a metaphor for female characters' ability - or lack of it - to govern their sexuality. Wroth's portrait of the sexually provocative queen of Bulgaria burlesques her unbridled nature with images of uncontrolled and undignified movement. She signally fails to achieve the statuesque ideal of female virtue:

> Unsteady she was in her fashion, her head set upon so slight a necke, as it turned like a weather-cocke to any vaine conceit that blew her braines about, or like a staulke of Oates, the eare being waighty: her feete never but mooving, as not willing to stand, or sit still: her gait wagling and wanton, businesse she had perpetually with her selfe, the looking glasse being most beholding for her to stay. (346)

The queen of Bulgaria is seen from the outside - in the same way that she views herself in a mirror - and her performance or presentation of femininity is found to be lacking. The portrayal of lack of self-control as ungoverned movement finds a further subject in a woman writer whom Pamphilia and Limena meet:

> ...A handsome, and well-cloathed woman, neither walking, running, or staying, but as if she had made a motion of them all, and imployed them to her vanity; shee one while cryed, another chafed, smil'd scratch'd her head, stamp'd, rail'd, and all at Love. (416)

The lady's deviant eccentricity is burlesqued and so held at a distance. But the distance breaks down. When Limena and Pamphilia ask her the cause of her troubles, she turns out to be an abandoned but loyal lover and a poetess - not unlike Pamphilia herself. Pamphilia takes her under her wing and promises to help. The mad lady writer is, like Nereana, an extension of Pamphilia's own dilemma between self-expression and self-restraint.

Wroth treats Nereana with an odd mix of indulgent sympathy and overstated mockery. Sexually humiliated by the unflattering comparison with "the matchless" Pamphilia, Nereana flees to the Arcadian forest where she rues her folly. As a caution to women who travel alone in wooded places, she finds herself besieged by a love-crazed shepherd who believes she is a Goddess and proceeds to tie her to a tree, undress her and deck her out in the state of flower-clad semi-nakedness he sees as befitting to pagan divinity. He then abandons her. Reduced to surviving on nuts and berries, shorn of decent clothing and refused succour by a passing knight because she behaves so rudely to him, Nereana exemplifies the fact that female pride demands a fall into the most abject forms of sexual harassment and humiliation. When the shepherd finds her again and forces her into another role-change by casting her as a forest nymph, Nereana finally retorts, "I am not a Nimph... nor a Goddesse, but a distressed woman" (168).

Book II plays up Nereana's pathos as "a distressed woman," but from much the same seesawing narrative perspective. Humbled by misfortune and exile, she is rescued by Perissus. Her self-opinion soars again when she feels restored to "noblenes" and her belief that she is born to rule is once more accompanied by her playing the role of the importunate wooer. However, Perissus beats a retreat and she is once again abandoned and humiliated by the object of her desire. When Nereana finally reaches Stalamine she finds that her sister has usurped the throne and she is promptly thrown into prison. The depiction of Nereana here as a victim of injustice and misunderstanding presages her restoration to power in Book III. When she is released from prison to take up the throne again she is indeed a "chastened" woman. The lack of restraint and strong desire which had in the first book constituted a negative example

now provide her with the relevant experience for good government:

> Thus may you see that none can run so far that shall not have some time to returne... This was verified in her, and she deserv'd their due restoring her prooving an excellent Governes, and brave Lady, being able to overrule her old passions, and by them to judge how to favor, licence, and curb others, and this experience, though late, is most profitable to Princes. (421)

Moreover, the sense that her immodest behaviour was ridiculous precisely because of her gender is qualified. "As a woman, why should shee not be permitted both her vanity, and the nature of her Sexe?" (421).

The odd moment of compunction is characteristic of the narrator's lingering sympathy for Nereana's excesses. Nereana's overweening egotism has consistently been coded as sexual impropriety. The curbing of the female will is conflated here, as in instructional literature for women, with the bridling of sexual desire. Modesty is above all a discipline. Pamphilia and Nereana, set up as opposites, parallel one another. Both of them have the "aspiring and brave minde[s]" of women whose refusal to be ruled over is symbolised by their royalty. In both, the "private will" is associated with the social latitude of monarchy and in some sense legitimated by it. But where Pamphilia adjures herself to "take heed" not to betray "the pride of your desires," Nereana gives them rein (*Poems* 106). In her treatment of Nereana, Wroth's concern with the self-policing limits which the ideal lady must place on her desire is coloured by a recognition of women's desire as a form of sovereign agency. This belief also informs her portrayal of Pamphilia. Nereana proves the point that queens may be allowed a certain latitude for their indiscretions, which are a facet of their worldly power, their legitimate "pride."

Nereana exemplifies a tension in *Urania* between the high valuation of modesty and the idealisation of passion. With some contradiction, the romance glosses modesty as a certificate of virtue and a barrier to self-fulfilment. Pamphilia's modesty makes her unable to solicit actively the attentions of Amphilanthus, the man she loves. Mellissea the fortune teller in Book II describes her predicament thus:

> Rarest of women for true loyalty... Destiny that governes all our lives hath thus ordain'd, you might be happy, had you power to wedd, but daintinesse and feare will hinder you (160).

And Pamphilia suggests that modesty is a blight common to all women: "Am I the first unfortunate woman

that bashfulnes hath undone?" (75). But bashfulness is clearly a form of feminine excellence. On receiving a compliment, Pamphilia shows the opposite response to Nereana:

> Pamphilia, whose modesty never hearde her owne commendations without blushing, pretily now did expresse a bashfulnesse, but her speech delivered with confidence shewed those words, nor the speaker of them neede for them blush... (124)

The fact that the narrator takes the trouble to point out Pamphilia's confidence in the same breath as proclaiming her bashfulness is coy in the extreme. Pamphilia's "pretty" shyness is an affectation which hampers her development as much as it enhances her charm in the mirror of the social gaze.

Mary Wroth conflates chastity with modesty. Chastity is not, as it is in Marguerite de Navarre, a spiritual ideal. Wroth does not have Marguerite's concept of a higher form of spiritual love, whether secular (*amour courtois*) or religious (Christian Neoplatonism). This makes women's "giving" of their love more simply a question of whether they want to or not. Women's "sovereign" desire in Wroth is accorded an explicit value it is never given in Marguerite de Navarre. In the *Heptaméron* virtuous women hide their desire in the attempt to extinguish it. In *Urania* concealment is sufficient. Wroth is more concerned with the ways in which women mask and reveal their desire by word and by gesture, to whom, and when. It is an ideal of becoming social behaviour which does not provide insurmountable moral obstacles to "courtly" love.

The tale of the knight Dolorindus' relationship with a married woman, Selinea, bears some similarity to that of Amadour and Floride. Dolorindus, Amadour-like, makes an earnest courtly appeal to a lady for her love and she prevaricates with a show of feminine virtue. Dolorindus explains that, even as he "solicit[ed]" the love of Selinea, she "modestly but confidently much refus'd" (155). He continues to spend time in the household of Selinea's husband, hoping to accomplish his wish - "to which," he comments, "(for all her chast replies, and curious preserving of her honour in her words) at last I did obtaine, and so her love, in as equall measure, as mine was to her..." (155).

Selinea's "chast replies and curious preserving of her honour in her words" are no more than a prelude to amorous liaison. The use of "curious," which betokens a kind of skillful intrication, suggests Castiglione's court lady - someone who must warily negotiate a social context where language is a

minefield of necessary but feared sexual suggestion. The fact that her modesty is "curious" suggests that social form here takes precedence over sexual virtue. One of the early modern meanings cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "particular, nice, fastidious... in matters of *taste*."

The rule of taste is deployed with the ruthlessness of social censure. Nereana is an outstanding example of *Urania*'s habit of making women who woo the men they desire look like fools. The foolishness of openly amorous women is further developed in the tale of Selarinus' imprisonment by the Queen of Elisor, who comes to his bedroom at night claiming that she has never before been "moved to thus much shew of immodesty" (256). In *Gawain and the Green Knight* it is not the lady who invades Gawain's bedchamber who is made to look foolish, but Gawain himself. Here it is the other way round. The queen gets Selarinus to fight on her behalf against a man who wishes for her hand in marriage. But Selarinus teams up with her enemy and abandons her. She declares that this is her "shame for rashly loving" (261). Luceania's tale is similar. She seeks to capture Amphilanthus' heart with games of blushing and modestly half-finished sentences, "desiring to be thought bashful but more longing to be intreated" (136). However, importunity rather than bashfulness rules the day and when Amphilanthus chooses Pamphilia as his partner after a tournament, Luceania taxes herself with "letting my love too much expresse it selfe... it is onely turned to my shame" (142).

The embarrassment which attaches to these women is of course never associated with men under the same circumstances. In *fin amor*, the rule of lovers' secrecy functions as a kind of aphrodisiac and a mark of mutual faith. However, in Mary Wroth, as in Marguerite de Navarre, the idea of secrecy as an ennobling force slides into the idea of secrecy as a social necessity, as discretion in the service of women's all-too-fragile honour.

But the necessity for discretion in sexual matters breeds uncertainty and confusion in practice. This is exemplified by the confessions of a lady whom Amphilanthus encounters in his travels. As she toys with her line at the water's edge she compares the fishes' suspenseful oscillation between attraction and repulsion to the bait with her own condition in love -

> ... So (would she say) doth Love play with me, show mee pleasures, but lets me enjoy

> nothing but the touch of them, and the smart of the hooke that hurts me without gaine... (241)

The image of deferred satisfaction provides a metaphor for her own life. Many years ago, before her marriage, she tells Amphilanthus, she fell in love with her cousin Laurimello. However, she did not make her love known to Laurimello for fear of his own and society's reactions:

> Sometimes I resolv'd to speake, but bashfulnes with-held me, casting before mine eyes the staine, that justly might be laid on me, a maid, and of so tender yeeres to wooe a man: then how often had I heard him say, that he hated a forward woman, and could love none but such an one, who he must win by suite and love, and who would love him so, as though most ernestly, yet pretily to make him thinke, neglect did governe her, which would be like Cordials to his heart, or a diet to increase the Stomack of his love. (245)

She began a game of deferral, fending off other suitors whilst giving them mild encouragement. Eventually Laurimello, in ignorance of her love, married someone else and so did she.

The domestic situation in which Amphilanthus finds her, however, testifies to a newfound "freedom." The widowed Laurimello now spends much time in her marital home where the two together "eagerly behold one another, as if they fear'd one part of sight had fail'd to make a full conclusion of their blisse" (246). The erotic charge of this description is mitigated by the narrator's assurance that her protagonist knows where to draw the line; she makes "such free, yet modest shew of love... as that love, was in her deem'd a vertue, and his wanton faults commended by the witt, and dainty manner of her earnest love" (246). The real nature of their relationship is left teetering on a semantic tightrope. The narrator's series of checks and balances echoes Castiglione's advice to court ladies to "tener una certa mediocrità difficile e quasi composta di cose contrarie" (266). Yet the lady in Wroth's story lays claim to the licence rather than the restraint of society manners when she admits to "my fashion being free... as having still beene bred in Court" (246).

Differently from its portrayal in Castiglione, however, the self-defeating and dishonest nature of feminine propriety is here put on display. The tale delivers a critique of bashfulness. The lady's tone of drifting disaffection with "childish modesty, which would a vertue prove in shewing modest love" (245) is the true subject of the story. At one point she uses a quintessentially "curious" image of intrication, evasive caution and self-entrapment to describe herself. She says she has behaved like

> a Spider, which being to crosse from one beame to another, must worke by waies, and goe farre about, making more webs to catch her selfe into her ownepurpose, then if she were to goe an ordinary straight course. (244)

This image of living at cross-purposes echoes the lady's role as a fisher toying with her line even as the fishes toy with her bait in a mutual dance of ambivalence.

The curious air of bitterness that pervades this tale of unexpressed feelings recalls the story of Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, where the idealisation of Pamphilia as a model female lover who desires at a heady pitch of fervour yet is shown to be morally impeccable incurs a drift of ironic commentary. Allarina's account of remaining constant to a man who had betrayed her is one of a series of such tales told to Pamphilia. With the hapless queen as their audience, these stories serve to question the self-immolating loyalty of women and the fickleness of men. Amphilanthus' repeated absences and convocations with other women question the value of Pamphilia's constancy to him, as she herself does. Yet where women's modesty is the ability to "discern men's understandings by their arguments, but no way to show it by [their] own speech" (7), Pamphilia, true to form, refuses to criticise Amphilanthus for shortcomings she well perceives. The romance remains prone to unambiguous, even obsessive, expositions of the unreliability of men. There is a pervasive contradiction between the ideal behaviour of women, as exemplified in Pamphilia, and women's real feelings and the real behaviour of men. However, this strain of realism and disillusion also means that Wroth is not interested in matching up the couple in marriage, the goal of so many handbooks and novellas of virtuous courtship. Finally, Wroth's lack of interest in providing a happy ending means that Pamphilia's desire, while it is endlessly deferred, is also endlessly protracted.

Writing, desire and a woman's 'private' space

Yet Pamphilia's desire is, to all intents and purposes, contained within the narrow compass required of the modest lady. As a woman who "could bee in greatest assemblies as private with her owne thoughts, as if in her Cabinet" (391), she is associated with the private space of proper femininity. A long metaphorical tradition associating chastity with enclosure and containment - walled gardens, bride chambers, locked

rooms, vessels - ensures that Pamphilia's love of retreating to her cabinet redounds to her virtue.[44] Within this tradition the room that contains the inviolate lady is often the lady herself. In "The Rape of Lucrece," Lucrece's body is a "quiet cabinet" (442) before it is "broken open" by Tarquin and the locked room of chastity comes to be associated with the containment of private wealth; the "jewel" of chastity (a cabinet is also a kind of casket for the safe storage of jewels).[45] When Lyly expresses the wish that his *Euphues* may be caressed in ladies' laps even as they caress their dogs, and that the book would "rather lye shut in a Ladyes casket, then open in a Schollers studie," he is revelling in the idea that *Euphues* will bring pleasure to ladies by slipping into their 'cabinets' (2:8-9). He makes his novel into a seduction tool that penetrates women's private space, the space of reading and of desire. Robert Greene also suggests that romance provides men with entry into a private world proper to women. He comments in his dedication to the male readers of *Penelope's Web* that "Mars will sometimes bee prying into Venus papers, and gentlemen desirous to hear the parlie of the Ladies..." (5:144). In fact, *Penelope's Web* stages a matron and her maids in deep discussion of the loyalty of wives and the virtue of virgins. "Venus papers" make no appearance.

Urania, by contrast, offers such papers to the reader's gaze. Picking up on the metaphoric associations of the "cabinet," Wroth makes Pamphilia's cabinet, the private space where she retires to be alone, into the space of her desire in a sense which Lyly would understand: it is here that she writes and stores her love poetry. She is described thus retiring to bed -

> taking a little Cabinet with her, wherein she had many papers, and setting a light by her, began to reade them, but few of them pleasing her, she took pen and paper, and being excellent in writing, writ these verses following. (51)

The reader is invited to share Pamphilia's secret life of concealed desire. The importance of her role as a love poet is underscored by her poems (which are scattered through the prose romance as well as appended to it) and by references to her skill and renown in poetry. Her "private space" takes on considerable importance in the romance.

Yet the interior of this realm is intensely conscious of a public gaze and even replicates it. In sonnet 34 Pamphilia's eyes watch themselves being watched, concealing their desire even as they maintain

its image in the eye of the mind:

> Take heed mine eyes, how you your lookes doe cast
> Least they beetray my harts most secret thought:
> Bee true unto your selves for nothings bought
> More deere then doubt which brings a lovers fast.
>
> Catch you all waching eyes, ere they bee past,
> Or take yours fixt wher your best love hath sought
> The pride of your desires; lett them bee taught
> Theyr faults for shame, they could noe truer last;
>
> Then looke, and looke with joye for conquest wunn
> Of those that search'd your hurt in double kinde;
> Soe you kept safe, lett them themselves looke blinde
> Watch, gaze, and marke till they to madnes runn,
>
> While you, mine eyes injoye full sight of love
> Contented that such hapinesses move. (106)

The oppressive world of the court, where Pamphilia feels herself to be under constant scrutiny, necessitates a process of inner self-policing and self-protective withdrawal. The sonnet's stark differentiation between the lover's concealed passion and her mask of non-attachment is replicated in an unpublished poem written by Anne Vavaser at the turn of the sixteenth century. Vavaser, like Pamphilia, fears being exposed by a censorious social gaze:

> Thou seest we live amongste the lynxes eyes
> that pryes and spyes eache pryvye thought of mynde
> thou knowest ryghte well what Sorrowes may aryse
> yf once they chance my setled lookes to fynde.[46]

She describes to her beloved the necessity "to shielde my selfe in shroud of honest shame," admitting that "my hearte hath vowed althoughe my tongue says no." The contradiction between what is shown and what is felt seem to militate against honesty. Yet in writing the poem she honestly adumbrates the concealments which "virtue" demands and, by dramatising her struggle to "save the honour of my name," she gives her passion a kind of legitimacy. The final stanza of the poem precisely echoes the subject position characteristic of Pamphilia throughout the romance.

> we sillye dames yt false suspecte doo feare
> and lyve within the month of envyes lake
> must in our heartes a secrete moaninge beare
> farre from the shewe yt outwardly we make.

The poem's combined complaint against and celebration of female honour constitutes desire as virtuous suffering, emphasising silence even as it gives it public voice.

In Mary Wroth's poems, the beloved is barely more than a shadow reflected in the eyes of a judicial or self-pleasuring society which Pamphilia, intent on proving her virtue, abjures. This may be because there is no poetic register for a woman's desire for a man, or because to name the object of desire is to possess him actively in a fashion unbecoming to the proper lady. The two, finally, are mutually complementary. Pamphilia, beset by jealousy and the fear that her feelings will be perceived by people at court, withdraws self-protectingly from present reality on "unconstant waves of doubt" (97) which serve to make the outer world hazy also. Her imagery recalls the "shroud of honest shame" with which Anne Vavaser shields herself from censure. Pleasure is "shadowe-like" (99) and "shady" (133): "outward showes" are "fond" (110). The absence of the beloved, figured in terms of "huge clowds of smoke" (140), "thickest mists" (141) and clowdy night" (141) is inseparable from her own, willed withdrawal from the scene of possible pleasure. Pleasure in general belongs to other, lesser beings and Pamphilia accuses those who embrace "looce desires" (138) of leading her astray.

She takes up an embattled position. She is thwarted not by the impossibility of gaining her love but by the dangers of showing it: "Fear, and desire... inwardly contend/ Feare to bee mark'd, desire to drawe still neere" (140). The predominant metaphor of the sequence is that of the labyrinth. It is hard to tell whether the labyrinth is social or mental. The two fields overlap.

> In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?
> Wayes are on all sids while the way I miss:
> If to the right hand, ther, in love I burne;
> Lett mee goe forward, therin danger is;
>
> If to the left, suspition hinders bliss,
> Lett me turne back, shame cries I ought returne. (127)

The labyrinth is a minutely self-inspecting conscience that tries to expunge from itself the shame that founds conscience in the first place, aspiring to a "government wher noe feare is of scorne" (132). Thus, in the romance itself, Pamphilia is described as "calling her thoughts into strict examination, so that none were to be found impure" (*Urania* 270). Pamphilia's self-descriptions as a "cleere" and "pure" diamond, as a

fort which has never given way to siege (*Urania* 121), and as "one whose soule knowes nott how to rang" (*Poems* 118) all draw upon the iconography of proper femininity. Most of all, her constancy, which is the dominating theme of the sequence of songs and sonnets, underscores her virtue. The purpose of love is

> Exiling thoughts that touch inconstancie,
> Or those which waste not in the constant art. (86)

Yet for all her virtue and privateness Pamphilia is, by the time of Book IV, famous. She is famous not only as a queen but as a constant lover. Amphilanthus, reunited with her in Arcadia but by now involved in a relationship permanently soured by suspicion and separation, quizzes a subject of the Queen's on his opinion of her. The man discourses confidently on Pamphilia's uprightness, just government and even her private life. He praises her loyalty in loving a "mighty man" who "thinketh varietie the sweetest pleasure under Heaven, and constancy the foolishest unprofitable whining vertue" (484). Pamphilia is also renowned as a woman "rare in poetry" (415). Several times in the course of the romance she is requested to recite or copy her verses by people who have heard of her skill as a poet, and in each case she obliges. Amphilanthus' comment to another bashful lady poetess, that "pittie it is, that you should hide, or darken so rare a gift" (337), is symptomatic of *Urania*'s emphasis on the virtue of lady poets, and the matchless queen is clearly top-ranking in both virtue and poetry.

Pamphilia is not as private about her desire as she appears to want to be. Where her poetry encodes its sense of a public by referring to the prying eyes of other courtiers, it also does so by drawing on images of the masque and the stage play.[47] Ann Jones thinks that Wroth uses images of blackness and night to remind the aristocratic audience at whom she was aiming of her own performances in theatrical events at court before her exile. In making a feminised personification of Night central to the sequence, Wroth alludes to her performances as a "daughter of Niger" and an Ethiopian maiden in Ben Jonson's "Masque of Beauty" and "Masque of Blackness." Jones suggests that "Wroth's corona of sonnets to Love links her to the king and to his court artists" by effecting a parallel with Inigo Jones' Neoplatonic designs for *The Masque of Blackness* ("Designing Women" 144). Self-display and self-dramatisation reach their peak in sonnet 42, where Wroth casts herself as a stage on which a tragedy is played out and invites an

audience to witness her death:

> If ever love had force in humaine brest?
> If ever hee could move in pensive hart?
> Or if that hee such powre could butt impart
> To breed those flames whose heat brings joys unrest.
> Then looke on mee; I ame to thes adrest,
> I, ame the soule that feeles the greatest smart;
> I, ame that hartles trunk of harts depart
> And I, that one, by love, and griefe oprest;
> Non ever felt the truth of loves great miss
> Of eyes, till I deprived was of bliss;
> For had hee seene, hee must have pitty show'd;
> I should nott have bin made this stage of woe
> Wher sad disasters have theyr open showe
> O noe, more pitty hee had sure beestow'd. (111)

While it is in keeping with the self-punishing ethos of feminine desire that the speaker makes herself a spectacle of martyrdom - "a stage of woe" - the final sonnet in the sequence reaches a peak of intensity in a fantasy not of suffering from desire but of displaying it:

> How like a fire doth love increase in mee,
> The longer that itt lasts, the stronger still...
> Mine eyes can scarce sustaine the flames my hart
> Doth trust in them my passions to impart,
> And languishingly strive to show my love. (115)

This moment where Pamphilia's eyes "languishingly strive to show [her] love" is the climax of the first sonnet sequence. It stages an outburst against all the self-cautioning poems that preceded it, where the suspicious gaze of others was replicated in Pamphilia's injunctions to her own eyes to "cease from this poore betraying of your feares" (114). The drama of the poetic sequence derives from Pamphilia's need to act upon her love for Amphilanthus.

In representing her capitulation as well as her resistance to desire, Pamphilia's poetry replicates the double-edged symbolism of the "cabinet," which can function as an invitation as well as a barrier. The only time Amphilanthus ever visits Pamphilia's cabinet is on the notionally innocent pretext of viewing her poetry. Each visit provides the occasion for an erotic union of sorts. In book II, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus capitalise on an exchange of glances filled with erotic tension by retiring to the "Cabinet of the Queenes, where her books and papers lay; so taking some of them, they passed a while in reading of them" (217). It marks a moment of intimacy. Later, when Amphilanthus is about to leave Arcadia, he asks

her for some verses of hers.

> She granted them, and going into her Cabinet to fetch them, he would needs accompany her; shee that was the discreetest fashiond woman would not deny so small a favour. When they were there, she tooke a deske, wherein her papers lay, and kissing them, delivered all shee had saved from the fire, being in her owne hand unto him, she was ashamed, so much of her folly should present her selfe unto his eyes. (266)

The narrator implies an element of licence in Pamphilia's admitting Amphilanthus to her cabinet but also rationalises it when she claims that this "discreetest fashiond woman would not deny so small a favour." It is a moment of capitulation in which a boundary is infringed upon. "Discretion" is both maintained by the cabinet's marking of private space and undone by Amphilanthus' entry into it. Pamphilia makes the poems into an erotic go-between when she kisses them as she hands them over, experiencing a delicious shame to "present her selfe unto his eyes." Her verse provokes Amphilanthus' curiosity and guides the pair to a moment of swooning consummation -

> but one thing (said hee) I must find fault with, that you counterfeit loving so well, as if you were a lover, and as we are, yet you are free; pitie it is you suffer not, that can faigne so well. She smild, and blusht, and softly said (fearing that he or her selfe should heare her say so much) Alas my Lord, you are deceived in this for I doe love. He caught her in his arms, she chid him not, nor did so much as frowne, which shewd she was betrayd. (266)

The pretext of her love poetry allows Pamphilia to cross the boundary of feminine modesty without seeming actively to transgress it. The moment is constructed as a mistake, a fall into spontaneity. The legitimation of love poetry as a form for female feeling in *Urania* is dependent on its status as a private activity, and femininity is constructed as a series of hard-to-breach boundaries. Yet Pamphilia's intense and tormented verse describes not only the willed autonomy of her passion but a loosening of those boundaries, a form of display and demand that rebels against "childish modesty, which a vertue prove in showing modest love" (245).

NOTES

1.Thomas Churchyard praised Mary Sidney for setting "to schoole, our Poets ev'ry where" (quoted in Gary Waller, *Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke,* 71). Mary Sidney's "college" is referred to by John Aubrey in *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, 138. Nicholas Breton's dedication to Mary Sidney of *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* makes her home into an Urbino.

2.See the introduction to *Kissing the Rod* (ed. Germaine Greer et al.) on the precedent set by the great lady patrons of the Tudor period, 17.

3.See Josephine A. Roberts' introduction to *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 3-40.

4.Betty Travitsky's introduction to her anthology of Renaissance Englishwomen's writing, *The Paradise of Women*, gives an overview of the literary genres and modes chosen by Tudor women under the influence of Protestant humanism.

5.On Mary Sidney's mourning see Abraham Fraunce, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch*, where the section entitled "Pembrokiana" is on the countess' reaction to Sidney's death. Nathaniel Baxter's *Sir Philip Sidney's Ourania* has Cynthia contemplating suicide to join Astrophil.

6.*Poems of Sir Aston Cokayne* (London: P. Stephens, 1622. 20). Cited in Mary Wroth, *Poems*, 36.

7.The letter is quoted in full in Mary Wroth, *Poems*, 238-9.

8.Nicholas Udall, "Dedicatory Letter" to *The first tome or volume of the paraphrase of Erasmus upon the newe testamente* (London: Edmund Whitechurche, 1548). Quoted in Betty Travitsky, *The Paradise of Women*, 5.

9.See Josephine Roberts' Introduction to Mary Wroth, *Poems*, 13.

10.See Greer et al, *Kissing the Rod*, on the unpublished masque written by two daughters of the Duke of Newcastle around 1644, 106-118.

11.Josephine Roberts discusses the play, its ownership and possible performance in "The Huntingdon Manuscript of Lady Mary Wroth's Play."

12.Quoted in Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 68.

13.Manuscript continuation of *Urania* MS I 3aAv. Quoted in Mary Ellen Lamb, 152.

14.On the identification of Pamphilia as Mary Wroth and the meaning of the Lindamira story, see Mary Ellen Lamb *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle*, 182-88.

15.See Mary Ellen Lamb for a decoding of *Urania*'s "key" to real-life figures, *Gender and Authorship*, 181-88.

16.Norman E. McClure (ed.), *Letters of John Chamberlain* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939. II: 427). Quoted in *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 36.

17.On Wroth's court career and subsequent decline in status see Josephine Roberts' Introduction to *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 12-27.

18.See Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance*, Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind* and Ann Jones, "Counterattacks on 'the Bayter of Women.'" Linda Woodbridge differs from Henderson and McManus in believing that two of the three defences of women, written in opposition to Joseph Swetnam's attack and under obvious female pseudonyms, were in fact by men. I agree with Henderson and McManus' view that "at this time there was simply no reason why men should choose to write defences under female names" (21).

19.Barbara McManus and Katherine Usher Henderson in *Half Humankind* point out that women's defences of their sex in Jacobean England claim, like Marguerite de Navarre's defence before them, that women are closer to God and chaster than men, who are cast as venal seducers.

20.See Margaret Hannay on Mary Sidney's concern for her reputation during her life and after her death, *Philip's Phoenix*, 58-83.

21.On the growth of a book market for women in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the attitudes inculcated by authors, see Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient* and Louis B. Wright "The Reading of Renaissance Englishwomen."

22.George Pettie translated Guazzo's *Civil conversatione* and Barnaby Rich wrote a conduct book, *My Ladies Looking-Glasse.*

23.Greene makes *Penelope's Web* into a tale about a group of women sitting at home and sewing. He cuts out Penelope's train of suitors and makes this scene of conduct-book femininity - Penelope is portrayed as wise chaperone to her incipiently giddy maids - into a frame-narrative for virtue-provoking stories which the women recount to one another as they sew.

24.For further reflections on Greene's use of the mirror to provide images of and for women, see Caroline Lucas, *Writing for Women*, 74-94.

25.See Lawrence Stone on Tudor Protestants' dislike of the commerciality of traditional marriage arrangements in which the material interests of parents made them pay little attention to their childrens' desires, 137.

26.Caroline Lucas has provided the fullest analysis of the narrator's construction of the woman reader in Elizabethan romances. See also Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700.*

27.Commmenting on this passage Paul Salzman claims that Pettie's female audience is "spun around by [the narrator's] ambiguous moralising until they are dizzy" (17) while a position of knowing, ironic distance is created for male readers. However, the position of knowing irony suggested by the text could as easily be occupied by women - seen from this point of view, the text is more subversive than Salzman supposes.

28.Sir Thomas Overbury, *Characters* (London: L. Lisle, 1614). Quoted in Louis B. Wright, "The Reading of Renaissance Women," 148.

29.Edward Hake, *A Touchstone for this time present... Whereunto is annexed a perfect rule to be observed of all Parents and Scholemaisters, in the trayning up of their Schollers and Children in learning* (London: T. Hacket, 1574). Quoted in Louis B. Wright, 141.

30.Thomas Powell, *Tom of all Trades* (London: B. Alsop and T. Fawcett, 1631), quoted in Louis B. Wright, "The Reading of Renaissance English Women," 680-1. Victor Skretkowicz, in his Introduction to *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, demonstrates the association of Sidney's work with a "morally pernicous influence" (xliii-xliv). If Skretkowicz's examples are anything to go by, writers who expressed moral outrage at the *Arcadia* referred

moral outrage at the *Arcadia* referred almost without exception to its corrupting influence on a female audience.

31.F. Pallavicino, *The Whores Rhetorick Calculated to the Meridian of London and Conformed to the Rules of Art in Two Dialogues* (London: George Shell, 1683. 50-1), quoted in Bridget Orr, "The Feminine in Restoration Erotica," 200.

32.Abbe Blum's "'Strike All that Look upon with Marble'" argues for female monumentalisation as a form of patriarchal control.

33.The phrase is from Shakespeare's "The Rape of Lucrece," where Lucrece is described asleep - "Where like a virtuous monument she lies/ To be admired of lewd, unhallowed eyes" (391).

34.See Helen Hackett's "'Yet Tell Me Some Such Fiction'" for an argument about Mary Wroth and the gendering of romance as feminine.

35.There are many other abandoned, loyal women in the romance who embellish *Urania*'s heroics of constancy - Dalinea, Dolorina, Lindamira, Allarina, Alena, Liana, Pelarina, Bellamira, Lady Pastora, Antissia.

36.See Ann Rosalind Jones, "Nets and Bridles."

37.See Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 220. Elias' thesis is that "the civilising process" is characterised by the inculcation of shame about the bodily functions and the progressively deep internalisation of checks and restraints on the expression of instinct. These restraints become "second nature." He pays particular attention to the "sociogenesis" of the early modern period and his argument has great resonance with regard to women, at a time when ideals of self-bridled feminine behaviour were being encoded in a large number of treatises on wifely conduct.

38.Representative novels which put the trial of feminine virtue at the centre of their action are the *Princesse de Clèves* and *Clarissa*. It is also worthy of note that *Clarissa* replicates Greene's *Mamillia*, in that the hero is darkly seductive in contrast with the heroine's virtuous purity. The idea of the aristocratic seducer goes at least as far back as Christine de Pizan's warnings against "courtly love"38. and Marguerite de Navarre's juxtaposition of sweet-talking lord and high-minded village girl.

39.See Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories," on Bakhtin's theory of the restrained and self-contained classical body and its relation to early modern ideals of the controlled and bridled woman, 123-9.

40.Elizabeth I's speech at Tilbury in 1588 is the most well-known instance of her repudiation of natural femininity so as to claim the power of masculinity: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too." Quoted in Louis Montrose, "The Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture" (80), from Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I: A Study in Power and Intellect* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974. 320).

41.William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth*, selected chapters, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffery (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970. 29), quoted in Elaine Beilin, "'The Onely Perfect Vertue,'" 241.

42.For discussions of the queen's childlessness, her unmarried state and her sexuality, see Carole Levin, "Power, Politics." For discussion of the queen's "two bodies," the body politic and the body natural, see Constance Jordan, "Representing Political Androgyny" (159-64) and Leah S. Marcus, "Shakespeare's Comic Heroines," 135-53.

43.Josephine Roberts in "Radigund Revisited" situates the queen of Romania and Wroth's other over-amorous queens in the context of Elizabethan ideas of the Amazon and of female rule, concluding that Wroth "struggles vainly" (202) to integrate ideas of women's sexual nature with those of legitimate government in the figure of Pamphilia.

44.Giorgianna Ziegler in "My Lady's Chamber" provides an excellent index of the association of women's chastity with private space and property in the Renaissance.

45.On Lucrece and femininity, see Jonathan Hart, "Narratorial Strategies in *The Rape of Lucrece*."

46.The poem is from a Folger manuscript MS V.c.89 (fol.7v), which was owned by Anne Cornwallis Campbell (d. 1635), daughter of the essayist William Cornwallis.

47.Ann Jones' "The Self as Spectacle" draws attention to the theatricality of Wroth's sonnet sequence. Jones argues that "Wroth makes Pamphilia's situation as unrequited lover the subject of laments that were strategic attempts to rewrite her disgrace and to put an end to her exclusion from court society" (137).

CHAPTER THREE

Veronica Franco's verse and letters: "Acting according to another's desire"

Italian courtesans and patrician culture

In 1611 Thomas Coryat published an account of his travels which included a description of Venice and the Venetian courtesan:

> The woman that professeth this trade is called in the Italian tongue *Cortezane*, which word is derived from the Italian word *cortesia* that signifieth courtesie. Because these women are said to receive courtesies of their favorites. (264)

Coryat goes on to associate the word "courtesan" with a specific type of speech by linking it with a Greek word "often taken for a woman of a dissolute conversation." On the one hand the link between courtesy and courtesanry elevates the trade of prostitution, and on the other hand it connotes sexual impropriety of a particularly devious kind. The Italian for courtesan, *cortigiana*, means 'female courtier.' The *cortigiana* in the Italian Renaissance was often taken to exemplify the most despicable qualities of the courtier himself; hypocrisy, a flattering tongue, servility, venality and remorseless ambition. Yet she was also associated with his refined and aristocratic manners. The fact that the courtesan was conflated with the courtier at all is a telling comment on the rise in status which she had undergone.[1]

By the time of the late sixteenth century, Venice had an international reputation for its courtesans. Marin Sanudo, writing in Venice in the early sixteenth century, claimed that 11,654 out of the city's population of 150,000 were prostitutes.[2] In the closing decades of the previous century some of these women had begun to move beyond the part of the city to which they had traditionally been confined and into more select areas of town (Casagrande 19-22). They attended public ceremonies in spite of the repeated passing of laws stipulating that they should not, and many of them dressed with the ostentation of noblewomen. When in 1580 Montaigne visited Venice he described the most lavish dressers of a generally well-dressed breed as "nobles... faisant une depense en meubles et vestemans de princesses" (73). Sixteenth-century Italy saw the downward movement of the ideal of the *donna di palazzo* and a corresponding rise in courtesans' status. This was at least in part due to their own self-imaging as proto-

aristocratic cultural *cognoscenti*. The lapdog, the lute, and the volume of Petrarch, Ariosto or Boccaccio (even if the latter went unread) seem increasingly to have become *de rigueur* in their accoutrements.[3] The tools of the high class courtesan's trade were as much the courtly skills of eloquence, wit, musical performance and elegant compliment as sex itself.[4]

In particular, for *cortigiane oneste* - the tiny minority of women whose accomplishments, style and wealth put them at the top of their profession - entry into aristocratic circles was a very real possibility.[5] Where the wives and daughters of the nobility - particularly in Venice - were increasingly confined to a cloistered existence within the home, the courtesan, not unlike Castiglione's *donna di palazzo*, could inject a welcome note of eroticism into masculine gatherings that cultivated the courtly arts of versification, witty exchange and musical performance.

In Venice from 1546 through to the 1570's, Domenico Venier's informal literary academy at the Ca' Venier included female writers, musicians and courtesans in its ranks. The poetesses Veronica Gambara and Irene di Spilembergo, the *virtuosa* Gaspara Stampa, early feminist Moderata Fonte and courtesan poets Tullia d'Aragona and Veronica Franco all received support from Domenico Venier. Apart from being a magnet for female talent, Ca' Venier also attracted some of the most important male writers of the day, among them Bernardo and Torquato Tasso, Sperone Speroni, Girolamo Molino and Girolamo Muzio. Its ranks were further swelled by members from the illustrious all-male Academia Veneziana, also known as the Accademia della Fama, when it closed down in 1561 (Margaret Rosenthal 89, 177-8). There were manifold opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of learned and vernacular literary cultures. Carlo Dionisotti writes of Venice in the mid-sixteenth century,

> Si erano spalancate le porte di una società letterataria ristretta e gerarchicamente ben differenziata... l'accesso e afflusso delle donne nei ranghi ufficiali della nuova società letteraria italiana si spiega dopo il 1530 per le condizioni stesse che ormai consentivano e stimolavano l'afflusso di uomini prima diseredati e reietti come Pietro Aretino. (239)

Men as well as women who had customarily been marginal to literary culture suddenly gained access to its centre.

In particular, writers' expanded use of the *volgare* made literary society more accessible to

women. This development seems to have shaped and been shaped by an atmosphere of liberated thought and freedom of expression. Moderata Fonte, one of Venier's acolytes, praised his intelligence, his leadership and his literary academy in Italy's earliest female-authored pro-feminist treatise, *Il merito delle donne*, which she wrote in 1590 (154). Gaspara Stampa, who was also connected with Ca' Venier, felt free to allude to the carnal consummation of her love for Count Collaltino in her published verse collection (CIV 147). The *Rime* even celebrated her adoption of a new lover when she was abandoned by Collaltino. The courtesan Tullia d'Aragona appeared in a verse anthology alongside the impeccably chaste and patrician Vittoria Colonna (Masson 106-7). This indicates the degree to which rank as well as gender decorum had become more flexible. It also suggests the atmosphere of libertinism which allowed the women associated with Ca' Venier to express themselves with unusual freedom.

The erotic literature of writers associated with Venier's academy puts poets such as Gaspara Stampa and, in particular, the much-feted courtesan poet Veronica Franco, in context. At the end of his first "Tirrenia" eclogue Girolamo Muzio addressed these frankly carnal verses to Tullia d'Aragona:

> Vien, Ninfa bella, a fra le molle braccia
> Raccogli quel che, con braccia aperte,
> Disioso l'aspetta, e nel tuo grembo
> Ricevi, lieta l'infocata amante:
> Stringi'l bramoso amante: e stretta aggiungi
> La labbra a le sue labbra: e 'l vivo spirto
> Suggi de l'alma amato: e del tuo spirto
> Il vivo fiore inspira le sue brame... (Masson 106)

As well as allowing women to participate more fully in literary culture, Venetian writers' commitment to the *volgare* opened up new modes of erotic writing. Writers associated with Domenico Venier's academy, who owed much to Pietro Aretino's liberating influence as well as to their reading of the Latin elegists, experimented in erotic - at times frankly pornographic - writing that bypassed the elevated Petrarchan style. This seems to have co-existed comfortably with more lofty literary venturing. Thus Domenico Venier could promote "a distinctly Venetian grandeur" of letters as well as compose bawdy dialect verse.[6]

His writing straddled dominant and marginal literary cultures. The dualism parallels his nephew Marco Venier's straddling of what Guido Ruggiero has described as the "licit" and "illicit" sexual cultures

of Venice itself ("Marriage, Love" 10-30). Venetian humanists such as Leon Battista Alberti and Francesco Barbaro had written tracts that promulgated the ideal of an ordered civic society whose harmony was founded in the regulation of sexuality through the basic unit of the patrician family. In Guido Ruggiero's terms, this "licit" culture of sexuality in Renaissance Venice was subtended by an "illicit" sexual culture centred around prostitution. As a lover of Veronica Franco's, Marco Venier sent her adulatory erotic poems even though, in his capacity as a member of the Venetian senate, he ruled against the presence of prostitutes in public places.[7] Like so many influential protectors of courtesans, he was thoroughly embedded in the dominant culture which legislated against them. In order, presumably, that their interactions had a gloss of decorum and civility, such men colluded in the fashioning of the honest courtesan's refinement and even respectability.[8] Courtesans themselves, in particular "honest courtesans" with literary ambitions such as Veronica Franco, straddled sexual and linguistic cultures as did many of their noble protectors; only from a reverse perspective.

Emulating the manners and attire of the nobility, courtesans who had no sexual virtue to lose could redefine their virtue as a function of class. Virtue had come to be associated as much with the fine manners that denoted rank and education as with inner moral worth. Equally, where courtesans had no chastity to prove, they were not under pressure to be demure and silent in order to demonstrate their virtue. Instead of attempting to define their virtue in feminine terms, some courtesans defined themselves according to the rules of male virtue; in particular, according to the early modern understanding that virtue could be demonstrated and achieved through public literary activity. Juliana Schiesari writes of "a Petrarchan sense of *virtù* (derived from Cicero)" which "meant the human effort to reach fame and success through letters, a quest whose self-interested roots are not hard to find" (75). Some courtesans - overtly self-interested as only unmarried, "freelance" women could be - defined their honesty not in sexual terms, but through learning the rubric of eloquence which secured entry into upper class circles.

Educated by her mother in the art of courtesanry and clearly successful in her cultivation of influential friends and protectors within Venice, Veronica Franco was consummately entrepreneurial in pursuit of her literary career. She capitalised on her close connection with Domenico Venier and his salon,

referring reverentially in her poems and letters to his "celebre concorso d'uomini dotti e di giudicio eletto," as well as requesting literary advice and moral support from him on numerous occasions (*Rime* XV 8-9). She published a volume of poetry in 1575 and her *Lettere familiari a diversi* in 1580. The latter were despatched to Montaigne on his visiting Venice in the same year. She also tried her hand at editorship, collecting and contributing to a volume of poems commemorating the death of the scion of an influential Brescian family.[9] The crowning moment of her career was being visited by Henri III of Poland on his way through Venice to be made king of France. She addressed a sonnet to him in memory of the occasion, and appears to have planned another volume of poetry to commemorate his visit and their brief association (Margaret Rosenthal 104-5). Clearly, the king visited Franco because of her fame as a sexually desirable - and available - woman. What is striking is the way she shamelessly capitalised on her sexual career in order to build up her literary reputation, even as her profession - prostitution - seems to have been germane to the shaping of arguments that, for the sixteenth century, were strongly feminist.

In Venice, honest courtesans were creatures of privilege. In the magnificence of their dress and their bold public visibility, they availed themselves of freedoms that were largely denied to the noblewomen whose status they imitated. Two widely-reprinted and influential tracts by Venetian humanists of the fifteen hundreds, Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* and Leon Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia*, had placed women's role within the family in complementary opposition to men's role in the public sphere. Drawing on Greek and Roman models of the domestic confinement of women, they emphasised the hierarchically-organised, orderly household where sexuality is harnessed in the service of the nuclear family, which in turn serves the state. The fundamental unit of the orderly household where, in Barbaro's words, "all the parts fit together in a harmonious whole," is the industrious wife whose energies are channelled into a tightly organised domestic economy. The showy, freewheeling entrepreneurialism of the Venetian courtesan could not be more opposed to the ideal of the confined and obedient patrician wife. Barbaro expressly forbids wives' wearing of sumptuous clothes. He even stipulates that they must not show pleasure in love-making: "lust and unseemly desire are harmful to their dignity and their husbands, even when later they say nothing about it" (213).

In this light, the culture of Venier's salon, and the penchant of the women associated with it to speak out, was defined by the very repressiveness of the official social order that the Venetian patriciate cultivated. The culture of courtesanry revolved around the brash display of sexuality as a freefloating commodity. This was antithetical to the regulated sexual economy of the patrician family. It represented a freedom of expression which, if degrading, was at least associated with pleasure. Thomas Coryat wrote that courtesans were necessary "places of evacuation" for Venetian husbands intent on safeguarding the chastity of their wives and went on to say,

> But I marvaile how that should be true though these Cortezans were utterly rooted out of the City. For the Gentlemen do even coope up their wives alwaies within the walles of their houses for feare of these inconveniences, as much as if there were no Cortezans at all in the City. (265)

Such an existence, for all its aura of unassailable virtue, must have looked exceedingly dour beside the ostentatious luxury of courtesans, which Coryat goes on to describe in fascinated detail and at great length.

> For so infinite are the allurements of these amorous Calypsoes, that the same of them hath drawen many to Venice from some of the remotest parts of Christendome, to contemplate their beauties, and enjoy their pleasing dalliances. And indeed such is the variety of the delicious objects they minister to their lovers, that they want nothing tending to delight. For when you come into one of their Palaces (as indeed some few of the principallest of them live in very magnificent and portly buildings fit for the entertainment of a great Prince) you seeme to enter into a Paradise of Venus. For their fairest roomes are most glorious and glittering to behold. The walles round about being adorned with most sumptuous tapistry and gilt leather, such as I have spoken of in my Treatise of Padua. Besides you may see the picture of the noble Cortezan most exquisitely drawen. As for herself shee comes to thee decked like the Queene and Goddesse of love, in so much that thou wilt thinke she made a late transmigration from Paphos, Cnidos, or Cythera, the auncient habitations of Dame Venus. For her face is adorned with the quintessence of beauty.

He finishes off by describing her make-up and the "ornaments of her body" - her hair "decked with many chaines of gold and orient pearle like a second Cleopatra" - her "divers gold rings beautified with diamonds and other costly stones, jewels in both her ears" - and, finally, her clothing, "the more to enamour thee, most fragrantly perfumed" (266-67). Coryat, clearly in thrall to the courtesan's art of self-display, makes her regal and mythic; a figure of considerable power.

Veronica Franco capitalises on the symbolic empowerment of the courtesan and adopts the trope of women's adornment as a way of talking about female power. She does so in a poem that takes issue with

a man who has insulted a friend of hers, and in the context of a feminist argument that states that woman,

> ... se mostrar volesse quanto vale,
> in quanto a la ragion, de l'uom saria
> di gran lunga maggiore, e non che eguale.
> (XXIV 79-81)

In a *tour de force* of extended irony, she goes on to say that women refrain from exercising their superiority over men because they are concerned for the preservation of the human race. It is for this reason that men pay court to women and "cedono 'l luogo in casa e in strada" (XXIV 104), and for this reason

> che gli uomini perciò grand onor fanno
> a le donne, perché cessero a loro
> l'imperio, e sempre a lor serbato l'hanno.
> Quinci sete, ricami, argento ed oro,
> gemme, porpora, e qual è di piú pregio
> si pon in adornane alto tesoro. (XXIV 94-9)

In a cultural context where feminine luxury is stereotypically associated with mendacity and ambition, Franco wittily refashions it as a male concession to female superiority. To put it another way, as a courtesan she's got it and she's not afraid to flaunt it. Her attitude could not be more opposed to Barbaro's belief that "wives ought to care more to avoid censure than to win applause in the splendid style of their dress" (206). In spite of the repressive prescriptions of Barbaro and his ilk, Venetian women were renowned for the luxury of their clothes - legislation against courtesans revolved largely around the fact that their style of dress made them hard to distinguish from noblewomen (Casagrande 47-142). Courtesans' ethos of display was an extreme example of a general Venetian trait. They represented a mixture of class fluidity, conspicuous consumption and unregulated sexuality that was the bane of moralists and civic authorities alike. They were in some sense trailblazers of Venetian and, in particular, female libertarianism.

It is significant that Franco's comments on female ornamentation prefigure a feminist argument made by Lucrezia Marinelli in her *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne* (1600). Juliana Schiesari notes that Marinelli "argued for the superiority of women over men precisely *because* they wore ornaments" (83). Pointing out that Arcangela Tarabotti in the seventeenth century also argued in favour of feminine adornment, actively encouraging women to beautify themselves with jewels in order to celebrate their

beauty in the eyes of God, Schiesari suggests that these women were militating against the ideology of feminine chastity. Their praise of female ornament provided a way of gainsaying an ideology which emphasised silence and sober clothing in order to enforce female subservience. It is surely also significant that both Tarabotti and Marinelli were from Venice, a city whose courtesans exemplified its ostentatious tastes. In England and France, where the culture of prostitution was squalid and provincial in comparison with Italy, feminist tracts did not polemicise the subject of female self-beautification in this way.

Marinelli and Tarabotti were also writing in opposition to the stringency of Venetian sumptuary laws. Many such laws were directed specifically against prostitutes. A 1562 Venetian ruling declared:

> Le meretrici habitanti in questa città non possino vestir né in alcuna parte della persona portar oro, argento et seda, eccetto che le scuffie, qual siano di seda pura. Non possin portar cadenelle, anelli con pietra o senza, né meno alle orecchie alcuna cosa, tal che in tutto e per tutto sia prohibito alle ditte meretrici l'oro, l'argento et seda et etiam l'uso delle zolie di qualunque sorte, sì buone come false, sì in casa come fuori di casa, et anco fuori di questa nostra città. (Quoted in Casagrande 64-5)

Franco's witty celebration of women's right to "sete, ricami, argento ed oro,/ gemme, porpora, e qual è di piú pregio" flies in the face not only of received wisdom about feminine virtue but of the law itself. In a world where clothing was so closely associated with rank, courtesans' wearing of expensive fabrics and jewellery dramatised their desire for status as well as their selling of sexuality. It is typical of Franco that she celebrates public display rather than private obedience, and that she aggressively lays claim to the badges of her own profession rather than attempting to gloss it over.

Courtesans' devotion to the art of self-adornment contributed to their reputation for being devious and having ideas above their station. Their penchant for adopting aristocratic names contributed to the image. Cesare Vecellio wrote in his popular book on fashions in 1591 that "after frequenting a Venetian patrician, [courtesans] grab onto his family name, using it as their own, and thus fooling many foreign men who come to the city and mistake them for Venetian ladies."[10] The anxiety he shows about courtesans' attempts to cross class was to some extent justified. Tullia d'Aragona adopted the name of Donna Maria d'Aragona, a Spanish princess (Masson 106). The poet Gaspara Stampa displayed a similar urge to enhance her social standing. In a gesture of mingled entitlement and submission, she gave herself the pen-name of Annasilla after the river that flowed through the estate of her lover, Count Collaltino. In cases where

courtesans succeeded in marrying their aristocratic lovers, acceptance into the patriciate became a tangible reality. Yet Pietro Aretino, lampooning the venality of the age in *Sei giornate*, makes courtesans' emulation of noble-sounding names into a ludicrous affectation (126). His satire of their euphemistic grandiosity certainly suits Tullia d'Aragona, most of whose poems address influential men of the time with lavish flattery and none of which talks of love as anything less than ideal.

The 'honest courtesan' and literary language

Veronica Franco stands out for not changing her proper name and, moreover, for inscribing it into the texture of her writing. Her denial of the ennobling ornament of pseudonymy matches her refusal to gloss over the nature of her profession. In an important sense, these two phenomena are linked. Two scurrilous satirical poems of the 1530's were directed against notorious courtesans. In both *La puttana errante* and *Il trentuno della Zaffetta*, Elena Ballerina and Angela Zaffetta were referred to by their own names. It was an integral part of the poems' aim to insult, a form of public exposure. In this context, Franco's self-naming constitutes a refusal of shame. It is also remarkable within a Christian and Neoplatonising tradition of love poetry where the concealment of the lady's name was a cardinal rule and the very structure of love depended on the lady's sexual honour. Anonymity presupposed chastity and vice versa.

Neither Gaspara Stampa nor Tullia d'Aragona, the two other successful literary courtesans of Franco's day, defied this convention, even though in both their cases it rang a little hollow.[11] While Tullia d'Aragona in her treatise on love, *Della infinità di amore*, was represented as an interlocutor under her own name, this was her editor's doing. Giustipolitano Muzio found it inconsistent that Tullia, "per modestia," had renamed herself Sabina, while calling the men in the piece by their own names.[12] Another way of viewing it would be that he felt free to bypass her scruples because she was a courtesan; in the same way, he felt free to write her an erotic poem. In another variation on feminine modesty Gaspara Stampa in her *Rime* calls herself Annasilla after the river that flows beneath her lover's ancestral home, thereby exaggerating her social inferiority and putting herself "at his feet."

Franco, in contrast to Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona, takes considerable pride in her own name. This may be related to her privileged social standing as a Venetian *cittadina* - a citizen by birth - whose family had a coat of arms. In a series of poems which oscillate between the plaintive epistolarity of Ovid's *Heroides* and the debatative stance of Ciceronian dialogue, she consistently refuses to adopt positions of modesty and subservience.[13] Her own verses are interspersed with verses written to her by an *incerto autore*. The *autore* was likely to have been not just one but several men. Thirteen of the *capitoli* are organised as a series of questions and answers which force the speakers to define their own position and which frequently place them in competition with one another. Where the epistle is, in a peculiarly concentrated and self-conscious manner, a form of signature, the dialogue reveals the speaker's name and foregrounds his or her voice by virtue of contrast and polemical opposition.

As her choice of poetic forms - not to mention her publication of a volume of familiar letters - suggests, the idea of signature in Franco's work has a particular resonance. The adjective *franco* connotes nobility of nature and openness of temper, and Veronica emphasises its suitability for her surname when she gives "Franco" a feminine agreement, as if it were an adjective: "Questa la tua fedel Franca ti scrive..." (III 1).[14] A sonnet addressed to her in the collection of poems dedicated to Bartolomeo Zacco also plays on her name's association with nobility and freedom in the lines "Veronica con rima eccelsa e franca/ De l'immortalitate il sacra al tempio" (Margaret Rosenthal 100). Clearly, her contravention of decorous feminine reserve counted, in this context, as a cause for celebration. Elsewhere in her own poetry, Franco uses the adjective so as to underscore the sentiment that liberty is her natural birthright.[15]

> Questa quella Veronica vi scrive,
> che per voi, non qual già libera e franca
> or d'infelice amor soggetta vive,
> per voi rivolta da via dritta a manca (XX 1-4)

She is "quella Veronica," "questa la tua Veronica," "questa la tua fedel Franca." Like the female speakers in Ovid's *Heroides*, she has a penchant for the self-announcement of the love letter, with all its overtones of sincerity and confessionality.

Throughout her *Terze rime* Franco offsets her own sincerity with the untruthfulness of her lovers and of men in general. The first of her poems in the *Terze rime* is something of an amorous and poetic

manifesto, in which she responds to verses from her lover Marco Venier by questioning his sincerity. Desiring that "quel, che tien la mente in sé raccolto,/ mostrasson le vestige esterne in guisa" (II 5-6), Franco emphasises that in her there is no conflict between heart and expression. As she comments later, "'l mio cor [è] simile al volto" (XIX). In two poems which openly confront the "armi insidiosi e non vedute" (XVI 7) of men's slander, she further elects herself the plain-speaking scourge of lying men.

The connotations of "franco" are peculiarly fitting for her bold persona and dismissive attitude to the velleities of feminine modesty. In *capitolo* XX she makes a journey through the city at night to visit her beloved's home, where she lingers at his front door and implores his doorkeeper to allow her entry. The *topos* of the *exclusus amator* from Roman elegy had, up until Franco, been used excusively for male lovers. The poem suggests her very real "franchise" as a courtesan who might move about the city at all hours of the day and night where other women would remain dutifully indoors. Franco dignifies the freedom of movement that forms the lowering motif of *La puttana errante* (the motif that was brought to bear on Elena Ballerina in Lorenzo Venier's poem).

Such freedom or *franchezza* was described by Pietro Aretino as a peculiarly Venetian quality. The fact that Venice was the European capital for the sex industry surely contributed to this reputation. The city's celebrated civil liberties also informed its ethos of free expression. Perhaps the most famous celebration of Venetian liberty came from Aretino in his letter to Doge Gritti (29). Veronica identified herself strongly with the city and, as a *cittadina*, benefited directly from its liberties.[16] Her *Lettere familiare*, published in Venice in 1580, are calculated to give the impression of a woman who is intimately involved in the fortunes of her native city. In the *Terze rime* she writes *encomia* to Venice and directs others to do so. In *capitolo* XII she boldly creates a homology between herself and Venice, instructing a rejected lover to direct his literary praises to the city as a substitute for her own self. In all respects, her identification with the city seems to legitimate her *franchezza* as a female poet. Both Margaret Rosenthal and Ann Jones have written about Franco's identification with the Venetian civic myth.[17] However, they suggest that it was Franco's way of rewriting her marginality as a prostitute. Thus, in Rosenthal's reading, Franco associates herself with Venice as a Venus Anadyomene - an immaculate virgin born from the sea.

Yet Rosenthal's point is made at the expense of noting that Franco identifies more with Venice the home of free speech than with Venice the immaculate icon. Franco uses her Venetianness to justify rather than to occlude the fact that she is a prostitute. Her "onestà" as a courtesan is not merely an attribute of rank but of defiant openness.

Perhaps there was an awareness that she embodied a kind of freedom of expression precisely because she was a courtesan. Aretino's often-reprinted *Sei giornate* (1534) had used the figure of Nanna the courtesan to expose the seamy underbelly of Roman society, and had done so in a ripe and earthy vernacular that was as liberatingly indecorous as the events it described. Nanna exposed the hypocrisies of vested authority in a thoroughly mercenary society whose priests and prelates were as venal as robbers. In a defence of plain-speaking that reflects Aretino's own theories of language the manipulative Nanna presents herself, paradoxically, as an exemplar of honesty (*Sei giornate* 165). Unlike the people she is surrounded by, she is at least honest about her materialism and self-interest.

Ten years later, Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo d'amore* (1542) also used a courtesan to give voice to unorthodox and anti-clerical opinions. He placed the Roman courtesan Tullia d'Aragona at the centre of a celebration of sensual love. Like Aretino's *Sei giornate*, the *Dialogo d'amore* went against the grain of the dominant culture. With splendid profanity, Speroni refers to an earlier piece by Antonio Brocardo, *In lode delle cortigiane*, asserting that if Lucretia, that icon of chastity, came back to life she would come as a courtesan. He argues that any other kind of life than the courtesan's is against nature: "egli pruova, in che modo li costumi cortigianeschi (si quelli bene istimiamo) sono via a scala alla cognitione di Dio" (*I dialogi* fols 21V-22). Unsurprisingly, Speroni incurred the wrath of his patrons, who directed him to refashion it into a denunciation of courtesans. Like Antonio Brocardo's oration, Speroni's dialogue was written before the Index of Prohibited Books was instituted in 1571 and was emblematic of a period of relative liberty of expression. The fact that his 1575 *Orazione* was a forced retraction composed under duress gives its attack on courtesans' *libertà* a peculiar irony.

Both Aretino and Speroni could swing between identifying with the courtesan as a subversive figure who symbolised the freedoms of the age and attacking her as a social disease. Indeed, an entire

satirical genre directed against the courtesan and couched in pointedly anti-courtly language grew up in the wake of Aretino's *Sei giornate* (Margaret Rosenthal 7-57). The anti-courtly language of these satires, which were by and large penned by Venetian writers, could function as a way of staking out their moral and artistic freedom. Paradoxically, it also enunciated their affective links with the courtesans they denounced. The courtesan's association with the dark heart of a society intent on ennobling its baser motives reflected something of writers' own predicament, even as they made it the butt of their satire. Writers seem to have perceived in the *cortigiana onesta* a person who was as ambitious, and as subordinately dependent on patronage and favour, as they themselves were (Margaret Rosenthal 30-36). She represented the will to autonomy that the age both coveted and feared, and the remorseless compromise of that autonomy. Thus Speroni describes her in terms of a doomed aspiration to personal power -

> Libera tu Signora, tu miserella? Non hai membro sulla persona, che non sia servo di tutto 'l popolo: Forse tu vanti di dominarlo, che dì e notte ti viene a casa ad ogn'hora con mani piene di ariento et oro?... l'oro et l'ariento, che tu li costi, son per te ceppi, et catene perché ti paia di trionfar nella servitù, e non ti caglia di liberarti. (*Orationi* 208)

Speroni and Aretino situate the courtesan at the centre of sixteenth-century debates about honest and dishonest motives, freedom and servitude. In doing so they seem to give her a disproportionate importance. By bringing her centre-stage they reflect the overlap between high and low, between "licit" and "illicit" cultures of sexuality that Guido Ruggiero has described in Renaissance Venice. Ruggiero claims that in Veronica Franco "we have perhaps the most famous example of the complex and regular mixing of 'high' and 'low' that was possible in this area of the illicit world" ("Marriage, Love" 22). During the period of the 1570's when Franco's fortunes peaked she was, in a sense, part of the establishment. Her personal success, and the discourses of courtesanry which seem in many ways to have enabled it, can perhaps best be explained in terms of Peter Stallybrass' and Allon White's "poetics of transgression."

> The 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent on that low-Other... but also that the top *includes* the low symbolically, as a primary eroticised constituent of its fantasy life... It is for this reason that what is so often *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central (like hair in the 1960's). (5)

White's and Stallybrass' theory explains the confident outspokenness of Franco's writing. As a courtesan she was a "symbolically central" figure who, in Guido Ruggiero's words, "was often seen as atypically active and powerful" ("Marriage, Love" 26). She was therefore sure of an audience - if not of a friendly reception. Courtesanry was a selling-point.

The doubleness of male writers' response to courtesans provides the background for Franco's own rhetoric. Speroni's backhanded admission of courtesans' autonomy as unmarried, 'self-made' women provides a telling gloss on her independent persona. Franco capitalises on the power that her society so uneasily accorded to the courtesan. Her confrontational stance in making an unsolicited night visit to prise a man from his bed is characteristic. The attitude is built into her choice of verse form, which both enacts her liberty and her defensiveness as a woman beholden to no man and yet constantly subjected to men's attacks.[18] In Venetian poetic practice of the sixteenth century, the *tenzone* - an exchange of questions and answers that has its roots in the Provençal *tenso* - was interpreted as an overtly competitive display of poetic virtuosity. To write *tenzone* in tercets was to meet a considerable technical challenge. Girolamo Ruscelli, who, like Franco, frequented Domenico Venier's influential and prestigious Venetian salon, described it in these terms:

> All'Ottave Rime, e alle Terze sieno stati alcuni arditi, e valorosi ingegni, che hanno risposto... E chi ancor volesse obligarsi a risponder con tanto numero di stanze, e di Terzetti, o di Versi, sarebbe tanto più vagamente fatto.[19]

Equally, to prefer the *capitolo* over the sonnet was to prefer a more intellectually astringent and socially critical form. Commenting on Franco's use of it, Margaret Rosenthal writes, "during the first half of the sixteenth century, the *capitolo* was the preferred form for academic, satiric and comic compositions" and "became the foremost weapon against literary pedantry" (178).

Riscelli's comment that poets who wrote in *terze rime* were "arditi e valorosi" is apt. Franco, whose *capitoli* outweigh her occasional sonnets both in volume and in originality, capitalises on their function as a medium of verbal combat. Capitoli were a peculiarly appropriate medium of expression for a prostitute, vulnerable more than most women to verbal - not to mention physical - abuse.[20] In them, Franco frequently uses a militaristic vocabulary, engaging in poetic duels with male opponents. In *capitoli*

XIII, XVI, XXIII and XXIV she challenges a lover to an amorous fight in the bedroom; attacks a man who has written a slanderous poem about her; meditates at length on how to avenge another personal insult; and reproves a man who has threatened a friend of hers.

She reverses sixteenth-century ideals of feminine virtue, which invariably turned on figures of humility and self-restraint, and defines her honour in masculine terms. This is a logical extension of the position in which courtesans found themselves. In general, women's honour was defined by their chastity, which in turn was viewed as the property of the male members of their family (so that, finally, women's honour was not their own at all). Courtesans were not likely to have male family members interested in conserving and defending their honour for the sake of the family name. They were obliged both to defend their own honour and to redefine it. Franco does this by dramatising her own valour (a virtue which Tasso seven years later in his *Discorso della virtù feminile e donnesca* defined as excusively male) and her magnanimity (likewise a virtue Aristotle defined in masculine terms).[21] Thus in capitolo XIII she throws out a challenge to a duel - "Non più parole: ai fatti, in campo, a l'armi/ ch'io voglio, risoluta da morire,/ da sí grave molestia liberarmi" - but insists, with chivalric gallantry, on her opponent's choosing the weapons.

The French for magnanimity is *franc-parler* and it refers to a spontaneous and open form of speech unconstrained by circumspection.[22] *Franc-parler* is in some sense Franco's trademark. But, at a lower level, it is also the trademark of women of her profession. Courtesans were renowned for their sharp tongues. Aretino's Nanna is the arch-stereotype. Thomas Coryat articulates a widely-held belief in courtesans' aggression when he says that a man who dared to lift one of their masks should find himself "cut to pieces" (248). In her poems of chivalric combat Franco ennobles the street slanging match. In the poem where she "takes up arms" on behalf of a woman friend, we learn that the man in question directly threatened her with a knife: "giuraste voler tagliarle il viso" (XXIV 35). Courtesans, clearly, were vulnerable to attacks that no cloistered *gentildonna* would be likely to incur, and Franco did not shy away from repudiating assailants in their own terms.

However elevated her social connections and literary venturing, she was still defined by her role

as a purveyor of illicit sex and by the language of the street with which this culture was associated. Aretino's *Sei giornate* had sparked a vogue for satirical writings (such as *La puttana errante* and *Il trentuno della Zaffetta*) that attacked the courtesan as a symbol of social corruption and used the scurrilous language of the street and the market-place to underline its vision of degradation. Maffio Venier wrote one such piece attacking Franco. He was born into this tradition of satire, as the son of Lorenzo Venier, whom Aretino had dubbed "il mio creato" because Lorenzo specialised in literary attacks on courtesans. Maffio's attack was circulated in Venetian coteries in 1575 - the same year that Franco pubished her *Terze rime*. In it, she becomes a woman whose syphilitic body is emblematic of her moral corruption.

> Veronica, ver unica puttana,
> Franca, "idest" furba, fina, fiappa e frola,
> E muffa e magra e marza e pì mariola. (Dazzi I:40)

The aggression of Venier's attack is marked by his use of slang. His description of Veronica in terms of smell and touch also inscribes her moral and social inferiority. Where sight was constructed as the privileged sense of refined experience, particularly love, smell and touch were progressively outlawed in early modern high cultural discourse.[23] In particular, Maffio's opening line echoes words written in Franco's praise by a distant cousin of his own, Marco Venier.[24] Maffio transforms Marco's highflown play on Veronica's name - "Ver unica beltade" -into the unambiguously lowering phrase, "Ver unica puttana." His use of her proper name exemplifies the risk of public insult and exposure that Franco had courted in being so self-advertising.

Franco takes the extraordinary step of openly defending her profession. Her response to Venier's slander is a characteristic blend of immodesty and dignity. She ironically accepts his description of her as *puttana*, employing the term *meretrice* which, if marginally more respectable - an English equivalent for *puttana* would be 'whore' - still means 'prostitute.' She raises the level of discourse but she does not shy away from naming the insult.

> E se ben "meretrice" mi chiamate,
> o volete inferir ch'io non vi sono,
> o che ve n'en tra tali di lodate.
> Quanto le meretrici hanno di buono,
> quanto di grazioso e di gentile,

esprime in me del parlar vostro il suono. (XVI 178-83)

In a way that seems very modern, she refuses to be shamed into silence or euphemism. With remarkable audacity for a woman of her time, she claims the upper class qualities of grace and gentility for herself and others like her. Her sisterly solidarity with other prostitutes must be put in context. Cathy Santore describes the case of a sixteenth-century Venetian courtesan who was charged for infringing certain laws as a *meretrice* but subsequently acquitted because, as a courtesan, she was exempt from them. Franco, rather than distancing herself - as she so easily could have done - from women who were lower down in the hierarchy of her profession, claims kinship with them. Uniting "frankness" with a kind of back-handed courtly elegance, she denies the baseness attributed to prostitutes at the same time as asserting their value *as prostitutes*.

In what is at one level a battle of styles, she reinvents Maffio's insulting phrase as a courtly compliment and scores points against him for her superior wit and refinement. In *capitolo* XXIV Franco fashions herself as a teacher of good manners to uncouth men who, according to the "fecciosi costumi del vil volgo," take it upon themselves to insult women -

quanto l'offesa fatta al nostro sesso
la civilitá de l'uom gentile aborre. (XXIV 112-13)

Franco's self-appointed role as arbiter of courteous discourse is visible in her letters as well as her poetry. It recalls the role of women in the *Heptaméron* and indeed capitalises on a recognised function of the courtesan. In correcting her suitors' manners, the courtesan inherited a debased form of the courtly tradition of the woman who directs her *serviteur* in the ways of virtue (Lawner *The Sixteen Pleasures* 27). The ornament of courtesy, clearly, redounded to the credit of both parties and raised the tone of commercial sex.

Yet the role takes on a peculiarly aggressive character in Franco's writing. She uses *cortesia* as a weapon. Her mastery of the language of civility is crucial to her ability to defend herself against attacks such as Maffio's, whether real or implied. In this sense, it matches the high-toned work of Tullia d'Aragona; in particular, Tullia's *Dialogo*, with its Platonising discussion of love and sex. Yet the

protracted *politesse* of Tullia's work is a world away from Franco. Both of them depend on the Renaissance ideal of Ciceronian dialogue as a means of rational debate conducted in refined, upper class language.[25] But the language of Ciceronian dialogue was prone to becoming absurdly effete in its use of phrases such as "la parte concupiscible" and "l'oggetto amabile" (Cox 96). Franco refuses the constraint of feminine gentility and lays claim to a more robust and forceful style.

She hovers between upper crust civility and lower class incivility. *Capitolo* XXIII - which, like *capitolo* XXIV, is her response to an insult - makes the tension between restrained and unrestrained language its subject. It is a letter in verse addressed to a male friend whom Franco hopes will instruct her on the best way to redeem her honour. She plays the lady, asking for his "cortese protezzion," only then to provide her own. She asks whether she should confront her assailant or affect an aristocratic unconcern. The class term is entirely relevant to the way Franco frames her argument. Her opponent's choice to "pugnar con una donna" (105) is "pessimo e vilissimo" (104). To respond to him at all would be to "avvilirmi" (28). His "via peggiore stile" (96) may affect her own. In fact, Franco allows herself to have it both ways. By mulling over the question she demonstrates her sensitivity to the dangers of getting involved in his lowering discourse. Yet she also asserts the claims of her anger's "soverchia passion," which urges her towards a *duello*. This argument between two subject positions and two linguistic registers provides the logic for a piece of consummately poised satirical invective. Franco's anger justifies her colloquial turn of phrase - "ben certamente merita costui/ cancellarsi del libro de' viventi" (46-7). Yet her use of colloquial terms also manages to skewer her assailant with his own class inferiority:

> Oh, se le rane avesser unghia e denti
> come sarian, se drittamente addocchio,
> talor piú de' leon fiere e mordenti!
> Ma poi, per gracidar d'alcun ranocchio,
> di gir non lascia a ber l'asino al fosso,
> anzi drizza a quel suon l'orecchio e l'occhio.
> Se un ser grillo, a dir mal per uso mosso
> de la sua buca standosi al riparo,
> m'ha biasmato in mia assenzia, io che ne posso? (49-57)

She juggles folk images, diminutives and popular turns of phrase with aristocratic disdain for the man they identify, who is a "ranocchio" - a small frog - the kind that crop up in fairy tales. This passage allows

Franco to use demeaningly earthy terms to front her slanderer:

> D'una brutta cornacchia a l'aspro grido
> trassero altri uccellacci da carogne,
> e di sterco l'empier la strozza e 'l nido. (64-6)

The letter - for all that its discussion of good manners is calculated to pander to the self-opinion of its addressee - locates its emotional centre firmly beyond the rubric of bellettristic social climbing. Franco dramatises a more self-reliant and oppositional ethos than the mere desire to take advice in good breeding from a well-bred man, and does so by way of a language quite foreign to the courtly *politesse* of Italian Ciceronianism.

For all that she cultivates a tone of civil propriety, she is in many respects an anti-courtly poet. Her penchant for the concrete, colloquial turn of phrase, her avoidance of pedantry and repudiation of false sentiment, bear testimony to the influence of Pietro Aretino. Aretino, who had throughout his life railed against vested authority of one kind and another (in particular, that of the Italian courts), had in 1542 found refuge in Venice. Like Franco he exalted the city's civil liberties and embodied them in his outspoken literary persona. His example had considerable influence on the subsequent generation of Venetian writers, the *volgarizzanti*. Their arsenal of expressive media was immeasurably widened by the variety of his literary output, his unembarrassed excursions into print, his commercial success and, perhaps most importantly in the case of Franco, his use of language from the street as well as the court. The venal and materialist view of social relations that Aretino presented in works such as *Sei giornate* and *La cortegiana* lampooned the courtly mystifications of Neoplatonic gallantry and asserted the claims of nature and truth over art and academicism. As a satirist he conformed to the Ciceronian ideals set out by Francesco Sansovino.

> Ora la Satira vuol esser di stil umile e basso et imitante la natura, perciò che basta al satirico apertamente riprender gli errori altrui senz'altro artificio... la Satirica richiede la verità nuda et aperta... si vede manifestamente ch'alla materia satirica non si convien l'ornamento né la grazia, né i fuchi, né la soavità del dire che vuol la materia eroica et alta, ma una schietta semplicità con una acerbità severa, mescolata talora con qualche sale e con qualche tratto gustevole et acuto. (517-18)

Franco frequently catches the sensory piquancy of tone, the naturalism that Sansovino describes. Like

Aretino she uses a popular idiom to satirise false ceremony and expose hypocrisy. Unlike Aretino, she tends to associate the deceptiveness of poetic hyperbole with masculine presumption, opposing it to the authenticity of her own view of the world.[26]

Her first poem in *Terze rime* employs low cultural idioms from the *volgare* and a tone of calculated, almost offhand frankness to challenge the idealising *lingua franca* of Petrarchism and its corresponding idealisation of masculinity.[27] It was preceded by some gallant verses from her lover Marco Venier, a distant cousin of Maffio Venier's. In reacting suspiciously to his declarations, Franco was playing a conventionally feminine role. As far back as the fourteenth century Christine de Pizan had counselled young women to be sceptical about men's words of love (110). Tullia d'Aragona, with becoming modesty and politeness, enacted feminine suspicion in her response to Sperone Speroni in the *Dialogo dell'infinità d'amore*. Yet Franco's poem avoids any such coy display of feminine virtue, even though her self-presentation through the filter of a man's poem would seem to guarantee it. This method of presenting the woman poet was used in editions of verse by Tullia d'Aragona and the Lyonnaise author Louise Labé. Introduced via the lens of a male gaze whose approval enacts a kind of patriarchal guarantee of good character the woman poet, to use Ann Jones' metaphor, is placed in a hall of mirrors which flatter and idealise her (*Currency of Eros* 104). Franco, however, resists this gaze by asserting the priority of her own frame of reference. Her response to Venier satirises his idealising language and philosophy of love by means of a bluntly colloquial rhetoric:

> S'esser del vostro amor potessi certa
> per quel che mostran le parole e 'l volto...
> semplice e sciocca ne sarei derisa:
> "a un luogo stesso per molte vie vassi,"
> dice il proverbio... (II 1-2, 10-11)

In describing the tortuousness of the language of male seduction Franco echoes Aretino's protestations against literary artifice in his celebrated letter to Lodovico Dolce: "La natura istessa de la cui semplicità son secretario mi detta ciò che io compongo, e la patria mi scioglie i nodi della lingua, quando si ragroppa ne la superstizione de la chiacchiere forestieri" (194).

Her description of Venier's words as a tangle of deceptive pathways is analogous to Aretino's "nodi della

lingua." She dramatises the fact that "tutti i lor vani indizi lascio a tergo" through a series of calculatedly homely phrases that catch the ethos of Aretino's native simplicity. Her repeated use of colloquialisms decentres Venier's high cultural idiom, as does her emphasis on the deceptiveness of its language of love. She punctures his adulatory rhetoric by asking that he put himself in her position:

> Signor, l'esser beffato è cosa dura,
> massime ne l'amor; e chi nol crede
> ei stesso la ragion metta in figura. (II 64-66)

Finally, Franco takes it upon herself to reject the assumption that courtesans are venal and does so with an open-handedness far more remarkable than her protestations of virtue:

> E però quel, che da voi cerco adesso,
> non è che con argento over con oro
> il vostro amor voi mi facciate espresso...
> Di mia profession non è tal atto. (II 94-6, 100)

The naturalism of allowing the words "mia profession" into her vocabulary at all, and of squarely referring to the coin of sexual exchange, further challenges the euphemism of Venier's poem. There is something of the straightforward self-reliance of Aretino's courtesan Nanna; both of them are working women and proud of it. It might be argued that Franco used proverbial and colloquial turns of phrase because she had not benefited from the refining influence of Latin and of upper class speech decorum. In fact, she goes out of her way to underline the linguistic options at her command. In *capitolo* XVI she offers to "duel" with a literary opponent in the Venetian or Tuscan dialects, "in lingua selvaghesca" or in "la maniera pedantesca," asserting that "in tutte queste ho molta industria speso" (128-9). Franco uses the linguistic register which will score her the most points within a specific poetic exchange - but shows a definite penchant for the "low" vocabulary of satire and comedy.

Franco's listing of her rhetorical skills was a remarkably flamboyant move for a woman of her time to make. The suspicion with which verbal facility was viewed in the Renaissance is instinct in George Puttenham's influential treatise on poetics. He associates poetic skill with cunning, and nowhere more so than in his section on poetic ornament, where the beautifying effects of rhetorical ornament are compared to female dress and make-up (149). Rhetoric becomes an artful disguise and this idea feeds directly into

misogynist views of femininity. Its use, therefore, becomes something that a woman - in the manner of Marguerite de Navarre - would tend to downplay rather than advertise. Franco openly arrogates its use. However, she treats it as a tool of masculine competition rather than an instrument of beautification.

With the same direct and pragmatic emphasis, she emphasises the material basis of the relation that Venier calls love. Terms of commercial exchange recur throughout the poem:

> ... io non crederò d'esser amata,
> né 'l debbo creder, né ricompensarvi
> per l'arra, che fin qui m'avete data (34-37)
>
> né cosí tosto d'alcun uom compresi
> che fosse valoroso e che m'amasse,
> che 'l cambio con usura ancor gli resi (88-90)
>
> ... mi darete quel che, benché vaglia
> al mio giudicio assai, nulla a voi costa (140-41)

Once again, Aretino's influence seems to have bearing on her poetic strategy. The pattern of his career went some way towards legitimating writing as a means of commerce. With Aretino, writing embraced the marketplace. For Franco, writing embraced sexuality, both because of her profession and because of the standard view that female writers were sexually immodest (nowhere more so than when they entered into the public domain of print culture). In Aretinian fashion, Franco bypasses aristocratic velleities that eschew the taint of practice and admits to the commercial basis not just of writing but of sex.[28] Once again, the position she adopts is quintessentially lower class and immodest. It approximates Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque -and, typically, feminine - body as "a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange." Bakhtin sets the mobility and multiplicity of the grotesque subject in opposition to the self-enclosed, completed, "indifferent" and essentially disembodied classical subject (Stallybrass 1986, 22). Where the grotesque suggests Franco's rhetorical style, the classical approximates Mary Wroth's monumental ideal of femininity. Franco's style is defined by the dialogism of her preferred writing forms and the multiplicity of her interlocutors, as well as by her penchant for dynamic, conflictual exchanges.[29] In glaring opposition to the self-advertisingly restrained rhetorical strategies of Mary Wroth and Marguerite de Navarre, she stresses that she gives as much as, or more than, she gets. In contravention of the courtly code of

Petrarchism, of the concept of the ideal woman as a sealed vessel of chastity and domesticity, and of the euphemisms usually employed by literary courtesans, she frankly positions herself as the subject of material and sexual exchange which indeed she was.

In her familiar letters, which were published in 1580, five years after her poems, Franco mingles a humanistic currency of moral advice with further references to commercial activity.

> Franco's only "debito" (debt) to her correspondent, she claims in letter 18, will emerge from a mutual exchange of "valor" (valor). She repays her "clients" solely with their "propria moneta" (own coin). (Rosenthal 136)

In letter 18 she reproves a man for treating her like merchandise with no respect for her personally:

> E la cagion che m'acqueta nel dispiacer ch'io sento di vedermi così da voi richiesta con accrescimento di prezzo, quasi facendo mercato, se ben, a dir la verità, molt'ingordo della mia persona, che vale assai poco, è questa. (31)

She accepts that civil exchange works according to the logic of commerce - a reality subtended by her profession - but insists that she is its subject rather than its mere object.[30] Letter 4, like letter 18, uses a vocabulary of equal repayment.

> ... vi discorrerò col vostro stesso discorso, e fate conto che, nel pagarvi il mio debito, io venga a restituirvi quella propria moneta a punto che voi m'avete dato: tal è ricambio della virtù, che m'attegna non pur in similitudine, ma in forma d'un medesimo modo. (11)

Franco does not hide the fact that she is above all a business woman and the language of high culture is a commodity. However the letters, published five years after the *Terze rime*, show an increased refinement of tone.

In publishing them she demonstrated to the world not only her elevated social connections but her ideal of a "ricambio della virtù... in forma d'un medesimo modo" whereby, as a *cortigiana onesta*, she repaid the cultural benefits that she received from her friends. She seeks parity with her male interlocutors. Sidestepping the obsequiousness of much humanistic letter-writing, she gives as well as receives counsel. She fashions herself as an advisor to the Venetian patriciate. Thus letter 17 dispenses advice to a lovelorn admirer, counselling him to pursue the only kind of virtue that really counts and devote his life to letters. In giving voice to this familiar humanist philosophy, Franco candidly reveals her own aspirations, placing them on the same level as his own -

> ... si la mia fortuna comportasse, io farei tutta la mia vita e spenderei tutto 'l mio tempo dolcemente nell'academie degli uomini virtuosi. (28)

In seeking equal status "nell'academie degli uomini virtuosi," she adopts the role of the male courtier, competing for patronage alongside an almost exclusively male fraternity of literary aspirants.[31] Franco may have felt she was enhancing her authority in adopting a masculine persona.[32] Her discourse, particularly in the letters, draws more on male, humanistic culture than on the woman-worship of courtly conventions. Her often fraternal attitude to her correspondents is a temperate extension of the machismo of her duelling *capitoli*. In both cases she enacts a kind of literary transvestism in order to lay claim to the virtue of letters. Italian humanist culture had a particularly masculine flavour. When Castiglione's characters debate whether the virtue of letters is greater than that of arms they are still equating the two. Machiavelli's frankly militarist definition of virtue in *Il principe* is based in a conflation of virility with virtue: the latter boils down an active assertion of force and will which was inevitably perceived in masculine terms. Finally, the sexual ambiguity of Italian courtesans was symbolised in their wearing of breeches beneath split skirts; they seem to have catered to the viragophilia so evident in sixteenth-century Italian literature.

Franco's emulation of high cultural masculine skills incorporates a tendency to elide her sexual difference. Where she chooses in *capitolo* XX to place herself in the masculine role from Roman elegy of the importunate lover who bangs at his beloved's door, in letter 13 she imitates Catullus' famous dinner invitation to a male friend.

> Vedete che il tempo tutto volto alla pioggia invita ogni buona persona a provedirsi di dolce trattenimento al coperto e al fuoco almen fino a sera. Se vi degenerete di venir, potremo desinar caritevolmente insieme, *sine fuco et caerimoniis more maiorum* di quella grazia che ci sarà. E se vorrete aggiungervi un fiaschino di quella vostra buona malvasia, di tanto mi contento e di più non vi condanno. (23)

In echoing Catullus she suggests that the pleasures of the courtesan's boudoir are primarily those of conviviality and masculine good form. Female models for the kind of humanistic, epistolary dispensing of friendly counsel that Franco was attempting did not exist. While the women humanists of fifteenth- century Italy had specialised in the epistle, their letters veered between the distance and generality of the oration

and a self-advertising humility that merely underlined their femininity. Moreover, Franco's continuing pursuit of plainness and naturalness of style is thrown into relief by the letters of some Florentine courtesans. Their use of learned language often serves purposes of indirection. Camilla of Pisa's use of tortured latinate circumlocutions to half-refuse money from Filippo Strozzi contrasts strongly with Franco's business-like directness over matters financial, cultural and amorous (Romano 67).

Franco in her letters aspires to equality with men as colleagues. In one particular exchange of sonnets between herself and a male interlocutor the possibilities for amorous Petrarchan role-playing are manifold. However, Franco sees herself as a literary apprentice. Her poems, "...se non valeranno per un solo di tutti i vostri versi, valeranno in farmi conoscere desiderosa d'imparare, poiché tanto in ciò m'affatico" (16). The tone is quite different from other sixteenth-century women writers such as Gaspara Stampa and the Lyonnaise poetess Pernette du Guillet, who aspire to mirror the men that their poems address within Petrarchan conventions which emphasise their own humility so as to glorify the beloved.

Franco's aspiration to equal status with men recurs in the poems, where she asserts her desire for "un amor mutuo" and repeatedly invokes the ironies of unequal affection in love. She describes herself as "quest'amata in amor disagguaglianza" (VIII 90). She laments the "Dure disagguaglianze in aspro amore,/ poi ch'a chi m'odia corro dietro" (XX 58-9). She attempts to redeem herself from the ignominy of unrequited love by asserting that her beloved "ridamar deve egualmente." Her desire to gain his love seems to be fuelled by her desire to be socially accepted by him and to thereby gain access to "le cose piú eccellenti." The extreme, idealised suffering of courtly love is distinctly absent. The "uom nobil"

> chi l'ama ridamar deve egualmente;
> voi 'n cui 'l ciel tutte le sue grazie aduna,
> dovete aver pietà da me, che v'amo
> si che 'n questo non trovo eguale alcuna.
> E, quanto piú ne' miei sospir vi chiamo,
> d'esser udita (a dir il vero) io merto,
> e quanto piú con voi conversar bramo.
> Non è d'ingegno indizio oscuro e incerto,
> c'ha gusto de le cose piú eccellenti,
> conoscer e stimar il vostro merto. (XX 87-96)

In Franco, the dream of equality is less romantic than social. Once again, she describes her relation to the man she is addressing as a form of mirroring: "d'esser udita (a dir il vero) io merto,/ e quanto piú con voi

conversar bramo... conoscer e stimar il vostro merto." She wants him to see that her merit is equal to his own so that she can make herself heard - "esser udita." She seeks respect rather than adulation.

In refusing to speak the language of Petrarchism, Franco refuses the hierarchical nature of "courtly love." The deification of the beloved and the lover's self-abnegation are alien to her discourse. Capitolo VIII, which starts out as a languishing declaration of unrequited love, soon modulates into a witty sketch of love as a universal comedy of mismatched affections. Franco measures her own feelings of rejection, consolingly, against the rejection she is forced to deal out to the man whom the poem addresses! She does not inhabit the self-contained aesthetic universe of lyric desire but a world of pragmatic speech acts in which women are usually worsted.

Her attention to social reality over the fantasms of lyric love, and her refusal to ignore misogynist insults, provides a feminist perspective. In *capitoli* XXIV and XVI, insults launched by men make Franco inveigh against sexual inequality. She claims that "la donna... s'accomoda e sostien d'esser vassalla." She also claims her virtues are, by comparison with men's, "di gran lunga maggiore, e non che eguale" (XXIV 80-84). She asserts not just women's equality, but their superiority. Amazingly for a woman of her time, she repudiates the stereotype of women as virtuous victims by arguing that they have the means of defending themselves and that they should, like her, begin to use them -

> ... se si risolvessero di farlo,
> con voi pugnar porían fino a la morte.
> E per farvi veder che 'l vero parlo,
> tra tante donne incominciar voglio io,
> porgendo essempio a lor di seguitarlo. (XVI 70-75)

In *capitoli* XVI and XXIV, Franco clearly conceives of sexual relations as a power struggle; a "duello" (XXIV 86) in which - ideally - each party is equally armed and in which women win precedence. The specific instance of the poetic duel is enlarged to include the whole field of relations between men and women. Franco's tendency to adopt masculine subject positions must be seen in the light of her unusually assured identification and refusal of the humiliations of early modern women. Her combative stance informs erotic poems which are conceived largely as battles of will in which she is able to assert her *libertà*.

Yet the poems are more powerfully shaped by the agency of the desiring male gaze than the writing of either Mary Wroth or the apparently impeccable Marguerite de Navarre. Unlike virtuous ladies, courtesans were required to perform rather than conceal their sexuality and Franco's bold persona plays up to this demand. The demand frequently had a status-enhancing dimension. As favoured subjects for sixteenth-century portrait painters, courtesans were enlisted in the perception and projection of themselves as sexualised art objects.[33] By the 1570's Venice had some fairly established traditions of erotic portraiture (Held 124). Titian's painting in particular had played upon the erotic connotations of imagery from classical myth. Carlo Ginzburg has shown that the erotic content of certain stock pagan tales was recognised as a powerful and, in the eyes of the Church, seditious force. He has also shown that Titian's sources were the low cultural, popular renditions of Ovid printed in the *volgare*, rather than Latin texts associated with more decorous reading practices.[34] In addition, there was the tradition of Aretino's *Sei giornate*; of "plain-speaking" pornographic realism centred around the figure of the prostitute. Aretino and Titian's friendship testifies to the cross-fertilisation of high and low cultural discourses about desire in Venice in the mid-sixteenth century.[35]

What is interesting in this context is that Franco herself uses pagan erotic imagery and the theme of painting to stage her desirability and her status.[36] Once again, she is situating herself very much in the material and affective world of the courtesan. Cathy Santore notes that among the Venetian courtesan Julia Lombardo's inventory of possessions was a portrait of Julia Lombardo herself. Santore suggests that this was unexceptional and refers to Thomas Coryat's description of a courtesan's "palace," where the owner's portrait is also remarked upon (54). Portraiture in this context was clearly a form of self-salesmanship, an amplification of the courtesan's charms. Franco brings this into her writing. Her twenty-first letter to Tintoretto declares rather conventionally that modern Italian painters have equalled the ancients, but does so in order to praise Tintoretto's portrait of herself. Franco declares herself to be overawed by the beauty of her own image. To accentuate the point she denies that, like Narcissus, she might fall in love with it.

She simultaneously flatters Tintoretto and draws attention to her beauty - as well as to her favour with Venice's most famous artist.

In capitolo XXV she uses a similar technique, complimenting her addressee on the magnificence of his house and gardens while setting herself at the centre of Della Torre's classical magnificence. She describes in detail Della Torre's frescoes of Ovidian myths. They are scenes favoured by Titian in some of his most celebrated erotic paintings, "The Rape of Europa" and "Danae and Cupid." Danae was locked in a tower by her father King Acrisius to stop her from getting pregnant after it had been prophesied that the king would be killed by his grandson. But Jupiter, the story goes, managed to impregnate Danae by transforming himself into a golden shower that poured through the bars of her window. It seems that this particular myth, which had been popularised through vernacular prose versions of Ovid, was associated with courtesans.[37] In Francesco Pona's prose dialogue *La lucerna* a courtesan speaks with satisfaction of a man "chi mi volea per sua Danae, mi promesse da Giove nel grembo, in oro" (67). The fashionably Ovidian pun plays on the courtesan's venality; a lover's "shower of gold" is, in more senses than one, her due.

While Franco, typically, is not ashamed to use this myth with reference to herself, she raises the stakes considerably. The tale stages a meeting between god and human, and stresses the intensity of the god's desire for the meeting. In capitolo XXV Franco emphasises this aspect of classical mythology: the gods descend to the mortal realm for sexual satisfaction, "scender dal cielo... seguitar ansiosi il lor desio" (157, 161). In a sonnet celebrating Henri III's visit to her she once again uses the golden shower myth to underline a rapprochement between high and low. Here, however, it reflects directly on her own privilege. She writes,

> Come talor dal ciel sotto umil tetto
> Giove tra noi qua giù benigno scende,
> e perché occhio terren dall'alt'oggetto
> non resti vinto, umana forma prende;
> così venne al mio povero ricetto,
> senza pompa real ch'abbaglia e splende,
> dal fato Enrico a tal dominio eletto... (*Sonnetti* I)

The meeting between king and courtesan, for all that their inequity is dramatised, centres finally upon the

power of the courtesan. Franco's sense of her own value as an erotic art object is palpable in her parting shot, where she magnanimously gives a present to the beneficent Henri. The present is nothing less than a portrait of herself. Once more she is emphatically a subject within the erotic exchange she describes:

> di ch'ei di tant'affetto non incerto,
> l'imagin mia di smalto e di colore
> prese al partir con grato animo aperto. (*Sonnetti* I)

Thus Franco engages in a decorously high cultural erotic self-portraiture which emphasises her equality with the men it addresses. Her grandiosity and sensuality are typically Venetian but they are not a typically feminine form of writing. She is an active subject within these exchanges. Girolamo Muzio's frankly sexual poems addressed to Tullia d'Aragona illustrate that male friends and lovers effectively solicited such self-portraiture. Male writers and artists could take liberties in their representation of courtesans because there was no need to protect their already-tarnished reputations. However, no courtesans, to my knowledge, responded in kind as did Veronica Franco.

Franco's sexual self-display is solicited from within the *Terze rime* itself in a poem which directly shapes her rhetorical attitude. Marco Venier's opening verses addressed to her turn upon tropes of covered/uncovered, outside/inside, closed/open, resistance/entry and are directed towards the ultimate stripping away of "ogni riparo, ogni difesa" in their object of desire. Courtly respect itself is stripped away. Questioning how "il bianco gentil vostro bel petto/ chiuda si duro cor e si spietato" (14-15), Venier elaborates upon the need for Franco to reveal the moral beauties which adorn her spirit as well as her body: "Così dentro e di fuor chiara e splendente/ sarete..." (25-6). He develops the theme of her mental and spiritual virtue by praising her literary talents, only to convert this sublimatory gesture into a plea that she display the "virtues" of her body just as she displays the virtues of her mind.

> Ma, se 'n voi la scienzia è d'alto frutto,
> perché de la bellezza il prego tanto
> vien da la vostra crudeltá distrutto? (139-141)

He "exposes" her mental beauty as a prelude to exposing her physical beauty, and uses this development to undercut the learning she so assiduously cultivates, asserting that Apollo submits to Venus rather than the other way round.

As Venier modulates his praise of the courtesan's virtues into a fullblown sexual fantasy, he visualises her nude and prone. The idea that Franco's role is to pleasure a proprietorial male gaze is underscored when he likens her to a painting, a recumbent Titianesque "Venere a letto." Where oil nudes functioned as private erotica for Italian men of means, Franco is now transmuted into a high class leisure object, the suggestion being that her role is to make herself into a spectacle for the delectation of men:

> Oh che dolce mirar le membra ignude,
> e piú dolce languir in grembo a loro,
> ch'or a torto mi son si scarse e crude!
> Prenderei con le mani il forbito oro
> de le trecce, tirando de l'offesa,
> pian piano, in mia vendetta il fin tesoro.
> Quando giacete ne le piume stesa,
> che soave assalirvi! e in quella guisa
> levarvi ogni riparo, ogni difesa!
> Venere in letto ai vezzi vi ravvisa,
> a le delizie che 'n voi tante scopre... (118-28)

For all that Venier strikes a Petrarchan note in complaining of Franco's "crudeltà nemica e schiva" (42), of the wounding arrows of her eyes, the whiteness of her skin and the blondness of her hair, his poem's consistently carnal and specular emphasis is very far from Petrarch's interdiction of the gaze. Petrarch's taboo-laden use of the myth of Acteon's viewing of Diana is symptomatic. Also, he makes Laura into an image of frozen virtue by fashioning her as a statue. He is wounded not by a human agency but by Cupid and by the supranatural force of desire. Where Petrarch mythifies a bruising encounter with sexuality as a confrontation between Diana and Acteon, Venier bypasses such discreetly mythological eroticism. His encounter with Franco portrays her as an active, fleshly woman who causes direct pain of an intimately physical kind -

> stendete a me la bella e bianca mano
> a rinovar il colpo, e che in tal guisa
> il sen piú m'apre e insieme il rende sano. (58-60)

Capitolo XIV extends the note of masochism in response to Franco's preceding warlike challenge to her lover's "falsa lingua, ch'in mio danno mente" (19). Venier willingly positions himself as a conquered enemy on the battlefield:

> ai vostri piedi umil mi volgo intorno:

del vostro sdegno la tagliente spada,
s'altro non giova, ormai prendete in mano,
e sopra me ferendo altèra cada...
Quanto a me, pur ch'a voi si sodisfaccia,
vi dono sopra me podestá franca,
legato piedi e mani e gambe e braccia. (126-9 142-4)

The play on Veronica's name in the phrase "podestà franca" affirms her self-appointed role as avenging warrior woman, and the physicality of his response - "breve fatica queste membra atterra/ lacere e tronche d'amorosa doglia" (133-4) - suggests that the pleasure he takes in her victory is strongly sexual. Where Petrarch fears the retributive violence of his beloved, Venier desires it. When Venier offers himself "legato piedi e mani e gambe e braccia" he imbues the act with sado-masochistic overtones. The dominating logic of the male gaze in *capitolo* I seems to be contradicted by this will to submission.

Philippa Berry has written that "in later Renaissance literature influenced by Petrarchism, there [is] increasing emphasis on this active and aggressive aspect of the beloved" (30). Venier's poem suggests a frankly carnal eroticisation of the aggression that in Petrarch functioned as a psychological taboo. It may be linked to the masculinising of beautiful heroines that is so evident in Ariosto, among others. The erotic roles that Venier and Franco together play out in their poetic dialogue are reminiscent of Bradamante and Ruggiero in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. The courtly and chivalric construction of love as a dialectic between dominated and subjected, slayer and slain, suits a carnal logic that is fully capitalised on in a number of the *Terze rime*.

Ample precedent for this was provided by Roman elegy. When Ovid claimed "Lovers are soldiers, Atticus" (*The Love Poems* I.9) he was conflating love with war like Propertius before him.[38] Propertius - whom Franco clearly imitates in *capitolo* XX when she implores a doorkeeper to allow her access to her lover - celebrated his bondage to the wilful and violent *demi-mondaine* Cynthia. Unlike the greater part of women in male-authored love poetry, Cynthia speaks - and does so in an angry, passionate and (perhaps most radically of all) self-concerned vein that is the antithesis of matronial subservience. Propertius hymns the *demi-mondaine*'s freewheeling independence and worldly love of pleasure - "she who walks out free with cloak thrown back,/ Fenced by no fear of keepers is the one I fancy" (II.23).[39] This might be

understood as gratitude for her sexual availability. But Propertius returns time and time again to Cynthia's independence of will and her fearlessness in asserting it. She is the dominant partner.

> But let my peers see tooth-marks on my neck;
> Let bruises show that I've been with my mistress.
> In love I want to see or hear suffering,
> To see my own tears or else yours,
> When you send back hidden meanings with your eyebrows
> Or with your fingers secret signals.
> I hate the sleep that sighing never punctuates,
> Want always to grow pale at female rage. (III.8)[40]

For Propertius, the lover's quarrel is a form of sexuality in itself, a reciprocal violence in which he longs to be worsted.

Judith Hallett has shown how the figure of the tyrannical *domina* - particularly in the work of Tibullus and Propertius - stood for a kind of "counter-cultural" freedom of expression in Augustan Rome (113). Unlike Ariosto, Propertius' reversal of gender roles is less campy game than committed protest at the establishment values of Empire, soldiery and patriarchy. Propertius flaunts his disempowerment as a lover in the context of Rome's imperial triumphalism, mischievously transferring the emasculation of the "enyoked" lover onto Rome itself.

> Why be surprised that a woman manages my life?
> Leading my manhood captive as her slave,
> And frame a shameful charge of cowardice against me
> Because I can't snap the yoke and break my chains?
> The sailor better forecasts the movement of the winds,
> The soldier has learnt from wounds to be afraid.
> I too in past youth used your boastful language;
> Let my present plight teach *you* to fear.
>
> ... What was the use of breaking Tarquin's axes
> (Whose proud life marks him with like name)
> If now we had to endure a woman? Sing *Triumph*, Rome...
>
> (III.11)[41]

When he celebrates heroic and Amazonic women from myth and from a wider world beyond the stormy confines of his own private affair, it becomes clear that Propertius is concerned not just with sado-masochistic thrills but with the field of denied human potential. Praising Sparta, where "naked girls and men wrestling together train/ Their bodies without dishonour"[42] and where women box, hunt, wield the

discus and sword, he goes on to oppose its civic freedoms to those of Rome -

> So Spartan law forbids the separation of lovers;
> In public each may be at his sweetheart's side.
> There is no fear, no custody for enclosed girls,
> No punishment by strict husbands to be by-passed
> ... But our girls move surrounded by a massive throng.
> (III.14) [43]

Masculinised, assertive and powerful women do not just represent Propertius' own sexual peccadilloes. They provide a way of imagining liberation from the oppressiveness of the official Roman order.

Propertius' poetry provided Franco with a positive model of courtesanry and a socially critical model of sexual relations. The frank and subversive eroticism of contemporary pornographic discourses may also have done so. In particular, *I modi*, a set of pornographic prints and sonnets co-created in sixteenth-century Rome by Giulio Romano and Pietro Aretino - and banned almost as soon as published - used images of sexual licence as a form of protest. Giulio Romano's sixteen prints of love-making positions were accompanied by Aretino's *Sonetti lussuriosi*, which represented the lovers' dialogue during sex. *I modi* emerged in a context of dissent. Whether the story is true that "in a moment of anger at Clement VII for a tardy payment, Giulio drew the sixteen postures on the walls" of the Vatican, it is certainly true that the printing of his designs forced him to flee Rome and caused the imprisoning of their engraver, Marcantonio Raimondi (Lawner 1988, 10). Subsequent to this incident, Pietro Aretino was inspired to make his own contribution to *I modi*. In a letter to Battista Zatti he describes how obtaining Raimondi's release from prison prompted him to seek out the controversial prints -

> ... e vistele fui tocco da lo spirto che mosse Giulio Romano a disegnarle... La cui lussoriosa memoria vi intitolo con pace di gli ipocriti, disparandomi del giudicio ladro e de la consuetudine porca che proibisce a gli occhi quel che più gli diletta. (400)

Aretino goes on to defend *I modi* for the levelling effect of its images, which annihilate distinctions of rank and expose the animal nature that is common to humanity. Unsurprisingly, Aretino also got in trouble with papal censors. His letter to Zatti suggests that challenging the false piety of those in authority was a primary motive for writing the sonnets "with the same spirit that had moved Giulio Romano to draw them." It was, after all, Aretino's characteristic stance.

The *Sonnetti lussuriosi* effect a typically Aretinian inversion of values. His other pornographic masterpiece, *Sei giornate*, achieves something similar: "he creates, in effect, an 'immoral family' that exactly mirrors the dynastic and social concerns of civic morality" (Ruggiero 1993, 14). Nanna's friend Antonia points out the logic of this scheme of things: "la monica tradisce il suo consagramento, e la maritata assassina il santo matrimonio" (139). The prostitute, however, does not disobey the laws she sets herself, for "la sua bottega vende quello che ella ha a vendere" (139). As with *Sei giornate*, the *Sonnetti lussuriosi* turn on sexual inversion. They are fascinated with sodomitic or pseudo-sodomitic sex. Out of a total of sixteen, eight of them allude to it - as do five of the marginally more restrained woodcuts. Their fixation with anal sex, perhaps even more than their frankly pornographic nature, was a calculated provocation of legal, social and clerical authority. In Renaissance Italy sodomy was the most feared of sexual transgressions, calling up visions of Sodom and Gomorrah and divine wrath. It was viewed as a far more serious crime than rape and was punishable with death (Ruggiero 1985, 109-45). There was perhaps a more urgent and immediate reason for the ferocity of its suppression. Guido Ruggiero has argued that, at a time of increasingly rigorous social regulation, sodomy "threatened to undermine the basic organizational units of society - family, male-female bonding, reproduction - which struck at the heart of social self-perceptions" (109). While there is ample evidence of legal and civic authorities' perception and fear of a growing homosexual subculture in fifteenth-century Venice, there is less evidence of sodomists' views of their own practices. However, if the aggression of attempts to purge it is anything to go by, members of homosexual subcultures in the Renaissance were fully aware of the subversiveness of their sexual preference. As the legal ordinances would suggest, it was strongly coded ideologically. Aretino's *Sonnetti lussuriosi*, in a manner similar to Propertius' praise of violent love, were calculated to suggest an alternative, even counter-cultural order of values.

I modi manages to have it both ways, however, and its iconoclasm stops short of representing men in bed together. The fact that it represents men sodomising women suggests that the women are courtesans. Courtesans provided a half-way house between illicit sexual practices and the tacitly sanctioned siphoning off of socially disruptive desires. It was common for Italian courtesans to wear their skirts slit and raised

in order to titillate their customers with a vision of the men's breeches they wore beneath. This suggests that sodomy was one of the items on offer. Certainly, individual courtesans are on offer in *I modi*. Three of the sonnets mention celebrated Roman courtesans by name.[44] The impression that Aretino is providing gossipy tip-offs for knowing readers is compounded by his references to other male characters well-known amongst northern Italian elites. Furthermore, as Lynne Lawner has pointed out in *The Sixteen Pleasures*, *I modi* resembles a number of printed genres prevalent in the Renaissance sex industry: the catalogue of brothels and courtesans; the list of positions of love-making, modelled after lists from the ancient world; and the album of portraits that advertised courtesans' attractions (30-34).

Vasari refers to *I modi* as "the loves of the Gods."[45] Romano's woodcuts give the naked human form the heroic perfection of the classical statue (he underlines the analogy by including busts on plinths). He takes early modern paganism to its logical extreme; not only is the human figure endowed with divine beauty, but it is sex itself, the animal will, that is elevated to a lofty principle. The prints are remarkable for including women in this symbolic cross-over between divine and human power. Franco reflects this ethos in her use of the Jupiter and Danae myth. Romano's female figures, who are by no means the passive partners, recall the women of Roman elegy - Propertius' beloved *demi-mondaine* Cynthia and his discus-wielding Spartans. They appear powerful, physically alive and sexually assertive. This is a world away from the flattened expressive will that Barbaro advocates for his model wife. *I modi*'s depiction of active female strength and sexuality clearly contradicts dominant early modern discourses. *Il cortegiano*, for all its classicising references to heroic women, ordains that contemporary women should be delicate and meek. If Franco's poetic response to the Roman elegists' portrayal of assertive women is anything to go by, it is not surprising that Vives in his *Instruction of a Christian Woman* forbade women to read classical poetry.

Arguably, the paganism of Romano's prints fed into other discourses of sexuality current in sixteenth-century Venice. It is likely that editions of *I modi* reached there in the 1530s and added to a burgeoning local industry in erotic prints, paintings and tales.[46] Achillo Olivieri has suggested that in Venice at this time "there was an authentic *civilità puttanesca* which progressed and developed, with its code of what it would and would not do, its corporeal rites and symbols" (97). As far as written erotic

discourses go, *La Zaffetta* and *La puttana errante* were first published in the 1530's, and in the former Lorenzo Venier had made "a jocular reference to Aretino that places him squarely at the head of writers of pornography and shows that his secretaries considered themselves Aretines" (Frantz 101). Furthermore, *La puttana errante*, which stages, as did Aretino, a conversation between a prostitute and her acolyte so as to provide occasion for a highly explicit discussion of sexual techniques, repeats many of the techniques found in Aretino. Some of them even have specific names. This once again suggests the very *civilità puttanesca* to which Olivieri alludes. All explorations of pornographic discourses in the Renaissance return to Aretino. He was associated by early modern writers from as far afield as France and England with the Greek Elephantis' lists of love-making positions.[47] Both sonnets and prints were reprinted across Europe and spawned numerous imitations (Lawner 1988, 23). The book, which celebrates the art of love and makes its female protagonists into artworks in their own right, set the seal on the Italians' paganisation of their sex industry. *I modi* can be seen as a celebration of courtesans - certainly of the *Zeitgeist* that they represented. It developed an unprecedented language in early modern Europe for the manipulation of the body as a desirable commodity, and it cannot have failed to influence Veronica Franco.

In several of her poems Franco speaks a language of eroticism that recalls the spirit of Romano's prints. Her language is magnanimous, active and deliberately sensual.

> Cosi dolce e gustevole divento,
> quando mi trovo con persona in letto,
> da cui amata e gradita mi sento
> che quel mio piacer vince ogni diletto,
> si quel, che strettisimo parea,
> nodo de l'altrui amor divien più stretto. (II 154-59)

"Gustevole" is the word Sansovino used to describe the language of satire, which should be "mescolata talora con qualche sale e con qualche tratto gustevole e acuto." Taste is perhaps the least sublimable of sense experiences. Early modern courtly discourse, influenced by Ficino's ranking of the senses according to the level of their spirituality, disapproved of taste and its associated sense, smell. Thus Tullia d'Aragona proclaimed in her *Dialogo dell'infinità d'amore*: "il sentimento del tatto e quello del gusto, ne' quali consiste principalemente la dilettazione di questi cotali amanti, sono materiali e non ispiritali, com'è il

vedere e l'udire, onde vengono a saziarsi incontanente" (235-6). Franco is being both anti-courtly and anti-clerical in using an image of taste to stand for sexual experience. She is, like Nanna the courtesan, unafraid to show the goods in her shop.

Franco's use of her own name in her poetry (like the use of the names of Angela Greca, Beatrice de Bonis, Lorenzina and 'La Ciabattina' in *I modi*) cannot be divorced from the sense that she is publicising her sexual skills and exploiting her own role in the sex industry. Her very first poem in *Terze rime* functions as such an advertisement. Marco Venier in the previous poem described her physical beauty as an artwork - "quest'opra" - and then moved into a celebration of her literary *opere* only to suggest that they be set aside in favour of sex. Franco replies in kind, but stresses that her sexuality is as much of an art as her writing:

> e, s'a Febo si grata mi tenete
> per lo compor, ne l'opere amorose
> grata a Venere piú mi troverete. (49-51)

She uncovers her wares, much as Venier fantasised doing in the previous poem. However, she only does so after taking firm control of the terms of the seduction process: "non è di mia professione tal atto." After thus reproving her interlocutor she moves into the highly suggestive self-description quoted above -"cosí dolce e gustevole divento,/ quando mi trovo con persona in letto.." (154-5). The lines emphasises Franco's expertise rather than her desire. In a possible reference to Aretino she promises "to reveal"

> *quei modi*, che con lui Venere adopra,
> mentre in soavi abbraciamenti il tiene;
> ond'io instrutta a questi so dar opra
> sí ben nel letto, che d'Apollo a l'arte
> questa ne va d'assai spazio di sopra... (163-68)
> (my emphasis)

While the notion of the courtesan as an artist is ancient and has a powerful mysogynist pedigree (the artist/woman/courtesan deceives with beautified appearances), Franco takes it up with pride. She portrays herself as "instrutta," the certified practitioner of an accredited art.

Certainly, the ennobling model of lute-playing, verse-writing courtesans from the ancient world played a part in Franco's sense of self-worth. Lynne Lawner rightly emphasises that Italian courtesans of

the Renaissance were in some senses women at a zenith of privilege and prestige. "Acknowledged by society and even by the State... they gave themselves over to pleasures of every refined manner... Although bound to the general precepts of aristocratic life, they were not required to exhibit the servility of the typical courtier of the age."[48]

The courtesan in Francesco Pona's *La lucerna* echoes some of Lawner's views. However, unlike Lawner, she embraces the moral and existential questions that dogged the lives of courtesans and indeed all sixteenth-century women - the vested conflict between tyranny and freedom, honour and infamy.

> L'esser libera è la miglior gemma, che posseda la Meretrice: nella quale hà in compendio quanto desidera: E questo sol Privilegio, fà parer à lei anco honorata la Infamia; percioche nè all'impero de'mariti, nè all'arbitrio de'Genitori vivono le Cortigiane soggette: onde il recarsi à gli Amanti in seno (alche gagliardmente la stimola il naturale appetito, e la lascivia del sesso) non le mette in pericolo di esser per interesse di honore uccise. (67)

The idea that the courtesan's celebrated freedom allows her to express the lasciviousness of her sex captures the weight of social opprobrium of female liberty in the sixteenth century. It is clearly questionable that she was expressing a lasciviousness that could be called her own in the first place. In this light, Lawner's image of the courtesan "in her absolute moment of 'being': free, powerful, entirely carnal and yet conscious of the value and beauty of her carnality" is an idealised image of female sexual liberation that derives from the nineteen sixties or after (Lawner 1988, 26-7).

In fact the courtesan, like any other woman of her time only more so, was damned for hypocrisy if she embraced the language of virtue and damned for lasciviousness if she was openly sexual. Aretino, exemplary in his contradictions as well as his concerns, was of all writers most disposed to sympathise with the courtesan's enmeshment in a sexual and economic double standard that was not of her own making. Yet his letter to the celebrated Roman courtesan Angela Zaffetta capitalises on the moral ambiguities of the courtesan's position as seen through sixteenth-century eyes. He praises her

> ...poi che voi più ch'altra avete saputo porre al volto de lascivia la mascara de l'onestà, procacciandovi per via de la saviezza e de la discrezione robba e laude. Voi non essercitate l'astuzia, anima de l'arte cortigiana, col mezzo de i tradimenti ma con sì fatta destrezza che chi spende giura d'avanzare. (367)

The letter continues in this vein, praising her for her tasteful business conduct while implying her

underlying rapaciousness. It ends on a more straightforward note -

> La bugia, l'invidia e la maladicenza, quinto elemento de le cortigiane, non vi tengano in continuo moto l'animo e la lingua. Voi accarezzate le vertù e onorate i vertuosi: cosa fuor del costume e de la natura di coloro che compiacciono a i prezzi de l'altrui volontà. (367-68)

However, since Zaffetta's profession is - as his preceding wordplay has so amply demonstrated - by definition lacking in integrity, claims to virtue are essentially contradictory. The courtesan is either undressed by the male gaze or, as here, dressed up in deference to her virtue. But of course her virtue is "a mask" ("mascara"). The net effect of either attitude is the same; her credibility is undermined. Male "respect" is inevitably tainted by irony. Aretino's letter reflects the impossibility, for sixteenth-century men at least, of taking the term "honest courtesan" seriously - the courtesan is always playing a role, and this is on some level intensely satisfying for men, restoring to them the whipping boy of devious, lascivious femininity which the culture of chastity was apparently designed to eradicate.

On the one hand, courtesans exemplify the lascivious nature of the female sex and on the other hand they are arch-fakers of desire. Franco's forthright expressions of self circumvent the courtesan's image of guilefulness. But they cannot avoid becoming entangled in the demand that she perform her sexuality in order to satisfy a masculine logic of desire that despises her immodesty in the moment of wanting it. And Franco is a consummate and accomplished performer. She does manage, however, to turn the tables on the hooker stereotype by suggesting that it is men, rather than women, who perform roles - only then to offer to go along with the game. Her performance of desire displays its own theatrical process and the patriarchal logic of sex. This means that desire itself is held at one remove. She advises Venier to prove his love by deeds rather than words, and then proceeds to playfully match the "fable" of his love with the "fable" of her own. She wittily makes this *desio* into a kind of meta-love without foundation -

> ma, s'avete di favole desio,
> mentre anderete voi favoleggiando,
> favoloso sará l'accetto mio;
> e, di favole stanco e sazio, quando
> l'amor mi mostrerete con effetto,
> non men del mio v'andrò certificando. (II 40-45)

She maintains an ironic distance from the language she is using -the language of *I modi* and the sexual

market-place - and offsets it with ideas of truth and provability. But finally she is less committed to the values of "true love" than to the values of the marketplace. Seeking to certify fables is, *a priori*, a self-defeating project. Where "certificando" smacks of hollow business transaction, "favole" smacks of wilful self-delusion and each undermines the other.

Franco's defensiveness is not surprising. Predictably enough, courtesans' bodies were not merely vehicles for men's lust but for their contempt. The ritual of slashing courtesans' faces in sixteenth-century Venice both symbolised and effectuated a form of retributive castration by destroying their beauty. Franco's capitolo XXIV is a direct response to a man's threatening to cut her friend's face. Furthermore, sodomy was a primary means of enacting contempt for courtesans. Sodomitic mass rapes even had a name - "31s." The term derives from the poem by Aretino's acolyte Lorenzo Venier, *Il trentuno della Zaffetta*. The piece describes the multiple rape of Angela del Moro, a *cortigiana onesta* whose lover organised the event as a way of punishing her for refusing him access to her home. Sodomitic rape was a way of cutting the honest courtesan down to size. It negated her pretensions to dignity and worth - to honesty. Lynne Lawner points out that "in one apochryphal Aretinian sonnet, the front area is called 'the honest place,' implying that the other is 'the dishonest place'" (1988, 45). In view of this, *I modi* - for all its frank representation of female desire and indeed its suggestion that the female protagonists are fascinated by anal sex - speaks a language of male power and control.

In his study of sexuality in early modern Venice, Guido Ruggiero has shown that sexual violence against women was not necessarily perceived as criminal (*Boundaries of Eros* 89-108). Where women were less important than men, crimes against them were correspondingly considered less serious unless the family honour was at stake: the greater the family, the greater the crime against the woman's honour was perceived to be. Rapes committed against women of the lower - or, as they were increasingly called, "dishonest" - classes were viewed as negligible by comparison. And, where violence and sex were so closely linked and woman's honour was seen as so extremely variable, courtesans - the quintessence of *dishonestà* - may more or less have furnished an excuse for violence. Commenting on Venetian lawyers' comparatively tolerant attitude to certain kinds of rape, Ruggiero writes

> ... we might at least hypothesise that the leaner rhetoric of rape cases was related to the culture of illicit sex in Venice. Accustomed to the victimisation of women, especially those of lower status, this society may have come to see the one sex crime [rape] that clearly victimised women as merely an extension of an exploitative sexuality that was quite common and not particularly troubling. (90)

Aretino's *Sei giornate* brings the reality of prostitutes' victimisation to life. It suggests that sins committed by courtesans lose their lustre when viewed alongside the sins committed against them:

> Ma ponghinsi da un canto tutti gli uomini rovinati delle puttane, e da l'altro lato tutte le puttane sfracassate dagli uomini: e vedrassi chi ha più colpa, o noi o loro. Io potro anoverarti le dicine, le dozzine e le trentine de le cortigiane finite ne le carrette, negli spedali, ne le cocine, ne la strada e sotto le banche... (245)

But the point is that the courtesan gives as good as she gets. While Nanna is a popular and unedifying version of the courtly lady who exercises arbitrary rule over her swains, her aggression is a logical response to her world. Aretino depicts her as emasculatory. The phallic power of her speech goes hand in hand with her predatory sexuality.[49] While the would-be gallants who pursue Nanna are portrayed as vulnerable fools, Nanna controls them primarily through her use of language and superior wit. In a remark reminiscent of Coryat's claim that courtesans "cut to pieces" the men that offend them, she declares with some pride that "le puttane hanno il mèle in bocca, a in mano il rasoio" (127). The phallic undertone of her comments is replicated in a piece of advice to Amelia on sexual technique - "chiariscilo che vuoi correre una lancia a la gianetta" (157). Raymond Rosenthal's translation renders the "gianetta" allusion transparent: "make it clear that you want to break a lance with him, Gianetta style, man on bottom, woman on top" (174).

The language of pleasure and the language of violence are once again blended. Role reversal contributes significantly to the mix. Nanna - who also wears male clothing to titillate her customers - delivers her metaphor in the light of reflections about what it is that men enjoy: "e quando si vede cavalcare da colei che egli sta per cavalcare, va in dolcezza come un che compisce" (157). *I modi* and *Sei giornate* suggest the sexual pleasure that men derive from submitting to the "lance" of aggression. One of the woodcuts appears to show a woman beating her partner. In her edition of *I modi* Lynne Lawner submits evidence of a sado-masochistic tradition in sixteenth-century engravings and paintings that eroticise flogging

and beating (*The Sixteen Pleasures* 54-6). Veronica Franco develops on this tradition of sexual pleasure, and at least one of her male interlocutors responds in kind. However, both the capitoli where she does so are self-defensive and self-assertive responses to male overtures. Franco's duelling poems seem to cater to male desires to be sexually dominated, but they also enact a defence against the victimisation which underwrote the apparent power of courtesans. If it is true, as Guido Ruggiero has claimed, that people at this time tended to conceive of sex as *either* violence *or* victimisation, with the former defined as the role of active masculine sexuality, then Franco's role reversals reach to the heart of early modern sexual politics.

Her duelling poems develop a language of female sexual supremacy which is only subsequently taken up by Venier. Like Propertius, she sexualises the violence of the lovers' quarrel, casting the conflict of separate wills that shadows reciprocal desire as a carnal confrontation. She does so in a heroic vein which puts victory before pleasure, underwriting her discourse of sexual supremacy with an aristocratic discourse of chivalric honour that puts her on a distinctly higher social plane than her attacker. In *capitolo* XIII she vows to avenge a lovers' slight, opening with the rousing challenge -

> Non piú parole: ai fatti, in campo, a l'armi,
> ch'io voglio, risoluta da morire,
> da sí grave molestia liberarmi (XIII 1-3)

She elects to have the fight in the bedroom, dwelling on the choice and use of weapons with considerable gusto. The poem concludes with a fantasy in which Franco gains a military and sexual supremacy that is mutually satisfying to both parties.

> Forse nel letto ancor ti seguirei,
> e quivi, teco guereggiando stesa,
> in alcun modo non ti cederei:
> per soverchiar la tua sí indegna offesa
> ti verrei sopra, e nel contrasto ardita,
> scaldandoti ancor tu ne la difesa,
> teco morrei d'egual colpo ferita (79-85)

In the spirit of the social and sexual inversions of Venice's illicit culture, she climbs on top of him and they both "die" in simultaneous orgasm.

Franco is relying on an established set of conventions in this poem. This is borne out by the

evidence of *I modi*, of Venier's poems, of *Sei giornate* and *La puttana errante*. *La puttana* and *Sei giornate* both voice approval for the woman-on-top position ("La gianetta"). Yet *I modi* stops short of representing its female protagonists in positions of domination. In the one print which shows the woman on top of the man, she is facing away from him in an act of anal sex. Sex revolves around "the dishonest place," and it is the woman who is dishonoured. The book's emphasis on sodomy constitutes a peculiarly insistent negation of female sexuality. Franco's most erotic poems reflect the mentality of *I modi* in that they are above all about power, about a conflict of wills. Aretino's *Sonnetti lussuriosi* repeatedly represent their male and female protagonists arguing over the means by which each shall achieve sexual satisfaction. However, Franco's role in her erotic dialogues is to enforce her will by means of a penetrative logic that claims male sexual power as her own.

> Quell'arme, che da te mi sará pòrta,
> prenderò volontier, ma piú, se molto
> tagli, e da offender sia ben salda e corta.
> Da petto ignudo ogni arnese sia tolto,
> al fin ch'ei, disarmato a le ferite,
> possa 'l valor mostrar dentro a se accolto.
> Altri non s'impedisca in questa lite,
> ma da noi soli due, ad uscio chiuso,
> rimosso ogni padrin, sia diffinita. (XIII 49-57)

Wielding her phallus-like knives, she conflates military with sexual domination when she states that "da petto ignudo ogni arnese sia tolto."

In early modern art the masculine woman - the warrior woman or transvestite heroine - is frequently a symbol of freedom. Freedom was seen as the prerogative of courtesans, who were in turn granted some of the accoutrements of masculinity. Yet Guido Ruggiero has noted of the language of lawyers in Renaissance Venice that "even the most aggressive women had their sexuality described... as passive, almost as if active female sexuality could not even be expressed" (*The Boundaries of Eros* 121). If active sexual desire in the Renaissance was by definition male, and if, as Juliana Schiesari states, the active will of Machiavellian *virtù* was also by definition male, then Franco's assertion of her desire and her honour is also a denial of her femininity (Schiesari 75). In this way she is not merely performing for the male gaze, but defying its capacity to make a woman of her; to render her passive and ineffective, a

recumbent "Venere a letto." She is in some important sense defending herself against the violence of the gaze.

Franco shifts between various subject positions that imply different and contradictory responses to the demands of the male gaze. *Capitolo* II seems to bypass the repressive and self-pleasuring aspect of the male gaze altogether when it ends by invoking an equality of sexual satisfaction - "saranno/ le mie dolcezze a pien da voi godute: a le vostre da me si goderanno" (182-84). Yet Franco is above all a professional, efficiently performing her role while keeping her private self in reserve. Social competence rather than subjective intensity is her keynote. Venier sets the tone when he invites her to display the "opere," the artworks, not only of her writing but of her sexuality. Franco responds by saying that he must earn what he desires by bestowing upon her the "opere" of his good deeds. The play on the word "opere" captures the self-consciously artificial tone which permeates their dialogue about love. Love, like poetry, is an artifact and, right through to the final lines of the poem, Franco continues to demand "opere" from Venier that will match her own sexual and poetic bravura. The note of challenge and competition allows her to maintain a distance from the sexual role she has play, and to perform it in such a way as to assert her independence and autonomy. Her overturning of the usual power structure of sex between men and women in capitoli II and XIII is essentially defensive and non-sexual. Even as she demonstrates for the male gaze her proficiency in "quei modi che... Venere adopra" (II 164), she insists on asserting the independence of her will.

Veronica Franco's resistance to an Other desire

But Franco is always cautious in asserting her independence. As well as playing up to men's desire, she courts their moral approval. This tendency is already marked in the *Terze rime*, where she projects herself as a woman concerned with justice and civility, dramatising her powers of self-restraint, her desire to learn the best manners and teach them to others and her measured consideration for the patrons and suitors with whom she comes into contact. She desires social acceptance. The tendency is further developed in her

Lettere familiare. Here, in the mode of the epistle writers of antiquity, she dispenses and receives advice about how to live and aims at a simple style of writing and a tone of measured dignity. Franco's letters were assiduous in their emulation of upper class civility because they were a primary means of cultivating and advertising her influential social connections. Her eighth letter, where she berates a man for insulting her, highlights the difference of the *lettere* from the *capitoli*. As Niccoli Gabriel writes, "the poetess envelops herself in a veil of rectitude and grace... How significantly different, how moderate and tempered with civility and loyalty these lines are when one recalls some of the responses in the *capitoli* of five years earlier!" (135).

Yet the letters, like the *capitoli*, contain a seam of resistance. In taking it upon herself to give advice to her social superiors, Franco continues to display the contestatory impulse of the duelling *capitoli*. In letter 4 she quotes *Ecclesiastes* to a member of the Venetian patriciate in order to drive home her point that it is wrong to covet material wealth. The position is conventionally Christian, but her evocation of an underworld that her noble correspondent refuses to see is peculiarly vivid.

> E s non vi par d'aver tanto che basti all'usanza del mondo corrotto dal soverchio uso, considerate quanto meno potreste avere e quanto potreste star peggio, abbassandovi con gli occhi agli essempi che sotto i piedi non vi mancano infiniti. (p.13)

Franco, for all her success in high society self-fashioning, was still connected to this world. The glittering, showy competence of her literary oeuvre does not entirely conceal her alienation from the society she cultivated. She fell into relative obscurity and poverty after her period of glory in the 1570's. After moving frequently from house to house throughout her adult life - which in itself suggests the insecurity and impermanence of her social and economic status - she was by the age of thirty-six living near the church of San Samuele, one of the poorer areas of town where prostitutes congregated. In particular, her increasingly impoverished circumstances seem to have been compounded by the death of her patron Domenico Venier in 1582, and by thefts of her personal possessions which culminated in Franco herself being arraigned for witchcraft.

Franco's accuser was her son's tutor, Redolfo Vanitelli. Margaret Rosenthal argues that Vanitelli, by denouncing Franco to the Inquisition in November of 1580, was covering himself against being accused

of stealing her possessions. Perhaps the most illuminating part of his denunciation is his reference to Franco's habit of wearing jewellery in flagrant contravention of the law, and her lying ways:

> Dice di più esser maritata hora, hora essere vedova, hora volersi maritare, et fingere tra l'altri un matrimonio falsamente fatto qui con un Romano, et ciò ha fatto solo per ricuperare le perli, le maniglie d'oro, e altre gioie, ch'ella portava contro la dispositione della parte fatta del Serenissimo Principe.[50]

His description of the shifting sands of Franco's self-definition suggests a woman who is constantly improvising a social legitimacy which she simply does not possess. Indeed, much of the denunciation is taken up by his belief that she is not a *cortigiana onesta* but a *pubblica meretrice*, a common whore. This in turn seems to presuppose the fact that she is a witch; thus she is a "fattuchiara puttana pubblica;" a witch-and-public-whore.

Historians have associated courtesans, prostitutes and their female pimps, the *ruffiane*, with the kinds of superstitious practice of which Franco was accused; that is, of invoking the devil in order either to win lovers or to punish enemies.[51] Where the object of early modern witch trials was to cleanse society of folkloristic knowledges associated with women and with female sexuality, there was likely to be a predisposition towards the belief that prostitutes were, *de facto*, witches. Prostitutes were almost invariably from the ranks of society where superstition retained a tight grip on peoples' imaginations. Franco's testimonies in her two court hearings reveal the extent to which she was acquainted with magical practices. She does not deny that incantations were held in her house. Rather, she deflects attention away from the extent of her own involvement in the matter by commenting on the superstitious practices of her neighbours. She demonstrates a sophisticated distance from popular superstition and yet the detail of her descriptions shows that she had an intimate knowledge of it.

In the court hearings, a different Veronica Franco appears from the Franco of her poetry, the bravura versifier speaking to an Italian elite. She speaks in Venetian dialect and shows her familiarity with popular culture. In her twenty-second letter, which has been described as her "piccolo capolavoro," this side of Franco also comes into view. Its concern for society's victims is similar to that of letter 4, where she unites this awareness with great naturalness of expression. Written in order to warn an acquaintance

against introducing her daughter to courtesanry, it makes further reference to harsh social realities. The letter could hardly be more different from the *capitoli* of five years earlier which so flamboyantly courted the male gaze. As usual, it is in her most contestatory poems and letters that Franco is most naturalistic in her expression. In a *tour de force* of unceremonious truth-telling, she returns to the concrete, proverbial style of *capitolo* II, dissuading her friend from her plan.

> Perché voi gettata in acqua la pietra, gran difficoltà vi sarà a volerne cavarla... romperete il collo credendola far beata nella professione de le cortigiane. (37-8)

The letter can be seen as an exemplary display of civic virtue which was calculated to win the approval of the Venetian establishment. It is perfectly in step with a law which had been passed in 1563 by the Venetian Council of Ten to stop mothers from prostituting their daughters for commercial gain (Rosenthal 129). The letter seems motivated by the desire for social acceptance in its attack on women involved in the sex industry rather than the men who used it. It looks like blaming the victim. Yet it can also be seen as a more subversive form of petitioning. Margaret Rosenthal writes that "the letter achieves unusual force by virtue of its location following a series of letters of counsel in which Franco ridicules the carelessness and moral negligence of male patricians" (128). In other words it is an act of protest that aims to puncture the Venetian patriciate's complacent acceptance of a moral double standard which allowed them to penalise prostitutes, enjoy their services and make money from the taxes they levied on them at one and the same time.

Letter 22 has been variously interpreted as Franco's expression of repentance for her way of life and as a piece of social criticism inspired by righteous anger. There were fictional as well as real precedents for the courtesan's repentance. It was a recognised form for feeling which could logically produce its own defiant anti-type. The latter is present in the poetry of Gaspara Stampa, whose poems repeatedly state "non mi pento." Franco, however, bypasses the issue altogether. Her reflections on courtesanry are not preoccupied with her own moral standing so much as a broader concern with freedom and injustice. Her public proclamation in her letters of the lived experience of courtesanry works to challenge Venetians' conception of their native city. Yet the letter makes a typically Venetian appeal in

enunciating the horrors of enslavement:

> Troppo infelice cosa e troppo contraria al senso umano è l'obligar il corpo e l'industria di una tal servitù che spaventa sola a pensarne. Darsi in preda di tanti, con rischio d'esser dispogliata, d'esser rubbata, d'esser uccisa, ch'un solo un dì ti toglie quanto con molti in molto tempo hai acquistato, con tant'altri pericoli d'ingiuria a d'infermità contagiose e spaventose; mangiar con l'altrui bocca, dormir con gli occhi altrui, muoversi secondo l'altrui desiderio, correndo in manifesto naufragio sempre della facoltà e della vita; qual maggiore miseria? quai ricchezze, quai commodità, quai delizie posson acquistar un tanto peso? Credete a me: tra tutte le sciagure mondane questa è l'estrema... (38)

The description is rendered from the point of view of a subject whose most intimate will has - nightmarishly - been seconded in the service of an alien desire. The courtesan must submit her body's most basic functions to the will of another. Her *servitù* involves precisely that physical performance in response to "un altro desiderio" which *capitolo* II enacted with such bravura gestures of independence. In other words, an acute awareness of sexual inequality requires the assertion of its opposite. Here, however, Franco describes the courtesan as a kind of puppet whose "maggiore miseria" is to be human and to know the dreary daily subjection of "mangiar con l'altrui bocca, dormir con gli occhi altrui, muoversi secondo l'altrui desiderio." The very bodiliness of her description suggests a distaste for the sexuality she sells with such expertise. Thus Franco's refusal - even as she plays the game of desire in her poetry - to capitulate to "l'altrui desiderio," reserves space for an embattled will -

> Povero sesso, con fortuna ria
> sempre prodotto, perch'ognor soggetto
> e senza libertà sempre si stia!

NOTES

1.Cathy Santore's "Julia Lombardo, 'Somtuosa Meretrize'" is an analysis of the possessions left behind by a Venetian courtesan after her death and shows the degree of luxury such women could achieve.

2.Quoted by Ann Jones in *The Currency of Eros*, 178.

3.There are numerous linkages of courtesans with books and music in early modern literature. See Pietro Aretino's *Sei giornate*, where Aretino's courtesan Nanna advises her acolyte; "trempella il manecordo, stronca il liuto, fa vista di leggere il *Furioso*, il Petrarca e il *Cento*, che terrai sempre in tavola" (211-12). See also Bandello, 2:462.

4.Thomas Coryat's famous description of the Venetian courtesan captures the high cultural ethos of her seduction technique. "Moreover shee will endeavour to enchant thee partly with her melodious notes that shee warbles out upon her lute, which shee fingers with as laudable a stroake as many men that are excellent professors in the noble science of Musicke; and partly with that heart-tempting harmony of her voice. Also thou wilt finde the Venetian Cortezan (if shee be a selected woman indeed) a good Rhetorician and an elegant discourser, so that if shee cannot move thee with all these foresaid delights, shee will assay thy constancy with her Rhetoricall tongue" (267).

5.Rita Casagrande's *Le cortigiane veneziane* mentions instances of courtesans marrying into the nobility, 29.

6.Margaret Rosenthal alludes to "a letter by Anton Francesco Doni in his *I marmi* (1552-53), in which Venier is exalted, together with Girolamo Molino and Federigo Badoer, as the principal figure for establishing a distinctly Venetian grandeur" (322 n.9). The contrast in Venier's use of literary styles is brought home when she also alludes to "the existence of an unstudied manuscript in Venetian dialect in London - composed as a lewd exchange between Domenico Venier and Benedetto Corner - concerning a woman 'Helena' that they both boast they have 'chiava' (screwed). The author's identity is almost certainly Domenico, because the manuscript contains allusions to Domenico Venier's crippling disease" (321 n.7).

7.Rita Casagrande describes the Venetian authorities' laxity in enforcing anti-prostitution laws, which constituted a form of protection, 22.

8.Tullia d'Aragona, a Roman courtesan, provides another example of the power of protectors to free the courtesan from undergoing the indignities of common prostitutes. Tullia was arraigned by city authorities for not wearing the yellow cloth that distinguished women of her trade from noblewomen. But she was still able to call upon a powerful friend to appeal against the charge and save her from the ignominy of being classified as a common prostitute.

9.*Rime di diversi ecellentissimi auttori nella morte dell'illustre Signor Estor Martinengo Conte di Malpaga* does not contain a date or place of publication, but was probably published in 1575. See Margaret Rosenthal, 92.

10.Cesare Vecellio, *Degli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo*, 2 vols. (Venice: D. Zenato, 1590). Quoted in Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans*, 19.

11.For the sake of argument, I am calling Gaspara Stampa a courtesan by drawing on sixteenth-century definitions of the term; in one Venetian ruling a courtesan is defined simply as an unmarried woman with a lover (see Rita Casagrande 87). While she was not a professional in the sense that Franco was - Franco actually appeared in a list that advertised Venetian courtesans - she was an unmarried woman who took more than one lover and openly admitted doing so in her poetry. It seems likely that she received material

support from at least one of her lovers. Whether she was or was not, strictly speaking, a salaried mistress, is uncertain.

12.Muzio's reference to replacing Tullia d'Aragona's pseudonym with her real name is in his appendix to her *Della infinità d'amore*, 246.

13.On the Ciceronian qualities of Franco's *tenzone*, see Margaret Rosenthal, 118, 181.

14.Glynnis M. Cropp's description of the troubadour poets' use of the word *franc* to denote nobility, affability and sincerity has some bearing on Franco's literary persona, 83-8.

15.Ann Jones in *The Currency of Eros* makes further comment on Franco's *franchezza*, 199.

16.See Brain Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, on Venetian citizenship and the privileges of *cittadini*, 100.

17.On Veronica Franco's identification with Venice, see Ann Jones, "City Women and their Audiences," 315, and Margaret Rosenthal, 11-16, 58-65.

18.Franco did not have to defer to male authority in the form of a pimp. The *cortigiana onesta* managed her own career.

19.Girolamo Ruscelli *Il rimario del Signor Girolamo Ruscelli* (Venice: Simon Occhi, 1750. 91). Quoted in Margaret Rosenthal, 178.

20.Courtesans were popular butts for writers, which makes Franco's combative rhetorical stance all the more appropriate. Thus Pietro Aretino, who elected himself the scourge of venal prostitutes in *Sei giornate*, not only makes a disparaging comment directed specifically at Tullia d'Aragona but also spells out the antagonism by having his main character, Nanna the courtesan, say "beware of writers."

21.For Tasso's Aristotelian division of the types of honour appropriate to men and women, see Juliana Schiesari, 76.

22.For comments on Aristotle's and Seneca's definition of honour and magnanimity as a free-speaking liberty from the opinion of others, see Jean-Claude Carron, "Les Noms de l'honneur féminin à la Renaissance," 276.

23.In "Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel '550," Ginzburg describes the way that *cinquecento* disquisitions on sensuality focussed on the evils of touch and hearing, 134.

24.Margaret Rosenthal discusses the likelihood that Marco was the author of this poem, and of many of the others in *Terze rime* that go under the name of *incerto autore*, 160-1.

25.For a discussion addressing the dialogue's role as a means of broadcasting the speakers' social skills and connections and as a model for refined discourse, see Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, 25.

26.Franco's "anti-rhetorical" stance enables her to gain the moral high ground in relation to her suitors. Thus she advises one to write

> Senza discorrer poeticamente,
> senza usar l'iperbolica figura. (XII 16-17)

To another she underlines her honesty by saying, "a dir la verità non richiede arte" (XV 177).

27. On sixteenth-century Italian pornographic and satirical writing, and its use of the prostitute to symbolise a socially and morally disordered world so as to challenge the "establishment" rhetoric of Petrarchism, see Margaret Rosenthal, 42, 18-19.

28. Virginia Cox writes that Ciceronian dialogue (whose spirit imbues the debatative attitude of Franco's *capitoli*) was defined by its "decorous and high-minded" aversion to "any art which was tainted with practice" (38). Franco's direct treatment of the "art" of courtesanry clearly contravenes this rule.

29. The openness and mobility that defines the Bakhtinian grotesque is also visible in Tullia d'Aragona in that she, like Franco, sought laudatory verses from as many men as possible. Clearly the practice was built into the courtesan's role.

30. Montaigne in his *Journal de voyage en Italie* remarks that some Venetian courtesans charged fees for conversation alone, 72.

31. While a number of other women were associated with Domenico Venier's *ridotto* and patronage, there is little evidence of literary links between the women.

32. Margaret Rosenthal has written most comprehensively on Franco's competition for patronage with male writers. She argues that their sense of threat at her invasion of their professional territory fuelled much of their writing against her, and against courtesans in general, 24-45.

33. See Charles Hope, "Problems of Interpretation in Titian's Erotic Paintings," 111-124. See also Julius Held, "Flora, Goddess and Courtesan," I: 201-218. Held shows that Titian's Flora was a courtesan.

34. See Carlo Ginzburg, "Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel '500." Another article which, like Ginzburg's, de-neoplatonises Titian and emphasises "the sense of touch" in his painting is W.G. Studdert-Kennedy's "Titian: The Fitzwilliam Venus."

35. On the cross-overs between imagery used by Aretino and Titian, see Charles Hope (124) and W.G. Studdert-Kennedy.

36. In "Designing Women: The Self as Spectacle in Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco" Ann Jones comments on Franco's letter to Tintoretto, her sonnet to Henri III and her description of the estate of Della Torre, 135-53. I am indebted to her comments on the latter as a form of self-portraiture.

37. Carlo Ginzburg comments in "Tiziano, Ovidio" on versions of Ovid in the *volgare*.

38. "Attice, crede mihi, militat omnis amans" (*Amores* 1966, 26).

39. The English translations of Propertius are by Guy Lee, from *The Poems of Propertius*. The Latin version of Propertius II.23 is,

> contra, reiecto quae libera uadit amictu,
> custodum et nullo saepta timore, placet... (58)

All Latin versions are from *The Elegies of Propertius*, ed. H.E. Butler and E.A. Barber.

40. The Latin verses are,

> in morso aequales uideant mea uulnera collo:
> me doceat liuor mecum habuisse meam.
> aut in amore dolere uolo aut audire dolentem,
> siue tuas lacrimas siue uidere meas,
> tecta superciliis si quando uerba remittis,

aut tua cum digitis scripta silenda notas.
odi ego quae numquam pungunt suspiria somnos:
semper in irata pallidus esse uelim. (*The Elegies of Propertius* 91-1)

41. Propertius' Latin version is as follows,

Quid mirare, meam si uersat femina uitam
et trahit addictum sub sua iura uirum,
criminaque ignaui capitis mihi turpia fingis,
quod nequeam fracto rumpere uincla iugo?
uenturam melius praesagit nauita mortem,
uulneribus didicit miles habere metum.
ista ego praeterita iactaui uerba iuuenta:
tu nunc exemplo disce timere meo.

quid nunc Tarquinii fractas iuuat esse secures,
nomine quem simili uita superba notat,
si mulier patienda fuit? cape, Roma, triumphum... (*Elegies of Propertius* 94-5, 96)

42. The Latin is as follows,

quod non infamis exercet corpore laudes
inter luctandis nuda puella uiros... (*The Elegies of Propertius* 101)

43. Lex igitur Spartana uetat secedere amantes,
et licet in triuiis ad latus esse suae,
nec timor aut ulla est clausae tutela puellae,
nec grauis austeri poena cauenda uiri...
at nostra ingenti uadit circumdata turba... (*The Elegies of Propertius* 101, 102)

44. Lynne Lawner in *The Sixteen Pleasures* has argued the case for *I modi* as an album of celebrated courtesans, 26-30.

45. Quoted in Lynne Lawner *The Sixteen Pleasures*, 38.

46. See Henry Zerner, "L'Estampe érotique au temps de Titien," on the probability of Venetian prints of *I modi* and the relative abundance of erotic images in Venetian art in the mid-sixteenth century, 89. See also Charles Hope, "Problems on Interpretation in Titian's Erotic Paintings" and Carlo Ginzburg, "Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel '500."

47. Ben Jonson and Pierre de Brantôme both linked Aretino with Elephantis.

48. Lynne Lawner *The Sixteen Pleasures*, 28. See also Cathy Santore's "Julia Lombardo: Somtuosa Meretrice," on the *Tariffa delle puttane di Vinegia*, which "alludes to the concept of the hetaera, a cultural phenomenon with antique roots and thus sanction" (50).

49. For what is still the definitive statement on the ways in which female speech and sexuality were conflated and viewed as highly aggressive in early modern England, see Lisa Jardine *Still Harping on Daughters*, 103-40.

50.The whole of Vanitelli's denunciation, as well as transcripts of Franco's two court hearings, is transcribed in Margaret Rosenthal, 198-203.

51.See Marisa Milani on the frequency with which prostitutes were arraigned in Venice for invoking the devil in order to win back lovers; "L''Incanto' di Veronica Franco," 254 n.8. For *ruffiane* and the practice of incantation and making magic potions, see Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, 27-8.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have shown how three Renaissance women writers internalised the demands of male-dominated literary culture. Yet their apparent obedience to the roles required of them was incomplete and fraught with contradiction. In following the twists and turns of their textual performance of desire and sexuality, I have aimed at an analysis that is firmly grounded in the material of history, literary history and the texts themselves.

In Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth the language of pleasure is not silenced but embedded in discourses of modesty and virtue. Marguerite de Navarre foregrounds an idealised portrait of virtuous women as fortresses of chastity and resolution. At the same time, her portrayal of a more worldly, wily and pleasure-loving kind of woman constitutes a comic and realist subversion of the claims of chastity. The modesty of Marguerite's authorial persona and her arguments for the virtue of women aim to secure her public reputation and that of her sex in general. However, a further discourse of sexual intrigue and "parleying" between the characters in the frame tale suggests a quite different set of meanings - and pleasures - encoded for a private audience, Marguerite's immediate circle. This dissonance between the public virtue of women and the private demands of individual desire feeds into other aspects of the *Heptaméron*; the narrative content of the novellas and the commentary contained within them, as well as the knowing asides that make up so much of the frame tale.

Mary Wroth is also taken up with a very vocal performance of virtue. Yet she too demonstrates an internalisation of ideals of feminine good conduct while making a significant break with traditions of feminine silence and reticence. Her idealisation of the private, self-contained woman errs towards a questioning of the demands of modesty and provides the pretext for a protracted discourse about female passion. Her somewhat hyperbolic narrativisation of female self-government thrives on the possibility of its breakdown. In this sense, she looks forward to the curious erotic tension of eighteenth-century novels about the trials of virtuous women in love.

Where Marguerite de Navarre and Mary Wroth attempt to make discourses of female desire into

a private matter, Veronica Franco capitalises on her position as a "public" woman. She adopts a plain-speaking persona and refuses circumspect and sublimatory discourses about desire, bypassing projections of idealised femininity by using the "low" vocabulary of satire and comedy. Her erotic poems, whose vocabulary derives from Renaissance Italian paganism, suggest the limits of female-authored discourses of desire in this period. For all their "frankness" and self-assertion they are defensive speech acts caught up in a social and signifying system that privileges masculine sexual power.

I have sought to demonstrate these writers' defensiveness and incompleteness of expression rather than their "success" in negotiating the social and literary constraints of their time. In her important work *The Currency of Eros* (1990), Ann Jones viewed Renaissance women's love poetry as the negotiation of "a range of interpretive positions" (2), some more critical and oppositional than others, in relation to the gender ideologies and literary system of Renaissance Europe. In doing so she stressed the inventiveness of women's responses to a literary system prejudiced against them. However, the search for Renaissance women's expression of desire immediately makes their self-imposed limits apparent. Jones' theory, drawn from Marxist cultural studies, provides an optimistic and positivistic overlay that occludes the ambivalence and irony at the heart of these women's writing.

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf imagines a Renaissance woman writer, Shakespeare's sister, "pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts" (48) and blames Chastity, which "has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest" (49). To read the contrariness, the "nerves and instincts" of modesty and its denial in Renaissance women's writing, is to read it on its own terms, and to take account of its courage.

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