STUDI
E
RICERCHE

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THE RENAISSANCE COURTESAN IN WORDS, LETTERS AND IMAGES

SOCIAL AMPHIBOLOGY AND MORAL FRAMING

(A Diachronic Perspective)

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To Elizabeth, who introduced me
to the concept of 'power as freedom'

In memory of Larry and Lucia

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INTRODUCTION

> *Anfibologia:* […] *errore o dubbio dovuto a uso improprio di parole o a confusione di concetti; espressione equivoca.*
>
> Amphibology: […] error or doubt due to the improper use of words or a confusion of ideas; equivocation.
>
> Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* [1]

In «Capitolo 16» of her *Terze rime*, published in 1575, Veronica Franco, the most renowned of Venetian courtesans [2], replies to the defamatory verses of the vernacular poet Maffio Venier. Maffio was a younger member of one of the most prominent Venetian families, whose patriarch, Domenico, supported Veronica's intellectual endeavors. In the first line of one of his poems Maffio acridly plays with Franco's name by calling her «Veronica, ver unica puttana» (Veronica, true and unique whore) [3]. Franco focuses her defense on proving Maffio's incorrect use of the term «unica» (unique). In contrast to his crass statement, her argument is craftily woven. In its intro-

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[1] The definition of the term 'amphibology' is somewhat different from its Italian correspondent «anfibologia». According to the *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* 'amphibology' refers to «a sentence or phrase that can be interpreted in more than one way», but does not apply to a single word, hence my quotation and translation from Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Torino: UTET, 1961-, voll. I-XXI), vol. I, 466.

[2] Veronica Franco's present fame is due to the brilliant monograph by Margaret Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan. Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth Century Venice* (Chicago - London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[3] Maffio Venier's poem is in a manuscript version, in the manuscript collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice. MMS it. IX 217 (= 7091). This bibliographical information is in Veronica Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. and transl. by Ann R. Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal (Chicago - London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 16. Maffio's slandering line also burlesques the Petrarchan style of an *incerto autore* who writes in «Capitolo 7»: «vera, unica al mondo eccelsa dea» (true and unique goddess, supreme on earth, 173). All citations and translations of Franco's «Capitoli» are from Veronica Franco, *Poems*. On Maffio's anti-petrarchan style and the paronomastic play on the name Veronica, see Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 186-188. On Veronica Franco's anti-petrarchan style of the *Terze rime*, see Sara Maria Adler, «Veronica Franco's Petrarchan *Terze rime*: Subverting the Master's Plan», *Italica* 65, 3 (Autumn 1988): 213-233; and Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 4-5. On the literary deification of the courtesan, see Fiora Bassanese, «Mythological Representations of the Renaissance *Cortegiana*», *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1989): 81-86.

duction: «'Ver unica' e 'l restante mi chiamaste» ('Verily unique', among other things, you called me, 139), Franco intentionally omits the word «puttana» (whore), gracefully blunting Maffio's linguistic sword. Then she selects the weakest of the two adjectives, «unica» (unique), and thrusts her blow against the amphibological use Maffio makes of it:

> *Forse che si direbbe impropriamente,*
> *ma l'anfibologia non quadra in cosa*
> *qual mostrar voi volete espressamente.*
>
> Perhaps you are speaking in an ironic way,
> but amphibology fails to communicate
> the point evidently you want to make. (145-148)

In this rhetorical duel Franco uses the linguistic authority of the dictionary both as shield:

> *Ma al mio dizzïonario io non so come*
> *'unica' alcuna cosa propriamente*
> *in mala parte ed in biasmar si nome.*
>
> How one can properly
> call something 'unique'
> in a critical sense, by way of condemnation. (142-144)

and spear:

> *L'«unico» in lode e pregio viene esposto*
> *da chi s'intende; e chi parla altrimenti*
> *dal senso del parlar sen va discosto.*
>
> «Unique» is used in praise and esteem
> by those who know; and whoever speaks otherwise
> digresses from the true meaning of words. (154-156)

In thrusting her blow she makes sure that her enemy has no escape. His erroneous use of the term «unico» is not a mere «fallo d'accenti» («mistaken emphasis», 157); rather, she says either his purpose was not to defame her, or, if it were, he didn't know how to properly lie («O voi non mi voleste biasimare / o in questo dir menzogna non sapeste», 160-161), that is to say that in both cases he was mistaken. But Franco goes even one step further. After having invoked lexical authority, propriety of speech, and the expertise of the literati, she recovers the previously omitted word («e 'l restante mi chiamaste», 139), whore («puttana»), and skillfully blurs its maligned meaning. First she chooses its synonym, «meretrice» («prostitute», 178), whose derivation from the Latin term *meretrix* gives to the

still derogatory word a less vulgar appeal, especially when presented to an audience of literati [4]. Then she presents two options, which are introduced as 'either […] or': «O volete inferir ch'io non vi sono / o ve n'è tra tali di lodate» («either you imply that I am not one of them / or that among them some merit praise», 179-180). But their opposition is only apparent as both options concur in deconstructing the negative meaning of «meretrice», either by eliminating it, «io non vi sono» («I am not one of them») as the untenable oxymoron «unica puttana» («unique whore»), or by transforming it. In fact, Franco presents the possibility that the derogatory term «meretrice» may actually allow for the praiseworthy qualities implied in the adjective «unica»:

> *Quanto le meretrici hanno di buono,*
> *quanto di grazioso e di gentile,*
> *esprime in me del parlar vostro il suono.*
>
> Whatever goodness prostitutes may have,
> whatever grace and nobility of soul
> the sound of your word assigns to me. (181-183)

If that were her opponent's intention she would be appeased and happy not to raise objections («di non farne romor io son contenta», 185). But ultimately, after careful reading, she is convinced that that is not the case, and is willing to challenge him with the weapon of his choice, the sword or the pen, their local dialect or any other idiom. In the end, his willingness to joust at least once will appease her, and she will grant him her reconciliation («son contenta di far con voi la pace», 207). In «Capitolo 16» Franco crosses the boundaries of gender and social status by applying two distinctive, but complementary, tactics. First, as contemporary scholars of Franco have clearly indicated [5], she challenges her aristocratic male offender to a physical or intellectual duel, both of which are his historical prerogatives. Second and more acutely, with a subtle but highly effective rhetorical tactic, she deconstructs the social meaning of words by making equivocation («anfibologia») her weapon of choice. Franco never duels with her aggressor because he has already been defeated by her ability to blur the meaning of words and the social boundaries they stand for. By means of

[4] In a footnote to the word 'prostitute' Jones and Rosenthal write: «In *meretrice*, the words Franco uses here, she may want her readers to hear the sound of *merito* (merit)» (Franco, *Poems*, 169, f.n. 29). As indicated by the translators in *Poems*, 22, the note could be a translation from Stefano Bianchi's edition of Veronica Franco's *Rime* (1995).

[5] See Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 190-196.

her rhetorical skills Franco performs what I describe as an act of social amphibology.

Franco's amphibological skill, although highly refined, is not unique to her. It is an asset of the Renaissance courtesans. In the following pages I will analyze the courtesan's ability to cross social boundaries upward as well as downward, and, just like an amphibian, to thrive in different environments by applying both her physical and intellectual skills. I will examine such behavior, and the political and social anxiety it produced, and still produces, from historical, literary, and visual perspectives. This monograph is therefore divided in three chapters. In the first and historical chapter, titled «Words», I will address issues related to the meaning of the term courtesan, its origin, and attributes. I will make reference to legal and historical documents of the time (census reports, decrees, diaries, letters, and travel logues), as well as to recent interpretations of such documents. In the literary chapter, titled «Letters», I will demonstrate how the XVI century literary world mirrored and supported the amphibology of the term courtesan, and the need for its framing. Works by Baldassare Castiglione, Pietro Aretino, and Matteo Bandello will be the subject of such exploration. In the third and last chapter, devoted to an analysis of visual representations of women and titled «Images», I will once again show how the ambiguity inherent in those representations produced, and still produces, questionable framing attempts. I will make reference to XVI and XVII century paintings and prints, to two recent art exhibitions and catalogues on the topic of women and love in the Renaissance, and to other contemporary visual media. Throughout the monograph, particular attention will be placed on the meaning of the term «onestà», with its moral (honesty), and social (honor) implications, as well as its opposite, «disonestà» (dishonesty), and their derivatives. Also, because translation is always an interpretation of the original text, I will underline any instance when the English translation becomes a tool for social and moral framing.

1.
WORDS

In his *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, the most prominent dictionary of the Italian language, Salvatore Battaglia first equates the term «cortigiana» (courtesan) with «mondana» (mondaine) or «prostituta» (prostitute), then he specifies: «Nella società del Cinquecento: donna di raffinata educazione e di qualità intellettuali, che concede i propri favori in un rapporto di reciproco rispetto e stima» (In sixteenth century society: a woman with refined manners and intellectual skills, who grants her favors in a relationship of reciprocal respect and esteem) [1]. Battaglia does not elaborate on what kind of favors the courtesan would grant, but in his earliest literary reference, he quotes a passage from one of Matteo Bandello's short stories, published in 1554, which shows the synonymy of courtesan and whore and the sexual nature of her favors: «Ella era molto bella e giovane. Il perché, essendo in abito di cortegiana ed usando atti di putta, cominciò a servire quelli che erano in nave […] di quei servigi che communemente gli uomini da le donne ricercano» (She was very young and beautiful. And because she was dressed like a courtesan and behaved like a whore, she began to serve the men who were on the ship […] offering those services that men usually seek from women) [2]. But Battaglia questions this initial equation when he adds a second meaning, «donna di corte» (court lady), which he defines as «antico» (an early use). He then uses Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*) as the term's literary reference: «Molto men fatica mi saria formare una signora che meritasse esser regina del mondo, che una perfetta cortigiana» (Certainly, it would cause me far less toil to imagine a lady worthy of being the queen of the world

[1] Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, vol. III, 863. The translation is mine.
[2] *Ibidem*. The translation is mine.

than to imagine a perfect Court Lady) [3]. According to Battaglia, the equations, courtesan = prostitute, and courtesan = court lady, coexisted during the sixteenth century. The Cortelazzo-Zolli *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* is chronologically more precise. The literary reference for courtesan = court lady is still *Il libro del cortigiano*, now dated before 1529, while for courtesan = prostitute the reference is Pietro Aretino's comedy, *La cortigiana* (*The Courtesan*), published in 1534 [4]. This second equation is somewhat questioned by the historian Arturo Graf, who in *Attraverso il Cinquecento*, published in 1888, writes: «Se le donne tutte di mala vita furono spesso nel Cinquecento chiamate cortigiane, non è men vero, che si cercò, allora stesso, con qualificazioni e con aggiunti […] di ripristinare le distinzioni opportune, e di toglier di mezzo l'equivoco» (If during the Cinquecento, prostitutes were often called courtesans, it is also true that attempts were made […] to reestablish the appropriate distinctions and avoid any misunderstanding) [5]. I would disagree with Graf. In fact among the few examples: «cortesana puttana» (courtesan whore), «cortesana da lume o da candela» (candlelight courtesan), «cortesana onesta» (honest courtesan) [6], that he selects from the 1517 census of the city of Rome, the ambiguity of the 'courtesan whore', and the moral contradiction of 'honest courtesan', are particularly indicative of a social reality with blurred class boundaries and moral values; therefore of a society which is unable to establish distinctions and avoid misunderstanding.

Arturo Graf dates the origin of the equation courtesan = prostitute back to the *Diarium* of Joannes Burchard, master of ceremonies of Pope Alexander VI. In two separate accounts Burchard uses the term «cortegiana» (courtesan) as a synonym for «meretrix honesta» (honest prostitute). In April 1498 he writes: «Superioribus diebus incarcerata fuit quedam cortegiana, hoc est meretrix honesta, Cursetta nuncupata» (The following days a courtesan, or honest prostitute, named Cursetta, was imprisoned) [7]. And in October 1501: «In sero fecerunt cenam cum duce Valentinense in camera

[3] *Ibidem*. Unless otherwise stated all translations of *Il libro del cortegiano* are from Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, transl. by Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959).

[4] Manlio Cortelazzo and Paolo Zilli, *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (Bologna: Zingarelli, 1989, voll. I-V), vol. I, 289.

[5] Arturo Graf, *Attraverso il Cinquecento* (Torino: Ermanno Loescher, 1888), 226. All translations are mine.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] Johann Burchard, *Diarium, sive rerum urbanarum commentarii* (1483-1506), ed. by L. Thuasne (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1885, voll. I-LXVIII), vol. II, 42. The translation is mine.

sua, in palatio apostolico, quinquaginta meretrices honeste, cortegiane noncupate» (In the evening, fifty honest prostitutes, also called courtesans, dined with Duke Valentino in his chamber, in the apostolic palace) [8]. Graf's makes reference also to the 1517 census of the city of Rome, in which several definitions of the term courtesan are included. In particular the term «cortesana onesta» (honest courtesan) appears in the census only twice as the Florentine «dona Angelica», «honesta cortigiana», and «dona Lucia» also «honesta cortigiana», are housed on different floors of the same dwelling [9]. This juxtaposition of terms morally puzzles Graf who writes: «A noi quell'accozzo di 'cortesana' e di 'onesta' sembra veramente una cosa assai strana» (It seems quite strange to us the throwing together of words such as 'courtesan' and 'honest') [10]. Also Emmanuel Rodocanachi manifests moral uneasiness when in 1894 he writes: «Je ne parle ici que de la véritable 'cortigiana', de la 'meretrix honesta', l'honnête prostituée, car on accouplait alors sans vergogne ces deux vocables disparates» (Here I am referring to the true 'cortigiana', the 'meretrix honesta', the honest prostitute, because then these two unlike terms were paired without any shame) [11]. Moral uneasiness and social framing are still present seventy years later when Rita Casagrande di Villaviera states: «In questa definizione [cortigiana onesta] vi è tutta una morale ipocrita propria di ogni tempo» (In this definition [honest courtesan] there is a hypocritical morality typical of every era) [12]. While, Georgina Masson, who goes back to Burchard's equation, «meretrix honesta» = «cortegiana», finds it an «incongruous term used in the dog Latin in which he [Burchard] wrote» [13]. More contemporary scholars have overcome such uneasiness by accepting for «onesta» only the social meaning of «onorata» (honored). Paul Larivaille states that this paradox is only apparent and that the term honest does not mean chaste but cultured and

[8] *Ivi*, vol. III, 167. The translation is mine.

[9] In the census the term «cortigiana», including its spelling variations: «cortegiana», «cortisiana», «cortisana», and «cortesana», is used 162 times. Besides the ones mentioned by Graf, other attributes found in the census are «famosa» (renowned) and «della minor sorte» (of a lower status). All the above information is in Mariano Armellini, *Un censimento della città di Roma sotto il pontificato di Leone X* (Roma: Tipografia di Roma di Alessandro Befani, 1882).

[10] Graf, *Cinquecento*, 226.

[11] Emmanuel Rodocanachi, *Courtisanes et bouffons. Étude de mœurs romaines au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1894), 7. The translation is mine.

[12] Rita Casagrande di Villaviera, *Le cortigiane veneziane nel Cinquecento* (Milano: Longanesi & C., 1968), 28. The translation is mine.

[13] Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 9.

well-mannered [14]. Giorgio Padoan goes one step further. He interprets the adjective honored or honest as an indication that prostitution is no longer a trade but an art of living [15]. Such art is described in detail by Fiora Bassanese when she writes:

> Like the ladies of the court, the honest courtesan dedicated herself to the creation of an external image of grace and beauty, of cleverness, poise, and elegance, which had to be bolstered by specific abilities in music and in witty conversation. To these qualities were added the ability to discuss and understand the cultural agenda common to all educated contemporaries and the necessary appearance of propriety and decorum. [16]

Margaret Rosenthal has an even more specific interpretation. It focuses entirely on the courtesan's education and intellectual skills: «the honest courtesan's capital […] is acquired by honest means alone, that is through intellectual and literary projects» [17]. But are these intellectual and literary projects 'honest means' because they are viewed as socially loftier endeavors or are they 'honest' because they are morally irreprehensible? And can the amphibology of such an adjective be socially sustained? On the legal use of the term «cortigiana onesta» Talvacchia writes:

> After 1520 in notarial documents the terms 'cortigiana' or 'curialis' can be found in application to women, or the titles 'mulier honesta' or 'donna honesta', but never 'cortigiana onesta'. The implication is that the term 'onesta' had been co-opted and corrupted from its original, legal usage, eventually to bequeath status to a stratum of the population whose ascendancy the existing structure could not entirely assimilate. [18]

And the appropriation of the term is successful only if its amphibology is sustained. In fact as Talvacchia states:

> The connection of 'onestà' with erotic concerns expands and complicates the usage of the term […] As attested by the use of the adjective 'onesta' in conjunction with nouns pertaining to prostitute, we can establish that within different contexts, 'onesto' could have either a social or a moral meaning. A

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[14] Paul Larivaille, *La vie quotidienne des courtisanes en Italie au temps de la Renaissance. Rome et Venice, XV^e^ et XVI^e^ siècles* (Paris: Hachette, 1975), 34.

[15] Giorgio Padoan, «Il mondo delle cortigiane nella letteratura rinascimentale», in *Il gioco dell'amore. Le cortigiane a Venezia dal Trecento al Settecento* (Milano: Berenice Art Books, 1990), 65.

[16] Fiora Bassanese, «Private Lives and Public Lies: Texts by Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance», *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 3rd s., 30 (Fall 1988): 296-297.

[17] Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 6.

[18] Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 106.

> 'cortigiana onesta' often had high social standing, even while her behavior constituted sinful acts. [19]

The moral meaning of the adjective «onesto» is clearly stated in a deliberation of the Venetian *Provveditori alla Sanità* dated September 16, 1539. In the attempt to prevent prostitution of minors the deliberation states as necessary:

> *Levar la occasione a molte pute che praticano e stano in casa con quelle [cortesane over meretrice] acciò non siano da quelle vitiate et poste sopra la lor pessima via […] con rovina total di quelle povere pute che potriano viver con altro exercitio 'honesto' e con le loro fatiche.* [20]
>
> To eliminate the opportunity for many young girls, who frequent and live in homes with those [courtesans, or rather prostitutes], so that they will not be corrupted and placed on their wicked path […] with the total ruin of those poor girls who could make a living with another *honest* occupation and with their labor. [21]

I would add to Talvacchia's claim and the usage of *Provveditori* that «onesto» had, and still has, as we will see later on, social and moral meanings, which, particularly when referring to women, cannot be fully separated [22]. The term «cortigiana onesta», and all the other possible variations of the term, mentioned above, were a framing tool, a way for the legal and political establishment to label and control those very women who were exploiting the amphibological nature of words to blur social boundaries and thrive in public spaces.

In order to prove the intense social activity between patrician men and women in XVI century Venice, and reject the widespread belief in a strict gender separation Stanley Chojnacki quotes passages from the *Diarii* of the Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo, and writes:

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[19] *Ivi*, 107.

[20] Giovanni Battista Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie venete sulla prostituzione fino alla caduta della Repubblica* (Venezia: n.p., 1870-1872), 141. The emphasis is mine.

[21] The translation and italics are mine.

[22] For an historical analysis of the civic and moral aspects of the term 'honesty' and its derivatives see, Paolo Cherchi, *L'onestade e l'onesto raccontare del «Decameron»* (Firenze: Cadmo, 2004). Also *La catégorie de l'honneste dans la culture du XVI^e siècle. Actes du Colloque international de Sommières II (Septembre 1983)* (Saint-Etienne: Institut d'Études de la Renaissance et de l'Âge Classique - Université de Saint-Etienne, 1985), in particular, Colette Demaiziere, «'Honneste' et ses derives dans le dictionnaires français, de Robert Estienne à la fin du XVII^e siècle» (9-18), and Paul Larivaille, «La courtisane honnete, ou l''honnestete' devoyee: notes sur la conception de l''onestà' chez l'Aretin» (37-50). In particular on the general definition of «cortigiana onesta», 37-42.

> *Sanudo ci racconta di molte feste da ballo in case di privati, e ci informa che il comportamento era tutt'altro che consono con l'immagine della severa gentildonna patrizia segregata da marito geloso.* [23]
>
> Sanudo tells us about many balls held in private homes. He informs us that the behavior was not in accordance with the image of the severe patrician lady kept in seclusion by her jealous husband. [24]

Again, according to Sanudo, in 1521 a group of young patricians, members of the Company of the Hose, gave a party with more than forty of the most beautiful women on earth, and they danced «il balo dil capelo» (the Dance of the Hat) [25], which, according to Pompeo Molmenti, Simeone Zuccolo da Cologna, author of *La pazzia del ballo* (*The Madness of Dancing*, 1549), describes as the dance of adultery [26]. Should we assume that courtesans never participated in these patrician balls, and patrician women never had anything in common with them? Margaret Rosenthal offers us an answer when she writes that «Canon Pietro Casola, a Milanese pilgrim on his way to the Holy Land, as early as 1494 commented with dismay not specifically on the courtesan's dress and demeanor but on all Venetian women's lascivious dress» [27]. Casola extensively comments on women's wearing high footwear, called chopine, to enhance their appearance in public; on their wearing wigs, commonly sold in the streets, and also rich clothes and precious jewels, which, if necessary, could be rented. He comments on their wearing heavy make-up on their faces and other parts of their body as they do not shy away from showing in public their breast and shoulders. Venetian women enjoy being admired, thus they do not spend money in buying scarves or shawls neither do they hurry to cover themselves when men approach [28]. Such a moralistic account made by a clergyman may be

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[23] Stanley Chojnacki, «La posizione della donna a Venezia nel Cinquecento», in *Tiziano e Venezia. Convegno internazionale di studi (Venezia, 1976)* (Venezia: Neri Pozzi, 1980), 66.

[24] The translation is mine.

[25] Marin Sanudo, *I diarii di Marin Sanudo* (Bologna: Forni, 1969-1970, voll. I-LVIII), vol. XXIX, 547.

[26] Pompeo Molmenti, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata. Dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica* (Trieste: LINT, 1973), 379.

[27] Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 19.

[28] «Le loro done, a me pereno, per la minore parte, picole, perché, quando non fosseno cossì, non usarebbeno le sue zibre, aliter pianele tanto alte quanto fano; […] che, portandole, alcune pareno giganti et anche alcune non vano secure dal cascare, se non vano bene apogiate a le schiave […] vano con le crine ante li ogi cossì rize, che, al primo indicio, pareno più presto homini che femine; e la maiore parte de capili comprati, e questo el dico de certo, per ne ho veduto sopra la piaza de Santo Marco vendere in belle perticate da vilani […] esse done veneziane se forzano quanto pono in publico, precipue

somewhat extreme but, at the same time, symptomatic of a diffused social anxiety about women's attire and demeanor in general, and courtesans in particular, which produced the long list of definitions that we find not only in the 1517 Roman census, but also in the *Diarii* of Marin Sanudo. Sanudo uses at different times terms like «honorata, nominata, sumptuosa meretrice, o cortigiana, o puttana» (honored, renowned, sumptuous prostitute, or courtesan, or whore) [29].

The nomenclature became so extensive and ambiguous that it defied its framing purpose. In an attempt to solve the problem in a decree of September 16, 1539, the *Provveditori alla Sanità* clearly equated the terms courtesan and prostitute («meretrice, over cortesana […] cortesane over

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le belle, de monstrare el pecto, dico le mamelle e le spalle, in tanto che, più volte vedendole, me sono maravigliato che li panni non ghe siano cascati dal dosso. Quelle che possono et anche quelle che non possano, de veste sono molto pompose et hano de grande zoiie, perle in frixiri in capo al collo, portano de molte annelle in dito, de grandi baiassi, robini et diamanti; ho dicto ancora quelle che non possano, perché me fu dicto che molte ne pigliaveno a fìcto. Vano molto artificiate in el volto e in quelle parte monstrano, a ciò che pareno più belle […] grande e picole, quelle done veneziane hano piacere ad essere vedute e guardate e non hano paura che le mosche le mordeno; e però non hano troppo freza a coprirse, quando l'homo le gionge a la sproveduta. Vedo non fano troppo spexa in fazoleri per coprirse le sue spalle» (A few of their women seem to me to be short, because otherwise they would not wear such tall clogs, known as chopine, as they do […] By wearing them some look like giants and others, in order not to fall, have to lean on their servants. They wear their hair in curls over their eyes to the extent that, at first sight they look more like men than women. And their hair is mostly bought. I can vouch that as I saw people selling wigs, hanging from rods, in San Marco square […] These Venetian women, especially the good looking ones, when in public, try to show their breasts, I mean their bosom and shoulders, in such a way that many times I wondered why their clothes did not fall off. The wealthy ones, as well as the not so wealthy, dress sumptuosly and wear a lot of jewels, strings of pearls around their necks, and many rings on their fingers, with rubies, diamonds, and other precious stones. I mentioned the not-so-wealthy ones because I was told that many of these women rent their clothes and jewels. They wear a lot of make-up on their face and the other uncovered parts of their body. They do so to look more beautiful […] both young and older Venetian women enjoy to be looked at, and they are not afraid to be bitten by flies. That is why they don't hurry to cover themselves when men suddenly approch them. They don't spend much money in buying shawls to cover their shoulders), *Viaggio a Gerusalemme di Pietro Casola*, a cura di Anna Paoletti (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2001), 100-102. The translation is mine.

[29] Also on April 17th 1515 Sanudo uses the term «compagnessa» (female companion), *Diarii*, vol. XX, 68. The same term can be found in the «Atti uffiziali dell'Avrogaria del Comun» on May 14th 1515, in Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 262. Another term, used both in chronicles as well as legal documents as early as 1423, is «mamola» ironically referring to a modest and shy girl, while the term «carampana» derives from the area (Ca' Rampani) belonging to the Rampani Family, originally from Ravenna, and inhabited by prostitutes since the beginning of the XV century.

meretrice») [30], while on February 21, 1543 the *Provveditori sulle Pompe* qualified as prostitute any unmarried woman who associated and traded with one or more men, or a married one not living with her husband, who also associated and traded with one or more men [31]. Still the attempt to control through rules and labels was repeatedly challenged. In the same year Madonna Lucieta Padovana, accused of being in church during the hours forbidden to prostitutes, was not charged because she defined herself not a prostitute but a 'married courtesan' [32]. And if courtesans were not always allowed in churches, they were often buried in them. According to Sanudo the «honorata et nominata meretrice» (honored and renowned prostitute) Anzola Chaga in Calle was buried in I Frari [33], while Lucia Trevixan, «cortesana molto nominata» (very renowned courtesan), in S. Caterina [34]. The Tuscan Fiammetta, who, according to some literary sources, had become Cesare Borgia's mistress [35], had a chapel built in S. Agostino, in Rome. In the same church Tullia d'Aragona was buried, while the famous Imperia, mistress of Agostino Chigi, the wealthiest banker of his time, found rest in S. Gregorio [36]. These women had been able to repossess the nomencla-

[30] Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 101-102.

[31] *Ivi*, 109.

[32] The text of Lucieta's absolution is a clear example of ambiguity of terms even in the language of the law. In fact Lucieta not only confessed to having been in church during the hours forbidden by the law, but that she regularly went to church and any religious festivity among the noble and middle class women because she did not consider herself a prostitute but a courtesan, and that she had her husband to support this («confessa non solamente […] di esser sta in giesia alle hore prohibite […] ma che continuamente va per ogni giesia ed ogni festa di quella fra le nobele et citadine non reputandose meretrice ma cortesana, ma aver suo marito come giustificava», Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 274. Having proven her own fame («fama») and honesty («honestate») she is absolved from any punishment and fine established by the law on the subject of prostitutes, courtesans, and infamous women («meretrice e cortesane et donne infame»), *ivi*, 275. The ambiguity in the text may actually be caused by a clerical mistake: the use of 'but' («ma») instead of 'nor' («né»). In that case Lucieta would consider herself neither a prostitute nor a courtesan, and that would be in agreement with the conclusive statement of her absolution. But it is also possible that Lucieta was a courtesan as she herself admits, that she was married, able to prove her good fame and honesty («bona sua fama et honestate»), and to overcome any slander and denunciation.

[33] Sanudo, *Diarii*, vol. XXV, 138.

[34] *Ivi*, vol. XIX, 79.

[35] On this *vexata questio* see Pino Pecchiai, *Donne del Rinascimento in Roma. Imperia, Lucrezia figlia d'Imperia, la misteriosa Fiammetta* (Padova: CEDAM, 1958), 87-88.

[36] For the commission by a Roman courtesan of a chapel devoted to Mary Magdalen in SS. Trinità dei Monti, see Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, «The Chapel of the Courtesan and the Quarrel of the Magdalens», *The Art Bulletin* 84, 2 (June 2002): 273-292. The quotations from Vasari, in Witcombe's article at e.n. 3 and 4, 286, are particularly

ture society had devised to control them, and use it to affirm their social amphibology. This includes also their freedom to inhabit any public space, including places of worship.

The blurring of class boundaries and bending of moral and religious rules is evident also in the epistolary exchanges between prostitutes and aristocrats. In her numerous letters to Francesco del Nero, a relative of Niccolò Machiavelli, Camilla di Pisa talks about her unrequited love for Filippo Strozzi, her affection for Francesco, and the favors and money she receives from them. In a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Beatrice da Ferrara describes, in a forward and natural way, her multiple lovers, need to make love, being a whore and, at the same time, a pious woman [37], and her care and reverence for Lorenzo. I believe her letter is worthy of extended quotation:

> *Pure quando Dio vol[s]e vene quella settimana [santa] […] unde io, deliberata al tutto darme a l'anima, feci intendere a tutti gli amici miei, che ne ho uno scorzo, dovesseno attendere ad altro. E la prima cosa che feci fu il volerme confessare e avendo a d[i]eiunare per qualche giorno de quella cosa, scaricai cun il mio più caro molto bene la soma. E così, meza contrita, me confessai dal predicatore nostro de Santo Augustino, dico nostro perché, quante putane son in Roma, tutte veniano alla sua predica, unde esso […] ad altro non attendea in*

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interesting for their ambiguity of terms. In fact Vasari, who is the source for the identification of the commissioner of the chapel, in *Le vite* (1568) first refers to the commissioner as a prostitute («una meretrice», vol. V, 417), then as a very famous courtesan («una cortigiana famosissima», vol. V, 622). The quotations are from Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (1568), in *Opere*, a cura di Gaetano Milanesi (1906; reprint Firenze: G-C. Sansoni, 1981, voll. I-IX).

[37] In 1580, while visiting Rome, Michel de Montaigne wrote about the extreme («vanno all'estremo») behavior of courtesans on matters of piety: «Un tizio stava in letto con una cortigiana, in tutta la libertà abituale a tal pratica, verso le ventriquattr'ore ecco suonare l'*Ave Maria*: dal letto ella si precipita di colpo a terra e si mette in ginocchio a far la sua preghiera» (A fellow was in bed with a courtesan, with all the freedom customary to such activity. Around midnight at the sound of the bells ringing the *Ave Maria*, the woman jumped off the bed and kneeled down for her prayer), from *Giornale del viaggio di Michel de Montaigne in Italia* (Firenze: Parenti, 1958, voll. I-III), vol. II, 6. The translation is mine. Already in 1438 the Venetian office of *Signori della Notte* in order to prevent «le povere meretrixe publicamente pecchano in di solenni» (the poor prostitutes from sinning in public during religious festivities), decreed that «da mo in avanti alguna meretrixe di sta città sia de che condition se voia, non ardissa ne pressuma per modo alcuno over forma farse tochar de peccado intro i diti zorni» (from now on any prostitute of this city of any social status, should not dare or assume in any way or form to be touched by sin during the above mentioned days [Christmas Eve and Christmas, the entire Holy Week, and all the festivities of the Virgin Mary]), Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 190-191. The translation and brackets are mine.

volerne convertirne tutte. Oh, oh, oh dura impresa! […] io, per me, lo arei ben fatto, ma ogni volta che pensava esser priva, facendolo, de poter dire tolo tolo, non gli era ordine […] In quel medesimo giorno mi confessai […] Confessata subito mi detti al spirito, e cominciai pregare Dio per vostra eccellenzia chè ancora fusse pecatrice e putana, me volesse, postposta ogni altra grazia, farme degna de la salute de quella, e poter veder vostra eccellenzia, in quello pristino stato che è stata, facendo vodo, se ciò mi concedea, visitare Santa Maria di Loretto. [38]

Eventually, according to God's will that week [the Holy Week] came […] therefore, as I had decided to dedicate myself entirely to my soul, I said to all my friends, and I have a bunch of them, to do something else. First, I wanted to confess, and because I had to avoid that thing for a few days, I completely unloaded that burden with my dearest friend. Then, as I was half contrite, I confessed to our preacher in S. Agostino. I said 'our' because all the whores in Rome would go to his sermon. For that reason he […] didn't attend to anything else but to converting them all. Oh well, well a very difficult enterprise! […] If it were for me I would have done it, but each time I thought of being deprived, if I converted, of being able to say 'take it take it', there was no way [I was going to convert]. On that same day I went to confession […] Right after I confessed, I gave myself to spiritual exercises, and I began to pray God for your Excellency. Although I am a sinner and a whore I prayed Him to grant me, above all, to restore your Excellency's health. And I made the vow to visit The Holy Mary in Loreto, if He grants my prayer. [39]

The familial interaction between women of different social ranks and members of the highest Italian aristocracy is described in detail in Helen Ettlinger's study on mistresses in Italian Renaissance court society from 1350 to 1485. Ettlinger explains that «adulterous wives of courtiers […] these princely favorites, married or single, were openly recognized and honored ladies, some even holding property in their own right and achieving a degree of independence not normally available to Renaissance women» [40]. And those ladies could come from very different social classes, as was the case of two of Duke Niccolò III d'Este's mistresses: Stella da l'Assassino came from a noble Senese family, while Camilla della Tavola

[38] All letters by Camilla di Pisa, as well as this letter by Beatrice di Ferrara, are in *Lettere di cortigiane del Rinascimento*, a cura di Angelo Romano (Roma: Salerno, 1990). The above citation is at 144-145.

[39] The translation is mine. I thank Teodolinda Barolini for her interpretation and suggested translation of the expression: «tolo tolo».

[40] Helen Ettlinger, «'Visibilis et Invisibilis': The Mistress in Italian Renaissance Court Society», *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, 4 (Winter 1994): 770-792, in particular 770-771.

was simply one of the Duke's maids [41]. But the physical proximity of gentlewomen and courtesans, although a reality, is repeatedly sanctioned by the law, and honesty is the recurring parameter in the identification of the two categories. Two centuries after the time of Ettlinger's research study, on June 30th 1615, and again on December 19th 1617, the Venetian Council of X introduces in its deliberations the neologism «honestare». Referring to the public prostitutes of the city it states that they try «sotto il manto di così indiretti mezzi *honestare* l'infamia del nome et coprire la turpitudine della loro vita» (under the cloak of such indirect means to render honest their infamous title and hide the vileness of their lives) [42]. And, in the futile legal attempt to control their social amphibology, these women are strictly forbidden to attend «in qual si voglia abito alle feste o nozze di persone nobili et di honesta vita, overo alle sagre, feste, balli di villa, nelle chiese et alle fiere et altri luoghi pubblici delle città terre et luoghi dello Stato nostro» (in any sort of dress parties or weddings of noble and honest people, festivals, celebrations, country balls, churches, fairs, and other public places of the cities and lands of our State) [43]. Again and again societal control is met with women's defiance to and challenge of the moral and social definition of honesty.

[41] *Ivi*, 779-782.
[42] Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 137-138. The translation and italics are mine.
[43] *Ivi*, 141. The translation is mine.

2.
LETTERS

The same social and moral struggle, identified through legal and administrative documents, is also widely present in Renaissance literary texts. As indicated by both the Battaglia and the Cortelazzo-Zolli dictionaries, one of the literary sources to address such social amphibology is Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*. In 1507, in an attempt to exorcise this unsettling reality, a group of men and women of the court of Urbino gather to create the perfect «cortigiana». At the end of the second night of their parley, the ruling Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga assigns the topic of the following night's conversation:

> *Per esser l'ora molto tarda voglio che differiamo il tutto a domani; tanto più perché mi par ben fatto pigliar il consiglio del signor Magnifico: cioè che, prima che si venga a questa disputa, che si formi una donna di palazzo con tutte le perfezioni, come hanno formato questi signori il perfetto cortegiano.* (II, 99) [1]
>
> Since the hour is very late let us postpone the entire matter until tomorrow; and the more so because it seems to me wise to follow the advice of Signor Magnifico, namely, that, before we enter into this dispute, a Court Lady perfect in every way should be imagined, just as these gentlemen have imagined the perfect Courtier.

A worried Lady Emilia Pio, who has the role of moderator and executor of the Duchess' orders, quickly adds:

> *Signora […] Dio voglia che noi non ci abbattiamo a dar questa impresa a qualche congiurato con il signor Gasparo, che ci formi una cortegiana che non sappia far altro che la cucina e filare.* (II, 99)

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[1] All quotations are from Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, a cura di Ettore Bonora (Milano: Mursia, 1981). For all translation see chapter «Words», 16, f.n. 3. The books and chapters of the translation are the same as in the Italian text.

> Madam […] God forbid that we should chance to entrust this task to any fellow conspirator of Signor Gasparo, who should fashion us a Court Lady unable to do anything except cook and spin.

But the Duchess quickly reassures her by replying:

> *Io voglio confidarmi del signor Magnifico, il qual, per esser di quello ingegno e giudicio che è imaginerà quella perfezion maggiore che desiderar si po in donna ed esprimeralla ancor ben con le parole.* (II, 99)
>
> I am willing to put my trust in Signor Magnifico who (with the wit and good judgment that I know to be his) will imagine the highest perfection that can be desired in woman, and will express it in beautiful language as well.

When the following night Giuliano de' Medici prepares to fulfill his duty, he addresses the Duchess with these words of doubt:

> *Signora poiché pur così a voi piace, io dirò quello che mi occorre, ma con grandissimo dubbio di non satisfare; e certo molto men fatica mi saria formar una signora che meritasse esser regina del mondo, che una perfetta cortegiana, perché di questa non so io da chi pigliare l'esempio.* (III, 4)
>
> Since it is your pleasure, Madam, I will say what I have to say, but with great fear that I shall give no satisfaction. Certainly, it would cause me much less toil to imagine a lady worthy of being the queen of the world than to imagine a perfect Court Lady, because I don't know where to find the model for the latter.

And the Duchess replies:

> *Non uscite dai termini, signor Magnifico, ma attendete a l'ordine dato e formate la donna di palazzo, acciò che questa così nobil signora abbia chi possa degnamente servirla.* (III, 4)
>
> Do not exceed bounds, Signor Magnifico, but hold to the order given, and describe the Court Lady so that such a noble lady may have someone capable of serving her worthily.

The above quotations show to us that at the beginning of their debate on women, the ladies and gentlemen of the Court of Urbino use the terms «cortegiana» and «donna di palazzo» as synonyms, while as the debate continues only the latter is used, that of «cortegiana» having been wholly abandoned [2]. In the same passages, the term «signora» is used to indicate either a particular lady («signora Emilia») or a general category («così nobil

[2] Such synonymy does not appear in Singleton's translation of the quotations. In fact by translating both «cortegiana» and «donna di palazzo» as court lady, Singleton implies

signora»), which designates the women who attend, or would be allowed to attend, such an aristocratic circle. It is also interesting to notice that the «signor Magnifico» links the terms «signora», «regina», and «cortegiana» with the idea of merit («meritasse») and perfection («perfetta»), while suggesting the factual imperfect reality of the court, so clearly described by Ettlinger.

On December 15, 1537, eight years after the publication of Castiglione's masterpiece, Pietro Aretino wrote a letter addressed to Lady Angela Zaffetta. He wanted to express his attraction and admiration for her because, as he brilliantly summarized at the beginning of the letter, «voi più che altra avete saputo porre al volto della lascivia la mascara de l'onestade» (I, 293, 2) [3] (you, more than any other woman, have been able to put the mask of decency upon the face of lust, 56, 120) [4]. The letter is quite interesting because it addresses Angela with the title of «signora» (lady), and it also praises her unique «arte cortigiana». By using the term «cortigiana» following the feminine noun «arte», Aretino plays with the possibility that the term «cortigiana» can be the feminine adjective modifying the noun «arte», as well as a substantive juxstaposed to it. Thus he offers two possible meanings, which can be translated as 'courtly ways' or 'ways of being a courtesan' [5]. It is the proximity of the two terms, lady and courtesan, and the ambiguity inherent in the expression «arte cortigiana» that allows me to suggest a possible complementarity between Aretino's letter and Castiglione's description of his ideal «cortegiana».

In *Il libro del cortegiano*, the entire debate about women at court stems from the need to preserve women's honesty [6]. In fact, according to Ber-

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and applies a dichotomy of terms (courtesan versus court lady) which will develop much later, and is not present in Castiglione's text.

[3] All quotations from the letter are from Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, a cura di Francesco Erspamer (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1995, voll. I-II).

[4] Unless otherwise stated all translations of Aretino's letter are from *The Letters of Pietro Aretino*, transl. by Thomas C. Chubb (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967).

[5] The translation is mine. When Chubb translates «arte cortigiana» as «a harlot's trade» (56, 121) he fails to communicate Aretino's rhetorical ambiguity, which is essential to the understanding of the letter. With a similar framing intent Chubb arbitrarily titles the letter: «An Honest Whore». I thank Teodolinda Barolini for drawing my attention to the ambiguity in Aretino's expression.

[6] On this issue and its evolution in the different versions of *Il libro del cortegiano*, see Giuseppa Battisti Saccaro, «La donna, le donne nel *Cortegiano*», in *La corte e il «Cortegiano»*, a cura di Carlo Ossola (Roma: Bulzoni, 1980, voll. I-II), vol. I, 219-249, in particular 228-229, 231 and 245-246. On women's role and participation in Castiglione's text see Marina Zancan, «La donna nel *Cortegiano* di B. Castiglione. Le funzioni del femminile nell'immagine di corte», in *Nel cerchio della luna. Figure di donna in alcuni testi*

nardo Dovizi, whose role is to set the parameters for the courtier's humor, «le burle del cortegiano […] che non siano anco troppo acerbe, e sopra tutto aver rispetto e riverenzia, così in questo come in tutte l'altre cose, alle donne, e massimamente dove intervenga offesa della onestà» («the Courtier's tricks […] must not be too rough; and let him show respect to women above all, in this as in everything, and especially when some damage may be done to their honor», II, 89). And what «onestà» means for women is explained a paragraph later by Ottaviano Fregoso who equates «onestà» (honor) with «continenzia» («chastity», II, 91). The same equation is repeated over and over by Giuliano de' Medici while he is fashioning the perfect court lady. «Onestà» has to inform all her actions, and because her role is to entertain «ogni sorte d'omo» («every kind of man», III, 5), she must do so with «ragionamenti grati ed onesti» («agreeable and honest conversation», III, 5) [7]. But she also must be «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, me né anco di suspizione» («more circumspect, and more careful not to give occasion for evil being said of her, and conduct herself so that she not only escapes being sullied by guilt but even by the suspicion of it», III, 4). Eventually she will be allowed to fall in love but, if she is not married, «signor Magnifico» wishes that she «ami uno col quale possa maritarsi» («loves someone whom she can marry», III, 57), and show to him «tutte le demostrazioni d'amore […] eccetto quelle che potessero indur nell'animo dell'amante speranza di conseguir da lei cosa alcuna disonesta» («every sign of love […] except such as may give him hope of obtaining something dishonorable from her», III, 57). If she is married, in order to protect «quella fama d'onestà che tanto le importa» («that reputation for chastity, which is so important to her», III, 56), she must give him nothing more than «l'animo» («a spiritual love», III, 56). But such a chaste court lady does not seem to exist because, as «signor Magnifico» states at the beginning of his endeavor, he would not know «da chi pigliarne l'esempio» («where to find a model for her», III, 4).

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del XVI secolo, a cura di Marina Zancan (Venezia: Marsilio, 1983), 13-56. Also Valeria Finucci, «La donna di corte: discorso istituzionale e realtà ne *Il libro del cortegiano* di B. Castiglione», *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 88-103.

[7] The translation is mine. Singleton translates the noun «onestà» and the adjective «onesti» with «comeliness» and «comely», and in doing so he divests the term of its moral meaning so strongly emphasized by Castiglione's characters. For an analysis of the term «onesta» in Castiglione and Aretino, see Larivaille in *La catégorie de l'honneste*, 42-50, and for the ambiguity of the term «onestà» in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, see Giulio Ferroni, *Le voci dell'istrione. Pietro Aretino e la dissoluzione del teatro* (Napoli: Liguori, 1977), 163-164.

Such an abstract concept of 'honest courtesan' takes us back to Aretino's «signora Zaffetta», her «mascara dell'onestade» («mask of decency», 56, 120), and «arte cortigiana» (courtly ways or ways of being a courtesan). Step by step Angela's skills match the court lady's virtues. She does not betray or make men jealous, she is not a liar or a slanderer, not envious or suspicious. She is modest, wise and discreet and she possesses a gentle beauty. We could say that by wearing her mask she could enter any court or aristocratic circle. But behind her mask of decency Angela is neither noble nor chaste, therefore she lacks two of the ideal court lady's major requirements. That could make her the target of slander by male courtiers who believe, as the misogynist Cesare Gonzaga states, that slandering a woman is «una sorte di cortegianìa» («a kind of Courtiership», III, 42). But Gonzaga's statement is not supported by Castiglione, who believes that «cortegianìa» must not include any dishonest and dishonorable act. The opposite is true of Aretino's «arte cortigiana», which includes all of those wrong acts. In fact Lady Angela's greatness lies in her ability to successfully disguise them, and she achieves her goal by keeping her «mascara dell'onestade» or what «signor Magnifico» calls «una certa mediocrità difficile e quasi composta di cose contrarie» («a certain mean, difficult to achieve and, as it were, composed of contraries», III, 5). After all, any ideal, model or «certa mediocrità» is nothing else but a way to mask reality, and Castiglione's idealism is counterbalanced by Aretino's realistic irony and egocentrism. Angela Zaffetta herself is praised only to validate Aretino's choice. In fact, he ends his letter by stating, «perciò mi son dato a vostra signoria, parendomi che quella ne sia degna» (I, 293, 17) («and so I give myself to your ladyship, feeling that your ladyship is worthy [of me]», 56, 122) [8].

Nonetheless, Angela is a lady and the best of all courtesans, and she holds in contempt «quelle che studiano i punti de la Nanna e de la Pippa» (I, 293, 9) [9] («all those who study the devices of Nanna and of Pippa», 56, 121) [10]. But who are Nanna and Pippa? Here in the letter we could consider them just a hyper-textual link, which allows us to enter Aretino's masterpiece, the *Ragionamenti*. Nanna, who is the narrator in five of the six

[8] The addition in brackets is mine. It translates the partitive pronoun «ne» (of it), which draws attention to Aretino's egocentrism.

[9] All quotations are from Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamenti sei giornate*, a cura di Romualdo Marrone (Roma: Newton Compton, 1993).

[10] Unless otherwise stated all translations are from Pietro Aretino, *Dialogues*, transl. by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Marsilio, 1994).

days in which the book is divided [11], describes herself as «la più scellerata e ribalda puttana di Roma, anzi d'Italia, anzi del mondo, con il far male, con il dir peggio, assassinando gli amici e i nimici e i benvoglienti a la spiegata» (141) (the wickedest and lewdest whore in all Rome – nay in all Italy and the world – doing evil, saying worse, assassinating wholesale friends and foes and just everyday well-wishers, 222). But what moves Nanna to tell her story is the need to decide about her daughter Pippa's future. Should she make her a nun, marry her off, or set her up as a courtesan? Initial suggestions are that by making her into a courtesan («cortigiana») Nanna will also be making her a lady («signora», 20). At the end of the third day, Nanna's interlocutor, Antonia, gives her the following advice about Pippa's future:

> *Il mio parere è che tu faccia la tua Pippa puttana: perché la monica tradisce il suo consagramento, e la maritata assassina il santo matrimonio; ma la puttana non la attacca né al monistero né al marito: anzi fa come un soldato che è pagato per far male, e facendolo non si tiene che lo faccia, perché la sua bottega vende quello che ella ha a vendere […] Oltra di questo, è bella cosa a essere chiamata signora fino dai signori, mangiando e vestendo sempre da signora, stando continuamente in feste e nozze.* (102)
>
> My opinion is that you should make a whore of your Pippa. The nun betrays her sacred vows and the married woman murders the holy bond of matrimony, but the whore violates neither the monastery nor her husband; indeed she acts like a soldier who is paid to do evil, and when doing it, she doesn't realize that she is, for her shop sells what it has to sell […] Beyond all this, it is a fine thing to be called a lady, even by gentlemen, eating and dressing always like a lady, and continually attending banquets and wedding feasts. (158)

If we compare the terms Nanna uses in her initial dilemma: nun, wife and courtesan, with the ones used by Antonia in her final suggestion: nun, wife and whore, we can conclude that Aretino uses the terms courtesan and whore as synonyms, and he does so not only at the dialogical level but also in the rubrics. In fact, Nanna, who defines herself a past and present courtesan, in the rubric of the third day of the *Ragionamento*, tells about «la vita delle puttane» (73) («the life of the whores», 105) and, contrary to the previous two days when she is mostly a spectator in her narration, she

[11] In the first three days, properly called «Ragionamento», Nanna tells her interlocutor, Antonia, the life of the nuns, wives, and whores respectively. In day fourth and fifth of the second three days, properly called «Dialogo», Nanna teaches her daughter Pippa how to become a successful courtesan. In the last day of the «Dialogo» Nanna and Pippa learn how to be a procuress.

is now the protagonist of her stories. But if there is no difference between being a courtesan or a whore, as stated at the beginning and the end of the first three days, also there is no contradiction in being a lady and a courtesan.

The three terms whore, courtesan, and lady [12] reappear in narrative proximity at the beginning of the first day of the *Dialoghi* when, as indicated in the rubric, «Nanna insegna alla sua figliola Pippa l'arte puttanesca» (108) (Nanna teaches her daughter Pippa the art of being a whore, 165). In the first few lines of this new day Pippa is angry at her mother because she does not want to teach her how to become a «cortigiana». Nanna is hesitant because «oggidì è tanta la copia de le puttane, che chi non fa miracoli col saperci vivere non accozza mai la cena con la merenda» (108) (nowadays whores come in hordes, and a girl who can't perform miracles of wise living will never rub a supper against a lunch, 165). But Pippa is ready to carefully listen to her mother's advise if she is going to make her a «signora», and Nanna promises that she will become a lady «più ne lo avere che nel nome» (146) (in fact if not in name, 231). This expression is the conclusion of a paragraph in which Nanna syntactically links the terms whore, courtesan and lady, while she gives Pippa a lesson in Machiavellian pragmatism.

> *E ancora che non ti andassi a gusto né quel né questo, sforza la natura: e specchiati in uno infermo il qual piglia la medicina contra stomaco per guarire del male: come guarirai tu, non del povero, che, senza essere altrimenti puttana, sei ricca, ma de la cortigiana, diventando signora più ne lo avere che nel nome.* (146)
>
> Even if this or that man doesn't please you, make an effort and force your nature: take as your model the sick man who gulps down disgusting medicine to cure his illness. So you will also be cured, not of poverty – since you are rich even without being a whore – but of whoredom by becoming a lady, which you shall be in fact if not in name. (230-231)

As Aretino's terms acquire an almost interchangeable meaning, following her mother's advice, Pippa will become a factual lady, not just a nominal one, if she is available to any man. If she «trita il favore minutissimamente» (146) (slices up [her] favors minutely, 230) «l'arti de la [sua] grazia la fregharanno a otto goccioloni in un tratto» (146) (her grace's skills will swin-

[12] In a list of approximately 190 prostitutes («pubbliche meretrici») condemned by the Venetian *Magistrato delle Pompe* between 1579 and 1617, 48 are addressed as «Signora», 39 as «Donna», 34 as «Cortesana», 2 as «Signora» or «Donna» alternately in the same text, 2 as both «Signora» and «Cortesana». In Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 19-25.

dle eight dolts at the same time, 230) [13]. But to achieve that, Pippa has to be «tanto puttana in letto quanto donna da bene altrove» (113) («as great a whore in bed as a respectable lady elsewhere», 175). As Angela Zaffetta a few years later, Pippa must wear the mask of honesty over the face of lust and, like Angela and Castiglione's court lady, she has to achieve a level of «mediocrità», or, as Nanna phrases it, «la via del mezzo» (148) («the middle way», 234). At public gatherings, Pippa, like the court lady, has to show herself a stranger to all boorishness («si mostri aliena ad ogni grosseria», III, 5) or, as Nanna puts it, should not behave «puttanescamente» (whorishly). On the contrary, she has to prove to be «signorile» (ladylike) in all her acts if she wants to «[acquistar] fama de la più valente e de la più graziosa cortigiana che viva» (111) («to become famous as the most talented and gracious courtesan», 171). Once again the three terms, whore, lady, and courtesan are in close juxtaposition, but this time the courtesan is praised. And in a previous statement Nanna suggests to her daughter the cure for being a courtesan (146). She reiterates that by following her advice, Pippa will be adored «per la più ricca e per la più savia cortigiana che fosse mai» (144) («as the richest and wisest courtesan that ever was», 228) [14]. Aretino's ambiguous use of these ambivalent terms is once again evident in Nanna's suggestion to Pippa, who is learning «l'arte puttanesca», not to go down «la via de le puttane che il non osservar la fede è la lor fede» (140) («the whore's highway [because] their idea of loyalty is to never be loyal», 220). Such a statement links us back to Zaffetta's letter where Aretino praises Angela because she also does not follow «la via delle puttane». In fact, she does not lie, envy, slander or betray all actions, which are «il quinto elemento de le cortigiane» (quintessential to the courtesan's nature, I, 293, 15) [15]. But, ambiguously enough, Aretino praises Angela also because, as I quoted before, she holds in contempt «quelle che studiano i punti de la Nanna e da la Pippa» (I, 293, 8-9) («those women who study the devices of Nanna and Pippa», 56, 121). In a footnote to Aretino's *Lettere* Francesco Erspamer interprets this ambiguous statement as referring to «quelle che imparano il mestiere della cortigiana sui libri» (those women

[13] The translation is mine. Rosenthal translates the verb «fregare» literally, as 'to rub', instead of figuratively as 'to swindle'. «So, eight dolts will be rubbing against the graces of your art all at the same time», *ivi*, 230.

[14] The translation is mine. Rosenthal translates «cortigiana» as «whore», and although here it does not seem to be the closest translation, he indirectly applies Aretino's amphibology of terms.

[15] The translation is mine. Once again Chubb translates «cortigiana» with «harlot», morally down-playing Aretino's linguistic ambiguity.

who learn the courtesan's profession in books) [16]. I instead suggest that this phrase refers to Angela's lack of concern for the amount of time spent in applying her «arte cortigiana» («né vi curate […] di tenere in lungo», I, 293, 8), in opposition to one of Nanna's counsels, this time to Antonia, that «non c'è maggior monte di quello che si fa col poco e spesso» (79) (there is no higher mountain than the one that's built up with what is made little by little and often, 117). But once again Aretino equates Nanna's advice to Pippa «[di] accarezzare i vertuosi che il più delle volte si ritrovano a le tavole dei signori» (119) ([to caress the virtuous] one often finds dining at the tables of noblemen, 184) [17], to Angela's behavior, as she «acarezza le vertù e onora i vertuosi» (I, 293, 16) (caress[es] virtue and adores the virtuous, 56, 122). Ultimately Angela like Nanna is a «signora», and a lustful one, whose superb social skills make her appear as an honest/chaste lady, while her wisdom and discretion give her both material wealth and praise («procacciandovi per via de la saviezza e de la discrezione robba e laude», I, 293, 2). Through the attributes given to Angela, and to the characters Nanna and Pippa, Aretino praises the amphibological nature of the courtesan, who must have no social or moral bias or boundaries in order to achieve her goal of being a nominal and factual «signora».

Aretino's ambiguous ambivalence of terms is shown also in another inter-textual link, this time between the *Dialoghi* and the comedy *Talanta*, published in 1542. When in the *Dialoghi* Nanna advises Pippa to keep her promises, she also presents the case in which her daughter may not be able to do so, and she suggests:

> *Se venisse il francioso che ti ho detto […] chiama colui che dee venir la sera, e digli: «Io vi ho promessa questa notte, ed è vostra, perché io sono vostrissima; ma io potrei guadagnare con esse una buona mancia: sì che prestatemela, che ve ne renderò cento per una. Un monsignor di Francia la vuole, e giene darò se vi piace; e se non vi piace eccomi al comando di vostra Signoria». Egli, vedendosi stimare, per donarti come savio quello che non ti può vendere, chinandosi al tuo utile, oltra che ti fa la grazia, te ne resta schiavo.* (140)
>
> If the Frenchman I mentioned happens along […] summon the man who has to come in the evening and say: «I promised you the night, and it is yours, because I am completely yours. But if I had this night to myself, I could earn a nice bit of change. If you loan it to me, I will give you back a hundred nights for this one. A gentleman from France wants it. If you agree I will give it to him; and if you don't here I am at Your Highness's orders».

[16] Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. I, 293, f.n. 8. The translation is mine.

[17] The parenthesis is mine, to underline the similarity of terms in the two texts. Rosenthal translates: 'play up to the scholars'.

> When he sees that he is highly regarded if he wisely grants you what he could not sell you, he will give away for your sake, not only doing you that favor but also becoming your slave. (221)

In the same situation is the courtesan Talanta, who asks her suitor Orfinio the gift of three days to please two older gentlemen, messer Tinca and messer Vergolo. In exchange she will receive from them a female slave and a male Saracen. But contrary to Pippa's wise suitor, Orfinio is angered by Talanta's request and the remainder of Act I, Scene XIII is a quarrel in which Talanta displays all her «arte cortigiana». At the end Orfinio reluctantly accepts her request while Talanta has her wish granted, plus a gold necklace as a gift. But, according to what some scholars define as Aretino's progressive conformity to social and moral standards [18], Talanta is ultimately marginalized and, at the same time, socially framed. She loses her independent persona and accepts to be paired with Orfinio because by marrying him she is free from blame, sin, and the obligation to open and close her eyes according to someone else's whim («uscire in un colpo di biasimo e di peccato, liberandosi dal tuttavia essere obligata at aprire et a serrar gli occhi a posta d'altri», V, 13) [19]. The courtesan's freedom to choose and act has become a constrained and sinful lifestyle [20]. But the ambiguous juxtaposition of the terms whore, courtesan and lady still remains. Even the humble maidservant Stellina, who refers to Talanta as «la signora», feels entitled to say, if one will excuse her saying so («con reverenzia parlando», III, 1), that Talanta, like all the other whores, is so greedy that she would do anything for a little gift («le puttane […] sono sì scarse, che per ogni favoluzza faria la moneta falsa», III, 1).

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[18] According to Giulio Ferroni Aretino went «dalla testarda irregolarità e insoddisfazione sociale […] ad una accettazione dell'ordine e delle regole della convivenza sociale, alla deferenza totale verso la morale e l'ideologia 'pubblica'» (from a stubborn irregularity and social dissatisfaction […] to the acceptance of the order and rules of social living, and a total deference toward social morality and 'public' ideology), *Le voci*, 220. The translation is mine. For Aretino's progressive conformism also, see Marga Cottino Jones, *Introduzione a Pietro Aretino* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), 135; and Paul Larivaille, «Pietro Aretino tra infrazione e censura», in *Pietro Aretino nel cinquecentenario della nascita* (Roma: Salerno, 1995, voll. I-II), vol. I, 20-21.

[19] All quotations are from Pietro Aretino, *Tutte le commedie*, a cura di Giovanni Battista De Sanctis (Milano: Mursia, 1968). All translations are mine.

[20] According to Ferroni Talanta becomes an honest courtesan («una cortigiana onesta», *Le voci*, 219) who will respect all the rules imposed on her by the outside society. Like Aretino her character will evolve from an unscrupulous maker of her own destiny to a passive receiver of social standards (*ivi*, 220).

When Salvatore Battaglia quotes a passage from one of Matteo Bandello's short stories, as I mentioned in section one, he fails to express Bandello's own ambiguity in the use of the term courtesan. Bandello uses a variety of terms to identify a woman who sells her sexual favors. She can be a «meretrice» (I, 19; IV, 16 [17]), «pubblica meretrice» (I, 19; II, 51; IV, 16 [17]) «cortegiana» (I, 19, 50; II, 51; III, 31, 42) «cortegiana da partito» (III, 31), «putta» (I, 19) o «puttana» (II, 51; III, 31), and «barbiera» (II, 51; III, 31). The use of the adjective or other explanatory terms as in «pubblica meretrice» or «cortigiana da partito» is only to reinforce the meaning of the noun. The term «barbiera» (female barber) makes reference to the appropriation of someone's wealth by way of figuratively shearing him. Some of these terms are often used to identify the same woman or group of women as in I, 19, and III, 31. In the introduction to II, 51, Matteo Bandello, while addressing his nephew, Gian Michele Bandello, introduces the term, honesty, and writes: «parlerò delle cortigiane che, per dare qualche titolo d'onestà a l'essercizio loro, s'hanno usurpato questo nome di 'cortegiane'» (I will speak about the courtesans who, in order to give an appearance of honesty to their trade, they have seized the name of 'courtesan', 45) [21]. Again in III, 31, while describing life in Venice, Bandello states: «Ci è un infinito numero di puttane, che eglino, come anco si fa a Roma e altrove, chiamano con onesto vocabolo 'cortegiane'» (There is an infinite number of whores, whom they [the Venetians], like the Romans and other people, call with the honest term of 'courtesans', 322). Interestingly Bandello seems to follow Johann Burchard's definition of the courtesan («meretrix honestae», «cortegiana noncupata»), as a prostitute who, in order to better her status and add some honesty to it, calls herself 'a courtesan'. Thus the term itself includes the quality of 'honesty'. But also because Bandello is a clergyman it is difficult to believe his use of the term honesty to be exclusively social and void of moral implications.

[21] All references are from Matteo Bandello, *Le novelle*, a cura di Gioachino Brognoligo (Bari: Laterza, 1910-1912, voll. I-IV). Because Brognolino's edition in four volumes does not match Bandello's divisions in four parts of his collection of stories, the following is the list of all the quoted stories following Bandello's (Roman numbers) and Brignolino's (Arabic numbers) divisions: I, 19, vol. I, 238, 241-242, 245, 252; I, 50, vol. I, 222; II, 51, vol. IV, 46-48; III, 31, vol. IV, 321-322; III, 42, vol. IV, 380; IV, 16 [17], vol. V, 220-221. All translations are mine.

3.
IMAGES

This pervasive and persistent ambiguity, which we find in Renaissance documents and literary texts, is also present in the visual arts and their current scholarly interpretations. I am going to use two examples, which parallel the literary analysis done so far. In the first example, XVI century printmakers try to frame the courtesan phenomenon just as Castiglione and Aretino did in their literary works a few decades earlier, while, with an interesting juxtaposition to the XVI century framing, XVIII century paintings of Venetian «ridotti» [1] show women defying once again a 1690 decree of the Venetian senate to identify prostitutes. In the second example current art historians analyze famous Renaissance paintings of women with the same diachronic and framing perspective Salvatore Battaglia, and Manlio Cortelazzo and Paolo Zolli use in their dictionaries for a twentieth-century definition of the term 'courtesan'.

In Jean Jacques Boissard's *Habitus variarum orbis gentium*, published in 1581, the Dutch engraver Julius Goltzius produced two plates which clearly include Venetian courtesans. In one plate the courtesan wears a carnival mask and is sided by two theatrical characters: the mask of the «Magnificus» master and the one of the «Zani», the servant. The other plate represents three sumptuously dressed women, whose place in society can only be identified by the rubric placed under the image: newlywed,

[1] The term «ridotto» (plural: «ridotti») comes from the Italian word «ridurre», meaning to 'close off' or 'make private'. It originally referred to several illegal, privately owned gambling clubs that offered games of chance to members of Venice's nobility in the city's Rialto District. These clubs came into being after the Venetian authorities attempted to ban games of chance that had spontaneously sprung up in the city's streets. Realizing it could not effectively prevent citizens from wagering on dice and card games, the Great Council of Venice opened its «ridotto» in 1638 on the occasion of the city's annual Spring Carnival. Web, January 14, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridotto.

matron, and courtesan (*fig. 1*) [2]. The visual ambiguity of Julius' second plate is also present in a 1584 engraving by Hendrik Goltzius, Julius' father, after the Dutch artist Dirck Barendsz (a.k.a. Theodorus Bernardus Amsterodamus), titled «The Venetian Wedding» (*fig. 2*). According to the Minneapolis Institute of Art's online description «a plausible interpretation proposes that the scene depicts the wedding of the daughter of the Venetian painter Titian in 1555» [3]. But beyond any plausible interpretation of Hendrik's' engraving, its theme takes us back to the words of Marin Sanudo and the use that Stanley Chojnacki makes of them. The engraving does not only show an intense social activity between patrician men and women, but also the same visual amphibology of Julius' engraving. All the women who are crowding the palazzo's salon are sumptuously dressed, wear many jewels, and sport a very low neckline. Should we assume that none of them is a courtesan? In doing so we would subjectively limit the objective multiple meaning of the image itself. There is in fact one woman in the engraving that can be distinguished from the others. She is the newlywed, and contrary to the «newlywed» in Julius' engraving, her hair is long and loose over her shoulder.

The same iconography is used by Cesare Vecellio, a distant relative of Titian, in his *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo*, published in 1590. He identifies the image of a richly dressed woman as representative of «Spose fuor di casa dopo che sono sposate» (Newlyweds outside their home after they are married, I, 103) (*fig. 3*), then he describes her clothes as being white and adorned with pearls, gold, and jewels of great value, while her hair hangs over her shoulders, with gold threads in it [4]. As in Hendrick Goltzius also in Vecellio this different hairstyle is the only identification of the woman's social status. Like Julius and Hendrick Goltzius, Vecellio

[2] Other women in Boissard's *Habitus* are identified as prostitutes by using a variety of terms, whose multiplicity and ambiguity of meaning is increased by Boissard's use in its rubrics of three languages in a non-consistent pattern. All rubrics are in Latin, most of them also in French, and often in German. Therefore Latin «prostibula» (prostitute) is known in Venice, as «amica» (female companion) (plate 31), but as «courtesanam» (courtesan) in Rome (plate 33). While «amica» translates the French «courtesane» (plate 35) as well as «aulicum scortum» both in Rome (plate 7) and in Padua (plate 10).

[3] The quotation is at: Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Web, January 14, 2014, http://www.artsmia.org/viewer/detail.php?keyword=engraving&v=4&id=7954&n=1&t=554.

[4] «Di veste […] bianche, ornate però di perle, d'oro et di gioie di gran valore. I capelli pendono giù per le spalle con alcuni fili d'oro», Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859, voll. I-II), vol. I, 103. All translations from Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti* are mine.

also struggles with the inherent amphibology of his own representation of women and their clothes, and uses words to exorcise it. But in doing so he underlines their amphibology even more. In the rubric's description «Delle gentildonne venetiane et altre, per casa et fuori di casa, la vernata» (Venetian gentlewomen in and outside the house, during winter, I, 118) (*fig. 4*) Vecellio states that, when in the house, courtesans («cortegiane») more than gentlewomen («donne di una certa condizione»), are clean and well adorned («polite et ben addobbate»), but they are easily recognizable when they proudly walk showing not only their made-up faces but also most of their whitened and painted breast («si mostrano assai baldanzose nel far mostra non solo del volto, ma di gran parte del petto imbiancato e dipinto») [5].

Courtesans seem now identifiable, but again, in «Delle cortigiane e meretrici romane moderne» (Modern roman courtesans and prostitutes, I, 32) (*fig. 5*) Vecellio reaffirms their ambiguity when he writes that they are so well dressed that only few people can recognize them from the noble women of that city («vanno tanto bene all'ordine di vestiti, che da pochi sono conosciute dalle nobili donne di quella città»). The same happens in Naples where the dress of noble Neapolitan damsels is also worn by plebeian women and prostitutes («questo abito è usato non solo dalle nobili, ma anche dalle plebee et dalle meretrici», I, 222) (*fig. 6*). Again in Venice, in order to acquire esteem by means of a feigned honesty («acquistar credito [6] col mezzo della finta onestà»), courtesans, prostitutes, and mercenarie women («cortigiane, meretrici e donne da partito») sometimes wear, not only the dress of damsels and widows, but also of married women, including their wedding ring. And if courtesans just like many other women wear valuable furs during the winter, as described under the rubric: «Alcune donne, la vernata, et massime cortigiane» (Some women, and most of all the courtesans during winter, I, 117) (*fig. 7*), their sumptuary amphibology, once recognized, must also be rejected.

In «Cortigiane fuor di casa» (Courtesans outside their home) Vecellio shows his social anxiety when he writes that prostitutes, who disguise themselves as honest women, cannot do it for long because nobody would see them if they always remained closed and covered in the cape they wear,

[5] Here Vecellio's description echos the words Pietro Casola used more than a century earlier (1494), describing Venetian women. Such continuity in women's body language and care is a clear indication of their defiance toward contemporary sumptuary rules and moral dictates.

[6] Consonant to the amphibological role of courtesans even the use of the Italian word, «credito», has both moral and material implications.

therefore sometimes they are forced to reveal themselves, and that is why it is impossible not to recognize them by their gestures («di maniera che, non potendo star sempre serrate et coperte con la cappa che portano, et non potendo d'altra parte essere vedute, sono finalmente sforzate scoprirsi alquanto, et è perciò impossibile ch'elle non sieno conosciute à qualche gesto», I, 113) (*fig. 8*).

Around 1610 Giacomo Franco published his *Habiti delle donne venetiane*, which includes 19 engravings and descriptions, mostly of Venetian women [7]. And like Vecellio, Franco uses the written word in the attempt to establish a distinction within an otherwise identical iconography, but in doing so he is not always successful. The amphibological nature of the visual sign seems to impair the logic of the written words. The image of a «Matrona, piena di autorità, la quale sedendo in un bel seggio è in atto di commandar ad altre gli negotii domestici» (Matron, full of authority who is seated on a beautiful chair and is giving domestic orders to her maids, 3) (*fig. 9*) [8], is identical to the following representation of a «Gentildonna che piglia i frutti» (Gentlewoman who takes some fruits, 4) (*fig. 10*). Both women are seated in a regal manner, wear similar sumptuous clothes and jewels, and are interacting with their servants. But the wording in the first image actually emphasizes women's social amphibology as Franco makes contradictory statements. On the one hand in plate 3 he affirms that in Venice there are four kinds of women who almost dress alike («le quali vanno vestite quasi tutte ad un modo»), then he adds that they can be identified by the amount of jewels they wear («la maggior, overo minor, quantità di gioie»). In fact, noblewomen surpass the others for their pearls' high value («sopravanzano le altre con le perle di gran valuta») [9]. Then Franco

[7] For the debate on the date of publication of *Habiti delle donne venetiane*, see the catalogue entry 65 by Wendy Thompson in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Andrea Bayer (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2008), 147-148; and Giacomo Franco's *Habiti delle donne venetiane*, a cura di Lina Urban (Venezia: Centro Internazionale della Grafica di Venezia, 1990), 17-18. Of the book's nineteen engravings, twelve exclusivily illustrate Venetian women of different social status (three of them are identified as courtesans, one in Diana's mythological attire). Two illustrations are of male lovers, one with a mythological reference to Acteon, following the Diana illustration. Three are of a man and a woman as lovers, one couple identified with the epic names of Olimpia and Biremo, from Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. One is a newlywed woman with an older man called «ballerino».

[8] All translations from Giocamo Franco's *Habiti delle donne venetiane* are mine.

[9] According to Franco, pearls are a mean of social distinction not only within the Venetian city and state, but also in relation to foreigners. In fact he writes: «le donne e massime le nobile di questa Città costumano portar tanta quantità e valor di perle per loro ornamento che basterebbono a rendere ornata qualsivoglia Prencipessa straniera»

continues that the «cittadine» embellish themselves like the «gentildonne» («vanno ornate al pari delle gentildonne»), that merchants' wives dress so pompously that are hardly inferior to the others («poco si mostrano inferiori alle altre») (*fig. 11*), and also craftsmen's wives are so sumptuous and wear so many jewels and pearls that they can be compared to foreign «gentildonne» («non meno si ornano delle ricche gentildonne forestiere»). Besides these four categories («gentildonne, cittadine, mercantesse e artiste»), Franco explains, «vi sono ancora le Cortegiane, o vogliamo dir meretrici di qualche ricchezza; le quali si vestono superbissimamente come lor pare» (there are also the courtesans, or we should say prostitutes of some wealth, who dress as sumptuosly as they please, 11) (*fig. 12*).

But if we compare the courtesan with the merchant's wife or the gentlewoman, we find no iconographic differences and, although the explanatory texts attempt to establish some, the use of the different terms is quite ambiguous just as in Castiglione, Aretino, or Bandello. For Franco «this most lustful woman» is sometimes a courtesan, a meretrix, a dishonest lady («signora disonesta»), as in «Cortegiana vestita da inverno» (Courtesan in Winter Clothing, 12) (*fig. 13*), or just a lady («una signora») who dresses elegantly in different ways to please those who gaze upon her («vestir vagamente, per rendersi in diverse maniere grata a chi la mira»), as in «Cortegiana vestita a la foresta» (Courtesan dressed in foreign clothes, 14) (*fig. 14*) [10]. In all the engravers mentioned above, ambiguity of meaning also permeates the symbols surronding women. For instance in Franco's «Cortegiana famosa» mentioned above the courtesan, or renowned prostitute, usually keeps little French pet dogs and in being lustful is above any other woman («[la] cortegiana, o meretrice famosa […] suol tenere cagnolini di razza francese, e nella lascivia superar qualsivoglia altra donna»). A similar small dog, now begging at her feet, and not held on her lap, is in Vecellio's «Alcune donne la vernata e massime cortigiane» (Some women, and most of all courtesans in wintertime, I, 117) (*fig. 7*). Both the iconographies of

(the women, and most of all the gentlewomen, of this town used to wear such a number of valuable pearls as would be sufficient to adorn any foreign princess). *Ivi*, plate 6.

[10] Franco's ambiguity in representing Venetian women has an intra-textual nature. On this topic Wendy Thompson writes (in *Art and Love*, 147): «The interchangeability of courtesan and respectful Venetians is evident from 1614 edition of Franco's *Habiti d'huomeni et donne venetiane* […] Here the dress of the woman playing the harpsichord, identified in the 1609/10 edition as that of the 'cortegiane principale' is represented as characteristic of the 'donne venetiane', and the word 'courtesans' has also been replaced by 'women' in the place showing how Venetians arrange their hair». The different wording in the two editions can be read as an example of amphibology of words and social status, or of editorial moral censorship applied in the later edition, or both.

being held on her bosom and begging at her feet have strong erotic connotations, which are somewhat muted when we look at Franco's «Innamorato con la ninfa» (Lover with his Nymph, 18) (*fig. 15*). Here a larger dog lies at the two lovers' feet in what can be read as a traditional symbol of faithfulness. In the same position is the dog at the center of Hendrik Goltzius' «The Venetian Wedding» in front of the groom and bride. Again the dog is read as a symbol for matrimonial union and fidelity. But in Franco's text the woman in the image can be a mythological nymph («ninfa») symbol of virginity and often object of male sexual desire, or a «signora», which can refer also to wife, or «dama», meaning the lover's lady. Her lover, seated next to her, plucks the cords of a lute (another possible *double entendre* for sexual intercourse) while she is gently embracing him, as they look into each other's eyes. In this *locus amoenus* surrounded by luscious vegetation, both humans and animals transform the dichotomy of fidelity versus desire, into faithfulness in desire, or in what Aretino claimed, as we will see in more detail later in this text, as the natural expression of human desire [11].

In 1690 the Venetian *Provveditori alle Pompe* required any sort of prostitutes to wear a mask when in theaters, and «ridotti» [12]. In the second half of the XVIII century the Venetian artist Pietro Longhi painted several scenes of social interaction in theatrical foyers. All patrons in the «ridotto» wear one of two kind of masks: the traditional white mask, called «bauta», worn by both men and women, and a black mask, called «moretta», only worn by women of a lower social rank. Interesting enough in two of his «ridotto» scenes Longhi represents women who are not wearing but hold-

[11] For the symbolism of the dog in western art, see Lucia Impelluso, *Nature and Its Symbols*, transl. by Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 203-211. Also, as Franco makes reference to the courtesan's lascivious French pet-dog, Dutch and French painters like Frans van Mieris (1635-1681) and Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) introduce canine pets in erotically charged scenes like Mieris' «Brothel Scene» or «Teasing the Pet», or Fragonard's «La Gimblette», where a naked young woman erotically plays with her furry pet. Interestingly enough this image was used by a XIX century English company as a decoration for a candy box. The images can be found in *Frans van Mieris, 1635-1681*, ed. by Quentin Buvelot (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders Publishers, 2005), 126-128, 144-145; and *L'opera completa di Honoré Fragonard*, a cura di Gabriele Mendel (Milano: Rizzoli, 1972) 99 (scheda 298).

[12] The Venetian *Provveditori* forbade all prostitutes «di comparire nei teatri di opera, comedie, et ridotto senza maschera sopra la faccia, e vestite conforme le gentildonne, ma debbono sempre tener la maschera sopra la faccia» (to appear at Opera theaters, comedies, and in casinos without a mask over their face, dressed like noble women, and [ordered that] they must wear the mask at all times), Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 167. The translation is mine.

ing their masks in their hands, while interacting with other patrons. In a «ridotto», now at the *Fondazione Querini Stampalia* in Venice (*fig. 16*) an elegant unmasked lady holding a fan in her hands entertains a masked gentleman. Her white mask may be glimpsed over her tricorn hat. But in an almost identical painting at the *Accademia Carrara* in Bergamo (*fig. 17*), the same lady is now wearing the traditional «bauta».

In a painting by a follower of Longhi, at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, titled «Bal Masque» (*fig. 18*), a lady holding a «moretta» in her hand is talking to a lady wearing her «bauta». Furthermore, in a print by the French engraver Jean Jacques Flipart, after Pietro Longhi, also at the Fine Arts Museum (*fig. 19*), a lady has removed her «bauta», now held over her hat, as in *fig. 16*, and is speaking to an unmasked gentleman. Two other women, at each side of the lady, wear the «moretta», and respectively interact with a masked man. But the one on the right has removed her «moretta» probably to speak, as the «moretta» had no strings and was held in place by a nob held in the wearer's mouth, or to show her facial features. A very interesting rubric below the image, reads: «Di degno cavalier tenera moglie / Dama che a nobil sangue ugual ha il core / Vede lo sposo suo lieta l'accoglie / Ringrazia il fato e benedice Amore» (The tender wife of a worthy gentleman / A lady whose nobil heart equals her nobil blood / Sees her husband and gladly receives him / Praises her lot and blesses Love) [13]. This «ridotto» scene has now been transformed into a celebration of marital bliss [14]. In looking at all these variations on the same theme one cannot help but wonder about the social role of all these masked women [15]. Can they all be labeled prostitutes and courtesans of any social status («mere-

[13] The translation is mine.

[14] Both works at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco are titled or identified as a «Masked Ball». Actually the Venetian «ridotto» was a private space often in a noble palace where men and women would gather, often after a theatrical performance, till the early hours of the morning. Gambling, amorous encounters, cultural conversations, and musical and theatrical entertainments would all be part of life in a «ridotto». Actual masked balls would be only one of the many events happening in a «ridotto» and the wearing of masks was not necessarily related to an actual ball's theme, but to the Venetian custom of wearing masks as a source of anonymity while in public spaces. For this research is quite interesting that one of the most famous of such «ridotti», which today is the headquarters of the Alliance Française, was the Casino Venier, run by Elena Priuli, wife of the counselor Federico Venier in the first half of the XVIII century. Two centuries before Veronica Franco belonged to the same family's literary circle and salon.

[15] Some of the women wearing a moretta, as a sign of their lower social status, are also holding a distaff and spindle. They present themselves as weavers as the Italian word for weaving «filare» has also the colloquial meaning of 'flirting'.

trice over Cortesana sia di che conditione esser si voglia») [16] as the Venetian *Provveditori* had done for almost two centuries? And the elegant ladies in these «ridotti», whose mask is removed, are they gentlewomen, therefore allowed to do so, or courtesans? But what about the more modestly dressed women wearing the «moretta», who sometimes remove their mask in order to talk? Can they be called prostitutes, courtesans, or ladies? Are some of these women breaking the law and others not? And where can we draw the line? I believe the difficulty in giving a definite answer to all of these queries and drawing such a line is inherent in the amphibological nature of these images and the women they represent.

Giacomo Franco, Cesare Vecellio, Julius Goltzius, and Pietro Longhi are referenced in the 1990 exhibition titled: *Il gioco dell'amore. Le cortigiane di Venezia dal Trecento al Settecento* (*The Game of Love: Venetian Courtesans from the 1300s to the 1700s*). The exhibition's catalogue contains the article «Iconografia delle cortigiane di Venezia» by art historian Filippo Pedrocco. Pedrocco, as member of the exhibition's Scientific Committee, is also the editor of the catalogue entries referring to paintings. In the attempt to identify the women portrayed in various Renaissance paintings as courtesans, and therefore justify their inclusion in the exhibition, Pedrocco adopts two iconographic parameters: one, the yellow scarf or dress the Venetian senate had ordered the courtesan to wear as a sign of her profession; two, the partially uncovered breast which Pedrocco defines as probably the more important sign («forse il più importante», 82) [17] of identification.

Among the paintings including a yellow garment, Pedrocco mentions Titian's «Portrait of Laura de' Dianti» (*fig. 20*). In 1519, Laura, daughter of a hat maker of Ferrara, became the mistress of Duke Alfonso d'Este after the death of his second wife, Lucrezia Borgia [18]. In the painting, dated circa

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[16] Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 119. This formulaic statement, which aims to contain all the different manifestations of female prostitution, is repeted over and over. Also see *ivi*, 101, 125-126, 136, 148, 151. This repetition is indicative of the *Provveditori*'s failure to control the courtesans' social amphibology.

[17] Filippo Pedrocco, «Iconografia delle cortigiane di Venezia», in *Il gioco dell'amore. Le cortigiane di Venezia dal Trecento al Settecento* (Milano: Berenice Art, 1990), 81-93. All translations of Pedrocco's article are mine.

[18] In «The Topography of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara», *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60, 4 (Dec. 2001): 424, Diane Yvonne Ghirardo writes that Laura de' Dianti «was a concubine just like many others, but the status of her lover exempted her from the punishment inflicted on those of the lower classes, and, indeed, many referred to her as Alfonso's wife. The laws and formal spatial control on the books in Ferrara […] aimed not at upper-class women, or women who acquired upper-class

1523-1525, Laura wears a yellow veil from her left shoulder to her right side. The veil, which is somewhat transparent, covers the low neckline of her untied white chemise. The two elements that should identify Laura as a courtesan are somewhat blurring her status, as she perfectly fits Ettlinger's category of 'princely favorite'. And on this matter Carol Schuler writes:

> Mistress portraits are often included in discussions of courtesans as an aspect of the same genre […] But though both courtesans and mistresses might be linked by their common association with sexual activities their role and status were not identical; while there may be analogies in their pictorial representation, it has never been demonstrated that their social status was identical. [19]

I would add that it is such close proximity and not identity that allows ambiguity and blurring of social status. So if Laura were able to transform herself from the daughter of a hat maker into the mistress of a duke, why would she allow her painter, even if he were the famous Titian, to portray her as a prostitute? Or should we assume that she was so naïve that she was not aware of the meaning of the color yellow, and that Titian used it in an attempt to slander her? Schuler suggests that scholars who are using the color yellow in general, and the yellow veil in particular, to identify portraits of courtesans, as in the case of Laura de' Dianti:

> [r]omanticize the courtesan's life by assuming her pride in her profession and her desire to immortalize it in a portrait. To the contrary, contemporary sources tell us that the courtesans affected all the appearances of wealthy ladies […] [Therefore] if they did not wish to advertise their status in real life, why would they wish or agree to be so depicted in a portrait? Is it not more likely that courtesans wanted to be painted as they wanted to appear, and that, as a consequence, portraits of courtesans look very much like portraits of other wealthy women? [20]

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prerogatives because of their relationships with noble men, but at women from the lower classes».

[19] Carol M. Schuler, «The Courtesan in Art: Historical Fact or Modern Fantasy?», *Women's Studies* 19 (1991): 217. On the ambiguity of the portrait, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, «The Mistress as 'Virtuous': Titian's Portrait of Laura Dianti», in *Titian: Materiality, Likeness, Istoria*, ed. by Joanna Woods-Marsden and David Rosand (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 56-57. For a more general reflection on women's portraiture in the Renaissance, see Elizabeth Cropper, «The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture», in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: Universty of Chicago Press, 1986), 175-190.

[20] *Ivi*, 215.

Another suggestion can be added to Schuler's supporting statement: in the Duchy of the Este yellow was not the color used to identify courtesans as in other Italian states. For example in some areas of the Venetian region as in the city of Padua, prostitutes and procuresses were required to wear a scarf of three «braccia» in length around their neck [21], while in Rome, at the time of Pius V «meretrici e cortigiane» were supposed to wear a white veil over the head and a black gown with a white fabric belt over the rich dress [22].

Sumptuary signs for prostitution were as varied as the political reality of Renaissance Italy. As Diane Owen Hughes writes, in Milan the sign was a cloak of common fustian, whose color – white in the original law of 1412 – was changed to black in the new sumptuary code of 1498 [23]. According to Hughes Florence went even further and made prostitutes not only visible but audible, by attaching bells to their hoods and shawls [24].

In 1421 Venetian public prostitutes and procuresses were required to wear a yellow scarf («faziolum zalum») over their coat [25], while already in Pisa in the XIII century and later in Bologna in the XVI prostitutes had to wind around their heads a band of yellow linen [26]. In the repeatedly frustrated attempt to separate 'meretrix' from 'matron', the sumptuary officers of Siena, Brescia and Ferrara went as far as to allow prostitutes to wear silks, belts, platform shoes, trains on dresses, which were outlawed for honorable women [27].

If yellow was the color often used to identify prostitutes of any sort in different locations and times, it was definitely not the main tool for identification. But yellow was in fact the color adopted by the Tuscan senate to identify the prostitute/courtesan. And, although Pedrocco suggests that during the Cinquecento the most famous courtesans enjoyed a level of respect totally opposite to the one they have now («godevano di una considerazione assolutamente opposta alla nostra», 81), we should not forget that in Florence the famous courtesan and writer, Tullia d'Aragona,

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[21] Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 199.

[22] Vecellio, *Costumes*, vol. I, 31.

[23] «Sumptuary Laws and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy», in *Disputes and Settlements. Laws and Human Relations in the West*, ed. by John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 92.

[24] «Distinguishing Signs: Ear-rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City», *Past and Present* 112 (Aug. 1986): 25.

[25] Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 35.

[26] Hughes, «Distinguishing Signs», 30.

[27] *Ivi*, 30-31.

dedicated her *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* to Duke Cosimo I, to express gratitude for having been exonerated from wearing the recently imposed yellow veil [28].

As for the second parameter, the partially uncovered breast, Pedrocco indicates, among other paintings, Paris Bordone's «Portrait of a Young Woman» (*fig. 21*), which without any doubt («questi dubbi non si pongono», 82) represents a courtesan. Pedrocco's affirmation is challenged by Schuler, who raises some valid questions to Julius Held's widely accepted argument that Titian's portrait «Flora», who also sports a very low neckline, refers to a courtesan. Schuler writes:

> Need [these portraits] necessarily represent courtesans at all? Must we assume that women who offer sex [as in the case of these portraits] are automatically courtesans? Must we read the courtesan/Flora tradition so literally? [29]

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[28] «A set of three documents preserved in the Archivio di Stato of Siena shows that Tullia d'Aragona was in that city in 1543, and that in 1544 she was denounced and later excused, for not dressing in the fashion prescribed for courtesans (i.e. the yellow veil) […] when a new sumptuary law was promulgated on 19 October 1546, Tullia was summoned by the (Florentine) authorities for not complying with the regulation obliging courtesans to wear a yellow cover when in public. Benedetto Varchi […] helped Tullia to word the petition to the Duchess Eleonora, which asked for an exemption. The Archivio di Stato of Florence has preserved the documents on which Cosimo penned the notation 'to be exonerated in consideration of her being a poet' together with the deliberation by the *Signori Luogotenenti et Consiglieri*, dated 1 May 1547, granting the exemption on the grounds of Aragona's 'rare knowledge of poetry and philosophy'», from Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. by Rinaldina Russell, transl. by Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 24 and 26. The historical reference is from Salvatore Bongi, «Il velo giallo di Tullia d'Aragona», *Rivista Critica della Letteratura Italiana* 3, 3 (1886): 85-95, in particular 89-90. For a convincing reading of Tullia's *Dialogue* as an innovative and original work in which she questions contemporary philosophical canons by inviting «poetry to enter the arena of philosophy, and to participate in the quest for a true definition of love based on human experience», see Lisa Curtis-Wendlandt, «Conversing on Love: Text and Subtext in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità d'amore*», *Hypatia. A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 19, 4 (Fall 2004): 77-98. For Tullia's original poetic language, see Ann R. Jones, «Enabling Sites and Gender Difference: Reading City Women with Men», *Women's Studies* 19 (1991): 239-249; and for a description of the way in which modern editors have fictionalized the life of courtesans by manipulating the sequence of their poetry, see Ann R. Jones, «Bad Press. Modern Editors versus Early Modern Women Poets (Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Franco)», in *Strong Voices, Weak History. Early Women Writers & Canons in England, France, & Italy*, ed. by Pamela Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 287-313.

[29] Schuler, «The Courtesan in Art», 217. The brackets are mine.

Like Pedrocco, who recognizes the parameter's ambiguity when he states that the naked breast has been interpreted as conjugal love associated with fertility, as well as carnal and mercenary love (82), Held also seems to doubt the parameter's validity. In fact he writes: «Yet it is not always easy to say whether the artist, indeed, intended to cast his model in any such role (the one of Lais, Sabina Poppea, or Flora the Courtesan)» [30]. But again for Pedrocco, Bordon's woman is undoubtedly a courtesan because her almost naked breast is associated with the monkey, symbol of lust, which is held on a little chain, and the roses, symbol of Venus, also held in the cup in the woman's hand.

The breast iconography is important also in another painting mentioned by Pedrocco, «Portrait of a Lady» (*fig. 22*), attributed to Domenico Tintoretto, and identified as a possible portrait of Veronica Franco. The lady, richly dressed, wears a pearl necklace, precious chain, and fashionable two-pointed hairstyle. The scarf around her neck is of a dark color, and nothing indicates her being a courtesan. But for Pedrocco her chain and necklace, forbidden to women by Venetian sumptuary laws, indicate that this lady, like most of the courtesans, is breaking the rule. Also, the chain worn across the breast is found in many representations of Venus (82). Although Pedrocco's sumptuary suggestions seem plausible, I would argue that his syllogism is somewhat untenable. The fact that the portrayed lady is wearing forbidden jewelry, and that most courtesans defied sumptuary laws by wearing forbidden jewels, does not make the portrayed lady a courtesan. Instead I would argue that this portrait is a clear example of social ambiguity. In fact the lady does not wear any color that would identify her as a courtesan. Her low neckline, which shows her left nipple in a discreet and sensuous way, was a common practice among women, Venetian and not, during the Renaissance. The very low neckline and almost naked breast of all Venetian women were often described by visitors to the city.

We have already mentioned the indignant Milanese canon Pietro Casola who, already in 1494, wondered how, sporting such a low neckline, women's clothes did not fall off their shoulders (20, f.n. 27). But again at the beginning of the XVII century two English travellers, Fynes Moryson and Thomas Coryat, write about Venetian women's naked breasts. Coryat,

[30] Julius Held, «Flora, Goddess and Courtesan», in *De artibus opuscola XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. by Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961, voll. I-II), vol. I, 216.

like Casola, also mentions their naked backs [31]. Moryson instead enphasizes the low neckline which now uncovers the nipples [32]. But not only Venetian women like to show their breasts. As early as 1388 Johannes de Mussis from Piacenza wrote about the clothing of his female fellow citizens:

> *Sed habent alia indumenta inhonesta, quae vocantur ciprianae […] quae ciprianae habent gulam tam magnam, quod ostendunt mamillas, et videtur quod dictae mammillae velint exire de sinu earum.* [33]
>
> But they have other dishonest clothing, which are called *ciprianae* […] these 'ciprianae' have such a low neckline, that the breasts are shown. It looks as if the breasts would jump out of the woman's bosom. [34]

Therefore, as shown in the above quotations, naked breasts were a prerogative of all women, and not just prostitutes, in different cities and at different times. In fact the Venetian *Magistrato delle Pompe* mentioned its prohibition only once, in 1562 [35]. But, if already in 1539, the same *Magistrato delle Pompe* states, as I already indicated [36], that prostitutes or courtesans of any social status were not allowed to wear jewels both real and artificial [37], then «Portrait of a Lady» represents a woman, who, by borrowing the words of Aretino's Nanna, could be a rich lady defying the sumptuary laws of her time, or a wealthy courtesan doing the same, or even a prostitute of a lower rank, having rented her jewels and garment for her own portrait [38].

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[31] «Almost all the wives, widowes and mayds do walke abroad with their breastes all naked, and many of them have their backes also naked even almost to the middle», *Coryat's Crudities* (New York: Macmillan, 1905, voll. I-II), vol. I, 399.

[32] «The women of Venice […] shew their naked necks and breasts, and like wise their dugges», *An Itinerary* (Glasgow: James McLehose & Sons, 1907-1908, voll. I-IX), vol. IV, 220.

[33] Mussis' quotation is from Giulio Bistort, *Il Magistrato delle Pompe nella repubblica di Venezia* (Bologna: Forni, 1969), 167.

[34] The translation is mine.

[35] *Ivi*, 168.

[36] See 46, f.n. 16.

[37] In 1543 the Venetian *Provveditori alle Pompe* declared that: «alcuna meretrice in questa terra abitante non possi vestir, ne in alcuna parte de la persona portar oro, arzento et seda […] et etiam l'uso de le zoie di qualunque sorte si in casa como fuora di casa» (any prostitute living in this land cannot wear gold, silver, and silk on any part of her body […] and also [it is forbidden] to wear jewels of any kind, both at home and outside), Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 108. The translation is mine. The same ordinance was repeated in 1563 when the *Provveditori* clearly stated: «zoie di qualunque sorte si bone come false jewels of any kind both real and artficial», *ivi*, 117. The translation is mine.

[38] By the middle of the XVI century the Venetian *Magistrato dei Provveditori alla Salute* had forbidden any rental of clothing to prostitutes of any status. For a list of condemned people, see Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, 280-282; for the importance of the

In one of the catalogue's entries Pedrocco describes another painting of Domenico Tintoretto's (*fig. 23*). Pedrocco states that evidently that is the portrait of a courtesan, because of her sumptuous red damask dress and large number of jewels which only the rich prostitutes used to wear («Evidentemente si tratta del ritratto di una cortigiana, come si deduce dalla suntuosità degli abiti rosso damascati e dalla gran copia di gioielli […] che solo le prostitute ricche portavano», 111). This time in support of his sumptuary interpretation Pedrocco mentions Giacomo Franco's prints and rubrics, which show and describe «cortigiane vestite ed ingioiellate ed anche atteggiate» (courtesans dressed, jeweled and posed) just like the one in Tintoretto's portrait. But the seated posture of Tintoretto's lady brings to mind two of Franco's prints, respectively described as a matron full of authority (*fig. 3*), and a gentlewoman who takes some fruits (*fig. 4*), but not the prints representing courtesans. As words try to contain the ambiguity of images so Venetian sumptuary laws tried to control the image of all women. But the laws had to be periodically reissued because women in general, and not only rich prostitutes, defied them also by implementing the amphibological nature of language.

Two of the many examples of such behavior come respectively from a literary and legal source. At the end of the XIV century Franco Sacchetti writes in his *Trecentonovelle* about a Florentine woman who, when questioned by the authority about wearing buttons forbidden by the law, changes their name from 'button' to 'stud', and gives the authority a lesson on clothing's accessories [39]. Almost a century and a half later, in 1541, a frustrated Senate describes how women have been able to circumvent a previous deliberation of 1533, which allowed only one string of pearls around the neck, by extending the length of the string all the way down to the bottom of their dress [40]. Long is also the list of women's public appeals

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second-hand trade in Venetian economy see, Patricia Allerston, «Reconstructing the Second-Hand Clothes: Trade in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Venice», *Costume* 33 (1999): 46-56.

[39] «Questi non sono bottoni, ma sono coppelle, e se non mi credete, guardate, e non hanno picciuolo, e ancora non c'è niuno occhiello» (These are not buttons but studs, and if you do not believe me, look, they have no loops, and moreover there are no buttonholes), in Hughes, «Sumptuary Law», 69-70 and f.n. 2.

[40] In 1299, the Venetian Senate first legislated against the wearing of pearls. Almost a century and a half later its wording confirms women's defiance of sumptuary laws: «Dandosi sinistra interpretation et execution contraria certamente alla bona intention di ditta parte, se ben ditte done non portano perle in petto, né in testa, quel fil de perle che portano al collo el fano descender in foza de sbara per fino al traverso, ita che cadauna dona vien a portar un excessivo numero di perle […] che […] basteria a due done et più»

to be exempt from the observance of sumptuary laws, deemed as unjust. Among the most eloquent appeals is Nicolosa Sanuti's 1453 treatise in defense of women and their clothes [41].

From the 1990 *Il gioco dell'amore* to the 2009 exhibition *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, Carol Schuler's 1991 statement that «although Renaissance documents provide evidence of paintings of well-known courtesans, no known works can be so identified with any degree of security» and that «in this ambiguous area, where 'high art' […] converges with [a] consummate symbol of potent sensual appeal, personal and historical prejudices have played a major role in scholarly discourse» [42] still holds true. From November 11, 2008, to February 16, 2009 the exhibition *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Among the museum halls, which displayed art commemorating love, betrothal, marriage, and childbirth, a much smaller room, almost secluded from the others, was devoted to art commemorating what the curators in the exhibition's catalogue label as «profane love». The term appears in the title of three of the ten major essays in the catalogue, and in each one of them the author offers either a moral or an aesthetical interpretation of the representation of physical nudity and sexual interaction.

In «Profane Love: The Challenge of Sexuality» James Grantham Turner responds to Pietro Aretino's frank acceptance of sexuality [43], and

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(By giving an inauspicious interpretation and an execution clearly opposed to the good will of this party, the above mentioned women, although they do not wear pearls on their breast or head, they make the string of pearls descend to the bottom of their dress and sometimes even across, thus each woman ends up wearing an excessive number of pearls […] which […] would be sufficient for a couple of women or more), Senatorial decree, May 5th 1541. The translation is mine. For this reference and a general history of the Venetian Senate ruling on women's wearing of pearls, see Bistort, *Il Magistrato*, 184-192, in particular 186. Also see 186, f.n. 4 for the definition of the word «sbara».

[41] Sanuti's treatise is titled «Nicolosae Sanutae matronia bononiensis ad Reverendissimum in Christo patrem dominum d. Legatum bononiensum ut mulieribus ornamentur restituauntur» (Nicolosa Sanuti, Bolognese matron, to the most Reverend Father in Christ, the Bolognese papal legate, that ornaments be restored to women). For a list of appeals which precede Nicolosa Salutati's treatise, and for an in depth introduction, analysis, and translation from Latin of Salutati's treatise see Catherine Kovesi Killerby, «Herald of a Well-instructed Mind: Nicolosa Sanuti's Defence of Women and Their Clothes», *Renaissance Studies* 13, 3 (1999): 255-282.

[42] Schuler, «The Courtesan in Art», 209. The bracket is mine.

[43] Turner quotes from Aretino's letter to Battista Zatti, December 11, 1537, in which the author claims the freedom to write about sexual intercourse: «Dapoi che io ottenni da papa Clemente la libertà di Marcantonio bolognese, il quale era in prigione per aver intagliato in rame i *XV modi ecc.*, mi venne volontà di veder le figure […] e vistele, fui tocco da lo spirito che mosse Giulio Romano a disegnarle. E perché i poeti e gli scultori

its inherent ambiguity [44], by initially stating that «Pietro Aretino's let-

antichi e moderni soglion scrivere e scolpire alcuna volta per trastullo de l'ingegno cose lascive, come nel palazzo Chisio fa fede il satiro di marmo che tenta di violare un fanciullo, ci sciorinai sopra i sonetti che ci veggono ai piedi […] Che male è veder montare un uomo adosso a una donna? Adunque le bestie debbon essere più libere di noi? A me parebbe che il cotale, datoci da la natura per conservazion di se stessa, si dovesse portare al collo come pendente e ne la beretta per medaglia, però che egli è la vena che scaturisce i fiumi delle genti […] onde se gli doverebbe ordinar feste e sacrar vigilie e feste, e non rinchiuderlo in un poco di panno o di seta» (After I obtained from Pope Clement the freedom of Marcantonio of Bologna, who was in prison for having made copper engravings of the *15 ways* [of making love], I felt the wish to see the figures […] and having seen them I was touched by the spirit that moved Giulio Romano to design them. And because poets and sculptors ancient and modern often write and sculpt lascivious things to amuse the mind – as proved by the marble satyr in the Chigi palace trying to violate a boy – I dashed off the sonnets on them that you see below […] What's so bad about a man mounting on top of a *woman*? Should the animals be more free than us? *I believe that what has been given to us by nature for its own preservation, should be worn like a pendant around our neck or on our cap as a medal, because it is the vein from which all folk gush […] thus we should arrange holidays, and dedicate fasts and feasts in its honor, instead of locking it up in a piece of cloth or silk*), in Aretino, *Lettere* (1995), vol. I, 315, 655-656. The translation is by James Grantham Turner, «Profane Love: The Challenge of Sexuality», in *Art and Love*, 178. The translation in italics is mine. In order to reflect Aretino's intention to eliminate social and natural barriers, I translate the term «donna» with 'woman', while Turner uses the term 'lady'.

[44] In a letter to Guidobaldo II della Rovere Duke of Urbino, dated March 1542, Aretino writes about the sexual ambiguity of a *Venus*, painted by Giorgio Vasari after a cartoon by Michelangelo: «Venere, contornata con meravigliosa rotondità di linee: e perché tal dea diffonde le proprietà sue nel desiderio dei due sessi, il prudente uomo [Michelangelo] le ha fatto nel corpo di femina i muscoli di maschio, talché ella è mossa da sentimenti virili e donneschi con elegante vivacità d'artifizio», in Aretino, *Lettere* (1995), vol. II, 14 (Venus, shaped with a wonderful rondure of line and because this goddess infuses her qualities into the desire of those of both sexes, the skillful artist has made her with the body of a woman and the muscles of a man. Thus is she stirred by both masculine and feminine feelings, such is his elegant and lively skill), in Aretino, *Letters*, 181-182. But Aretino's appreciation for sexual ambiguity is not only related to visual art but to life as well. In March 1548, in a letter addressed to «La Zufolina», he writes: «Due volte la mia sorte bona ha mandato la vostra persona in casa mia e d'altri; una vestita da uomo essendo donna, e l'altra vestita da donna essendo uomo. Voi sete uomo ne casi di dietro, e donna nei conti dinanzi […] Certo che la natura vi ha in modo composta in l'*utriusque* sesso, che in uno istante vi dimostrate maschio e in un subito femina; ne per altro volle il Duca Alexandro copularsi insieme con voi, che per chiarirsi s'eravate ermafrodito da senno o da beffe. Ecco il favellar di voi è di donzella, e il proceder vostro di garzone; talché chi non vi conosce per quella, né per questo, vi giudica or cavaliere ora alfana, *idest* ninfa e pastore, cioè agente e paziente. Che più? Sino a gli abiti che vi travasano, stanno in forse se la Zufolina è Zufolone, o se il Zufolone è Zufolina», in Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, a cura di Paolo Procaccioli (Roma: Salerno, 1997, voll. I-VII), vol. IV, 235 (Twice my good fortune has sent your fair person into that house which is mine and others – the first time as a woman dressed like a man and the next time, as a man dressed like a woman. You are a

ters to powerful rulers equate sexual stimulation and aesthetic quality, whereas we would undoubtedly separate them into 'good' art and 'bad' pornography» [45]. Then he isolates artistic behavior from mainstream sexual behavior when he writes: «In the art world, then as now, a hint of unorthodox sexuality denoted creativity and experiment. Renaissance 'artspeak' borrowed from antiquity a pose of easygoing bisexuality and associated sophisticated gender-bending with ideal beauty and virtuosity» [46].

In this way Turner responds to the uneasiness produced by physical nudity and sexual interaction by merging, and, at the same time, marginalizing aesthetic expression and sexual desire. But the words he quotes from a letter by Titian to his royal patron Philip II about the painting «Venus and Adonis» don't seem to justify such response. The turning posture of the nude Venus, which shows her buttocks and face at once, is described by Titian as a variation from the frontal nude of Danae [47]. To infer that

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man when you are chanced on from behind and a woman when seen from the front […] Certain it is that nature has so compounded you of both sexes, that in one moment you show yourself a male and in the next a female. Indeed, Duke Alessandro did not wish to sleep with you for any other reason than to find out if you were a hermaphrodite in reality or merely in jests. For look you, you talk like a fair lady and act like a pageboy. Anybody who did not know you would think that you were now the rider and now the steed – i.e. now a nymph and now a shepherd; that is now active and now passive. What more can I say? Even the clothes that you wear upon your back, and which you are always changing, leave it an open question whether my she-chatterbox is really a he-chatterbox, or whether my he-chatterbox is really a she-one), in Aretino, *Letters*, 249. Zufolina's amphibological nature is reflected also in her use of words, as well as in her name. Her prattle («chiachiare») is savory and tasty («molto insalate e molto apetitose»), her chatter is sweet like «marzapane» even for those people who belive her to be a joke. She is a sybill (*Lettere* [1997], vol. IV, 260 and 281), wiser than Plato and Aristotle. Her witty remarks («arguzie») would be a lesson for any teacher («pedagogo») as her «zufolo avanza ogni campana che suona e a martello e a festa» (zufolo overcomes any bell, which rings to alarm or to rejoice), *ivi*, 260. The translation is mine. Her nickname «Zufolina» can actually be interpreted as a «nome d'arte» (pen-name) as it references both her verbal skills, her «zufolare» (emitting sounds), as well as her sexual proclivities. In fact the actual musical instrument, the «zufolo», allows for an association with the male organ, therefore with an active role, while playing the «zufolo», would imply, for the instrument itself, a passive role.

[45] In *Art and Love*, 179.

[46] *Ivi*, 183.

[47] Titian writes to Phillip II: «E perché la Danae, che io mandai già a vostra Maestà, si vedeva tutta dalla parte dianzi, ho voluto in quest'altra poesia variare, e farle mostrare la contraria parte, acciocché riesca il camerino, dove hanno da stare, più grazioso alla vista» (Because the *Danaë* that I already sent Your Majesty, showed herself entirely from the front viewpoint, I want in this other *poesia* to play variations, and make it show the contrary part. *Thus the 'camerino', where they will be placed, will be more pleasant to the viewer*), in Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura* (Milano:

Titian may determine such artistic 'variety' as sexual 'virtuosity' is to add meanings that Titian's quoted words do not include [48]. It is a way to make exceptional, and pertinent only to a few social characters, a common human behavior, because, as Aretino writes in the letter to Battista Zatti, «Why should we be ashamed of the organs Nature has given us? Surely they should be celebrated in art and public ceremonies» [49].

In Linda Wolk-Simon's «'Rapture to the Greedy Eyes': Profane Love in the Renaissance», the uneasiness produced by nudity and sexuality leads to overreading in both images and texts. Comparing Raphael's «La Fornarina» (ca. 1518-1520) with Giulio Romano's «Woman with a Mirror» (ca. 1520-1524) Wolk-Simon describes the «Fornarina» as an ideal beauty and Giulio's woman «without doubt a courtesan» [50]. Wolk-Simon's statement is based on the interpretation of the paintings' background. In Giulio's painting a mirror, a cosmetic or jewel box, and a statue of Venus in a niche in the background are the clues for the identification of the seated

Giovanni Silvestri, 1822, voll. I-VIII), vol. II, 27. The translation is by Turner, in *Art and Love*, 183. The italics are mine.

[48] Sexual ambiguity and artistic virtuosity do merge in Ludovico Dolce's description of «Venus and Adonis» in his *Letter to Alessandro Contarini*, also mentioned by Turner (in *Art and Love*, 183). But it is Adonis who conveys a «certa gratiosa bellezza, che partecipando della femmina, non si discostasse però dal virile […] mistura difficile, aggradevole» («certain handsome beauty which would have its share of femininity, yet not be remote from virility […] an amalgam which is hard to achieve and agreeable»). Venus' virtuosity is related to her particular posture and no reference is made to her sexuality. She has her back turned «non per mancamento d'arte […] ma per dimostrar doppia arte» («not for want of art […] but to display art in double measure»). She «mostra da per tutto alcuni sentimenti dolci e vivi» («evinces certain feelings which are sweet and vital»), and the marvelous piece of dexterity («mirabile accortezza») of the artist is that one recognizes in the hindmost parts here the distension of the flesh caused by sitting («che nelle ultime parti ci si conosce la macatura della carne causata dal sedere»). All translations and original text are from Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 65-66. In interpreting Titian's painting, Dolce adds meanings that the artist does not mention in his letter. It is Dolce, the art critic *ante litteram*, who elevates sexual ambiguity to aesthetic heights («mistura difficile, aggradevole»), with the risk, once again, of separating art from life. Also if we agree with Erica Tietze-Conrat's statement that a vast majority of Titian's letters were written by Pietro Aretino, including the ones to Phillip II, which make reference to the «Venus and Adonis», then, given the merging of art and life that Aretino himself supports in his letters, i.e. «A la Zufolina», an interesting relation seems to emerge between the artist, who was always behind the content of the letter, and the *scriba*, Aretino, who stylistically produced the letter. Erica Tietze-Corat, «Titian as a Letter Writer», *The Art Bulletin*, 26, 2 (June 1944): 117-123, in particular 117.

[49] Turner, in *Art and Love*, 179 and 184, e.n. 13.

[50] *Ivi*, 46.

woman, who has a strong resemblance to the «Fornarina», as a courtesan. The laurel branches, which constitute the background of Raphael's painting are instead allegorically interpreted as a symbol of chastity, making the «Fornarina» into an «exhortation to regard the image 'in the proper way', that is, with pure rather than lascivious desire» [51]. The source for such interpretation is both classical, the myth of Apollo and Daphne, and Petrarchan, the *Canzoniere*. Wolk-Simon makes reference to poem no. LII of the *Canzoniere*, and its myth of Diana and Acteon, when she writes that Petrarch «made a clear distinction between his virtuous love and the base lust – 'the rapture to the greedy eyes' – that the vision of a naked goddess had the power to incite» [52]. But Daphne's rejection of Apollo's advances doesn't necessarily indicate her refusal of any lover or a vow for chastity. Also Petrarch, by playing with the spelling of the word 'laurel' («lauro»), makes alternatively reference to his lady («Laura»), poetry, fame (acquired by poetry), air («l'aura») surrounding his lady, or to her golden («l'auro») hair, but not necessarily to her chastity. In fact Laura is a constant source of sensual desire for Petrarch, who is painfully aware of pursuing worldly rewards instead of spiritual ones: «Et veggio 'l meglio, et al peggior m'appiglio» (And see the better, and cling to the worst) [53].

Furthermore Wolk-Simon quotes from Robert Bishop's inaccurate translation of Petrarch's poem [54]. In his hyperbolic translation, Bishop introduces meanings that do not exist in the original text. In its first line «Non al suo amante più Diana piacque» (Diana was not more pleasing to her lover) [55] the verb «piacque», which simply means 'was pleasing', is translated with the hyperbole «brought no more rapture to the greedy eyes». Then in the second tercet [56] Petrarch identifies himself with Acteon, and transposes Diana to a «pastorella» (shepherdess), whom Petrarch discovers

[51] *Ibidem*.

[52] *Ivi*, 48.

[53] *Canzoniere* CCLXIV: see Francesco Petrarca, «The Canzoniere», in *Francesco Petrarch and Laura de Noves*, transl. by Adalbert S. Kline. Web, January 14, 2014. http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=264.

[54] *Love Rimes of Petrarch*, transl. by Robert Bishop (Ithaca, NY: Dragon Series, 1932), reprinted in Petrarch, *Selected Sonnets, Odes and Letters*, ed. by Thomas G. Bergin (New York: Harlan Davidson, 1966), 35.

[55] All translations of *Canzoniere* LII are from *Francesco Petrarch*. Web. January 14, 2014. http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=52.

[56] «Ch'a me la pastorella alpestra et cruda / posta a bagnar un leggiadretto velo, / ch'a l'aura il vago et biondo capel chiuda» (Then, to me, the fresh mountain shepherdess, / set there to wash a graceful veil, / that ties her vagrant blonde hair from the breeze), *Selected Sonnets*, 35.

washing a «leggiadretto velo» (graceful veil). Here the only distant echo of Lady Laura is in the spelling of the word «l'aura», which Adalbert S. Kline correctly translates as 'breeze'. Bishop instead misreads the entire tercet when he translates: «Than did my glimpse of a maiden unaware / Washing a snood, the gossamer garment of / My Lady's wild and lovely golden hair». The «pastorella» becomes a 'maiden', who is 'washing a snood' that doesn't belong to her, but to Petrach's Lady who seems to literally materialize out of thin air, as «l'aura» refers to the breeze and not her name [57], while the maiden's hair is not 'wild' but only 'lovely' («vago») and simply 'blonde' («biondo»). The adjective 'golden' («d'oro», «dorato») would better translate another of Petrarch's plays on words: «l'auro» = «l'oro», which is not present in this madrigal. Also in the tradition of Courtly Love poetry, to which Petrach's poems belong [58], the «pastorella», in opposition to the Lady, is usually viewed as an object of physical desire [59]. Furthermore in the *Canzoniere* the word «pastorella» is a *hapax*, which suggests that Petrarch fully expresses his carnal desire through an act of voyeurism at least once. The possible reference to the Lady's name in the word «l'aura» could also indicate Petrarch's 'veiled' attempt to express his carnal desire for his Lady as well [60]. Thus *Canzoniere* LII does not refer to the ideological and moral

[57] According to Marco Santagata, Petrarch's first of four madrigals in the *Canzoniere* sequence was probably composed for a 'courtly' occasion, and the term «a l'aura» is not a reference to the poet's beloved. Also the term's single appearance in the first seventy-nine poems indicates that the madrigal was originally foreign to the system of images representing «Laura». See Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, a cura di Marco Santagata (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004), 268-269. On the ambiguity of the term «l'aura», see also William D. Paden, «Aesthetic Distance in Petrarch's Response to the Pastourelle: *Rime* LII», *Romance Notes* 16, 3 (Spring 1975): 705.

[58] William D. Paden underlines Petrarch's role in revitalizing «lyric poetry by returning to its sources in experience and imagination, yet in his intense self-consciousness he remained aware of his relation to all of his predecessors […] It is not surprising that Petrarch also answered the pastourelle; the response to it, which he gave in *Rime* LII, reveals his awareness and appreciation of the medieval genre», *ivi*, 703. Also Paden refers to the uniqueness of *Rime* LII as «the pastoral mode found new expression in other poems, such as *Rime* CXXVI, but the particular version of pastoral, which had been the pastourelle, came to an end», *ivi*, 707.

[59] Paden writes that «the two tercets recall an erotic encounter», *ivi*, 705. For a more extended analysis of the pastourelle genre and its erotic implications, see William D. Paden, «The Figure of the Shepherdess in the Medieval Pastourelle», *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 25 (1998): 1-14; and, by the same author, «Rape in the Pastourelle», *Romanic Review* 80, 3 (1989): 331-349.

[60] An earlier reference to the myth of Acteon and Diana, and the poet's voyeuristic desire, can be found in *Canzoniere* XXIII, in *Francesco Petrarch*, vv. 146-160.

separation of love and lust. On the contrary, in a 'veiled' manner, Petrarch affirms the unity of his desire.

Further in her article Wolk-Simon makes reference to a maiolica plate, which she describes in detail in catalogue entry 107 (*fig. 24*). The maiolica shows the image of an elegantly dressed woman, who bares her left breast with her right hand, and, with her left one, tightly holds a yellow bird to her bosom. In a banderole fluttering across the plate there is the inscription: «Piglia e no penetire pegio no po stare che a restituire» (Take and don't regret it. The worst that can happen is that you would have to give it back) [61]. In the catalogue entry Wolk-Simon first describes the woman to be «almost certainly a courtesan or high-class prostitute rather then a chaste paragon of virtue and beauty» [62], then she proposes a dichotomous interpretation when she writes, first with some hesitance, then with absolute certainty, that:

> The specific meaning of this prurient image *remains a puzzle*, but *it seems* to represent an allegory of sexuality, the breast and bird signifying, respectively, female and homoerotic pleasure […] the viewer-recipient is confronted with a conundrum or choice: which rival temptation of the flesh will prove the most seductive? Holding, or perhaps restraining, the bird tightly against her chest as she extends her breast like an offering, the woman *undoubtedly* hopes that her feminine charms will triumph. [63]

Wolk-Simon founds such sexual opposition on the amphibological use of the word «uccello» (bird) as a metaphor for «penis, anus, or an accessible boy» during the Renaissance [64]. But, I would argue that, by identifying the yellow bird as a homoerotic allegory, Wolk-Simon actually removes the ambiguity of the word. By selecting a more specific and limited meaning, she overlooks the more general one, i.e. the penis as an expression of heterosexual desire, which is still commonly used today. In this case the woman would offer her breast while holding the 'bird' of her potential lover. The banderole's motto itself seems to support such interpretation as it indicates the desire to share and not to compete. As in the case of Petrarch's poem, our maiolica can be interpreted as an expression of unity, and not opposition, of desire.

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[61] In *Art and Love*, 216.

[62] *Ibidem*.

[63] *Ivi*, 53. The italics are mine.

[64] *Ibidem*. Wolk-Simon reduces the multiple meanings of the word/image by choosing to quote from Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1996), 151.

Unity of desire is central to Beverly Louise Brown's essay «Picturing the Perfect Marriage: The Equilibrium of Sense and Sensibility in Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*» (*fig. 25*), but such unity is interpreted more as a way to control, rather than express, desire. In her introduction Brown states that although «we have no idea what Titian or his patron might have called the painting […] *it is clear* that the picture is about marriage» [65]. Brown's aprioristic statement is supported only by the rectangular shape of the painting, which is «reminiscent of cassoni, the traditional Italian wedding chest whose decoration extolled uxorial virtues and dynastic generation» [66], and by a syllogism of arguable conclusions: «Central to any discussion on marriage is love», «love has always been acknowledged as the key to unlock the picture's inherent meaning», therefore the picture must be «about marriage». Of the two women represented in the painting as sitting at the opposite sides of a sarcophagus-shaped fountain, the unsettling one is the naked woman on the right. In order to exorcize her disturbing nakedness most scholars identify her as Venus, the goddess of love [67]. But even as Venus, she continues to unsettle her viewers, as she raises questions about the identity of the other woman in the painting, who is instead richly dressed. It is the amount of flesh shown that places these otherwise twin-like women at opposite sides of the moral spectrum, and labels them respectively «Sacred and Profane Love». Brown goes to great length in trying to demonstrate that the dressed woman represents the Heavenly Venus, «the goddess of honest and licit marital love» [68], and the painting is an allegory of «the perfect marriage, in which the raging passions of the heart are subsumed by the generative power of marital bliss» [69]. In the painting Titian goes beyond the medieval view that carnal love is merely lustful. «In *Sacred and Profane Love* an equilibrium is maintained between the forces of love: an equilibrium necessary for marital success» because «only through marriage can man's baser instincts be channeled and true happiness be found» [70]. Once again the expression of desire is unsettling,

[65] Beverly Louise Brown, «Picturing the Perfect Marriage: The Equilibrium of Sense and Sensibility in Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*», in *Art and Love*, 239. The italics are mine.

[66] *Ibidem*.

[67] As we don't have any original name of the painting, all the different names assigned to it through the centuries make reference to love as its central theme, and about the two female figures Brown states: «few doubted that the nude was Venus», *ibidem*.

[68] *Ivi*, 240.

[69] *Ivi*, 244.

[70] *Ibidem*.

but this time the attempt to control it is through the legal act of marriage, and its promise of 'true happiness'.

Channeling desire within marital parameters is also the subject of Luke Syson's essay: «*Belle*: Picturing Beautiful Women». Syson summarizes the scholarly debate around the anonymity of these half-length pictures of women, known as *belle* (female beauties), as a question between their being real or ideal, lustful or chaste. He then suggests that, «given that it has proved impossible to agree on single interpretations» [71], the meaning of these *belle*, and the symbols surrounding them, is deliberately multivalent. But this ambiguity of meanings, to which also Andrea Bayer refers in the catalogue entries 146a, «Young Woman in Blue with Fan», and 146b, «Young Woman in Green Holding a Box» [72], is not sustained throughout Syson's essay, on the contrary he attempts to defuse the lustful and unchaste meaning of the paintings. He convincingly argues that the *belle* are not portraits of real lustful courtesans, and also that the erotic is not their only appeal [73]. He refers to Petrarch's poetry, and the Neoplatonic principles, described in Baldassarre Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano* and Pietro Bembo's dialogue *Gli Asolani*, in order to affirm that representation of female nudity, as in the case of Piero di Cosimo's «Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci», may evoke «the unadorned beauty of her soul as well as her chastity» [74], and that «the fact that these women are erotically stimulating does not mean that they sacrifice their virtue» [75]. Once again, if female virtue equates to chastity, then marriage is the more appropriate place to express and control desire. Thus these portraits can metaphorically stand for the bride «owned and attainable but properly chaste within marriage» [76]. Young married women need to be sexually active and alluring to satisfy their husband's desire, and produce for him a much-longed-for progeny, but their sexual behavior should be vigilantly circumscribed. This

[71] Luke Syson, «*Belle*: Picturing Beautiful Women», in *Art and Love*, 246.

[72] Bayer writes: «Interpretations of these *belle donne* have ranged from prostitute to bride to abstract beauty; from the illicitly available, to the *sposa* erotically available only to her husband, to an unreachable ideal. Accessories contribute to this hermeneutic confusion […] details found in related paintings can be interpreted in either sense: jewels, flowers, boxes, gold chains can equally signify the bride or the courtesan», in *Art and Love*, 318.

[73] Syson writes («*Belle*», 248): «The market for *belle* would have been unnecessarily limited if all these women were specifically identified as courtesans, or even if the erotic was their only appeal».

[74] *Ivi*, 250.

[75] *Ivi*, 251.

[76] *Ibidem*.

is the reason why the erotic appeal of the *belle* portraits should be somewhat muted [77]. In his essay's conclusions, while still recognizing the possibility that these pictures of *belle* could have been purchased by «rapacious or romantic bachelors», Syson reiterates that their acquisition was to mark marriages. Within the marital bond they may have helped to arouse the husband to respectful desire toward his wife. They may have represented the image of the ideal beloved linked, by their ownership and display, to a real bride or newlywed wife, or they may have been employed to give lessons to new brides on appropriate sexuality [78]. Once again the uneasy feeling produced by the sight of female nudity leads to an interpretation which attempts to bring under social control, i.e. within the confines of marriage, the otherwise amphibological appeal of these women.

[77] *Ivi*, 252.
[78] *Ivi*, 253.

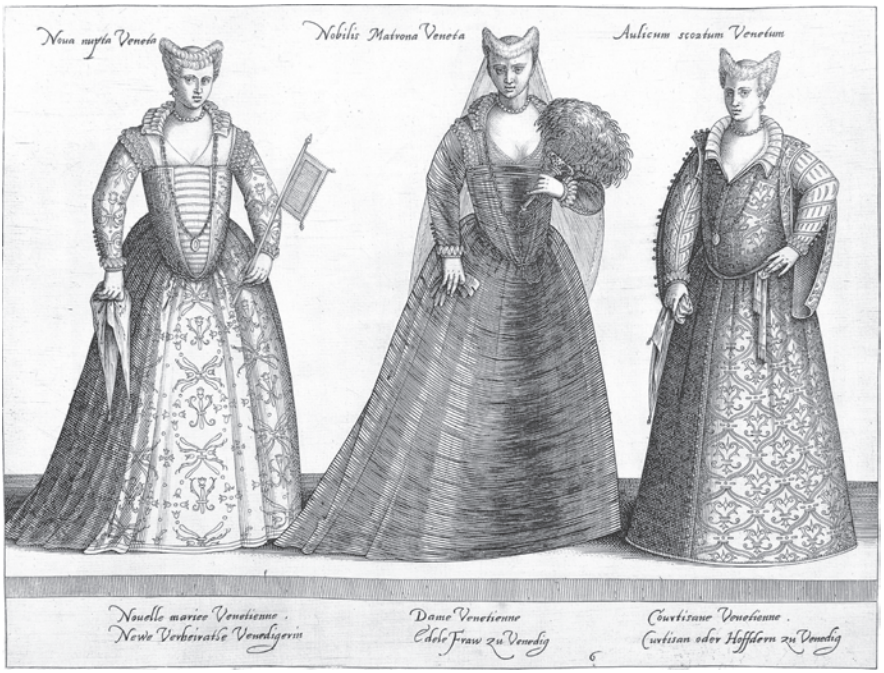

Fig. 1. – Julius Goltzius (Netherlandish, died ca. 1595), in Jean Jacques Boissard, *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* (Köln: C. Rutz, 1581). Folio NK4709.3 .H33 1581. Plate 6. Archives & Special Collections Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

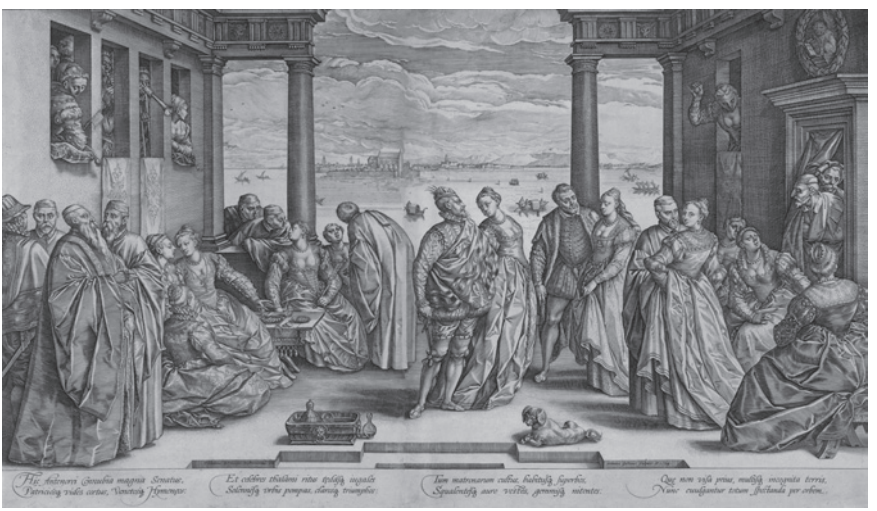

Fig. 2. – Hendrik Goltzius (Netherlandish, 1558-1617), «The Venetian Wedding», 16th century. Engraving 17 × 28 7/8 in. (43.18 × 73.34 cm) (plate) 17 3/8 × 28 7/8 in. (44.13 × 73.34 cm) (sheet). Gift of funds from the Print and Drawing Council. P.98.7. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Fig. 3. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859, voll. I-II). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 103. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

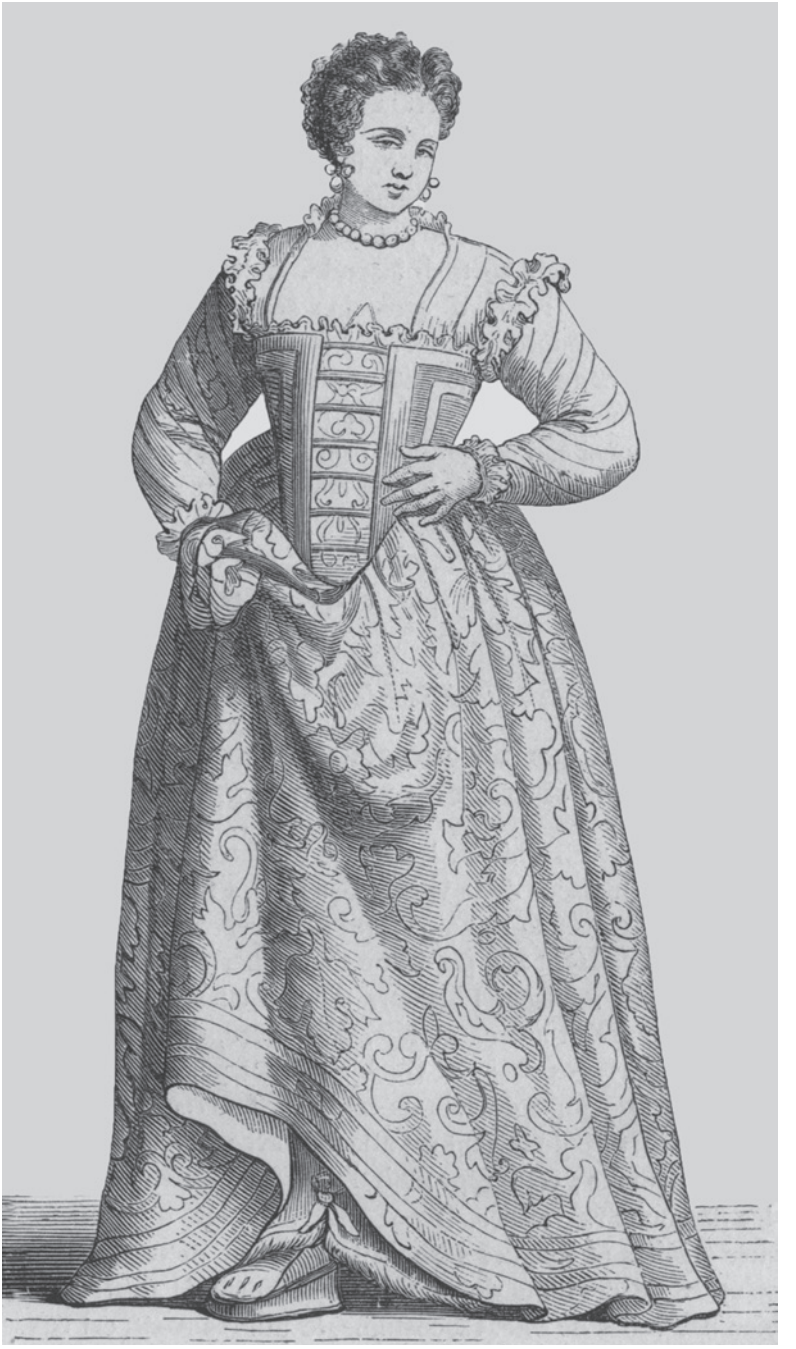

Fig. 4. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859, voll. I-II). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 118. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

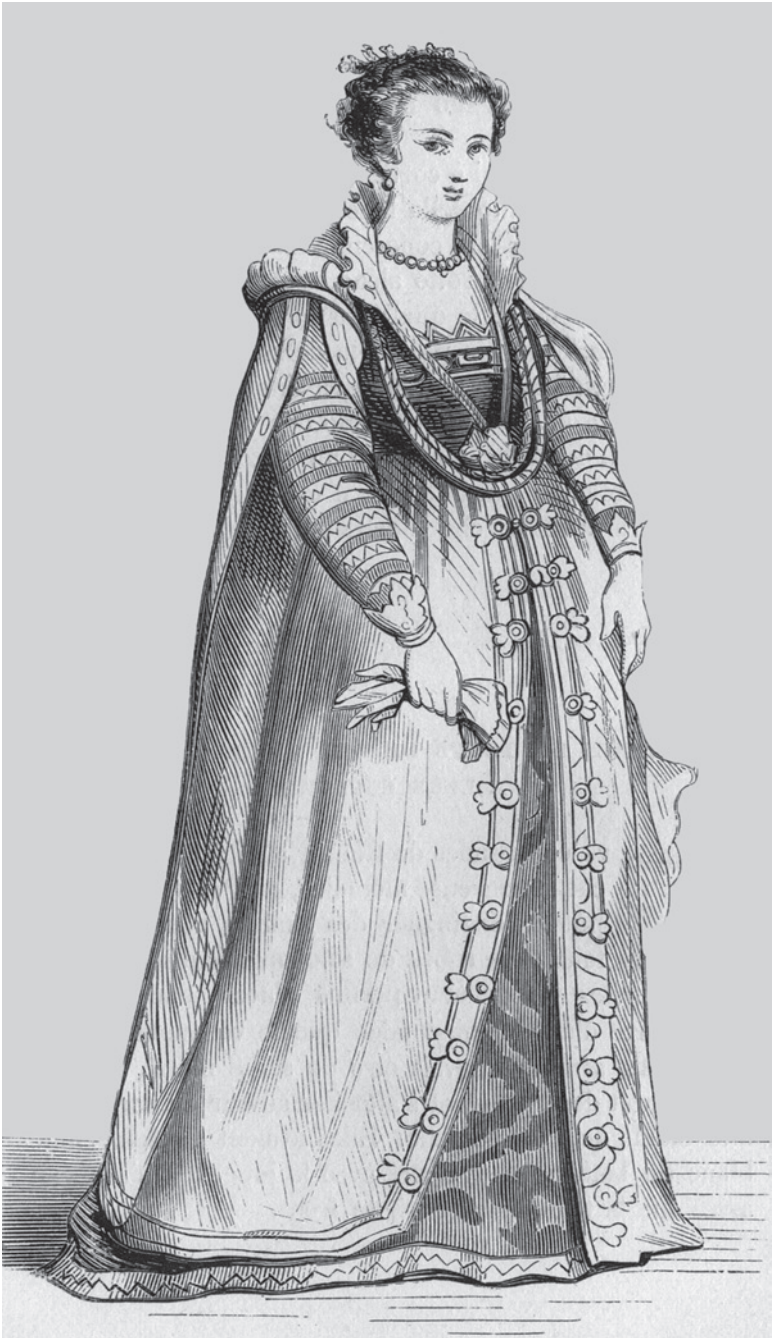

Fig. 5. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 32. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

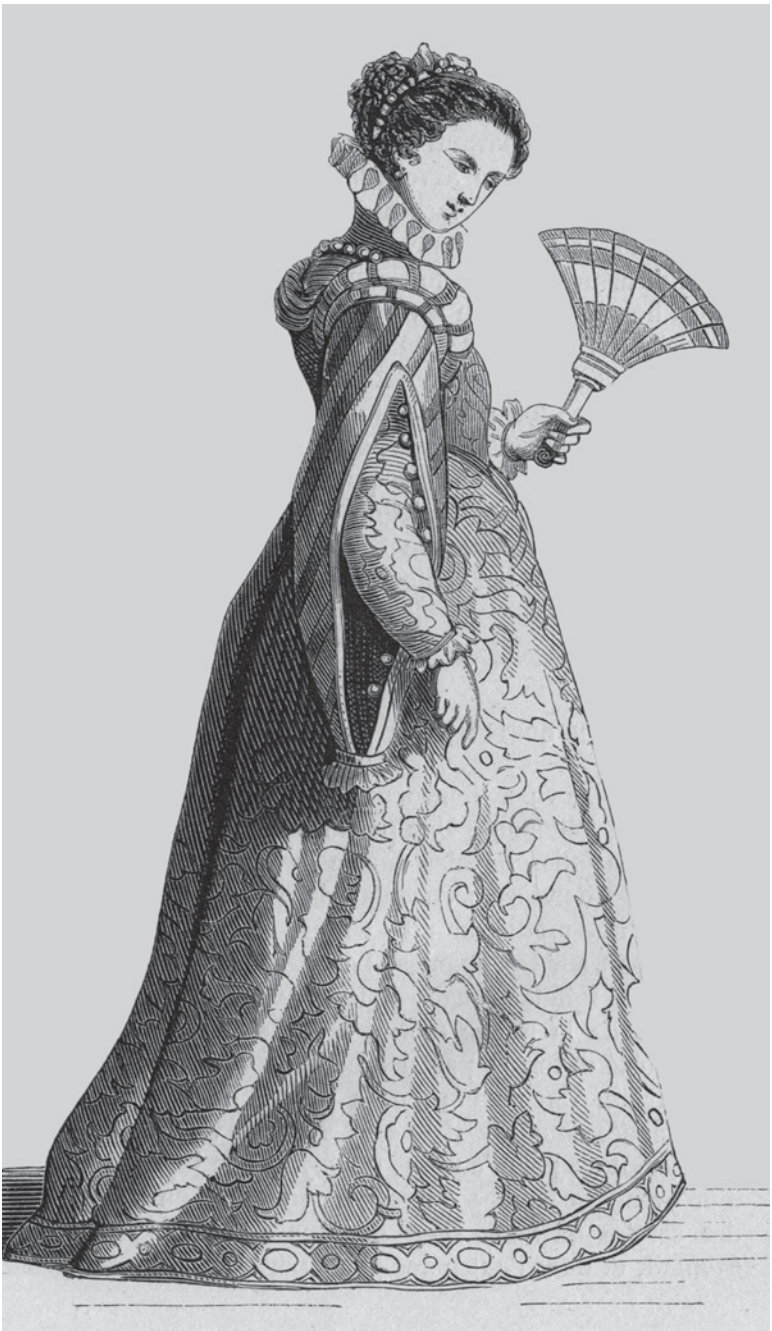

Fig. 6. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 222. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

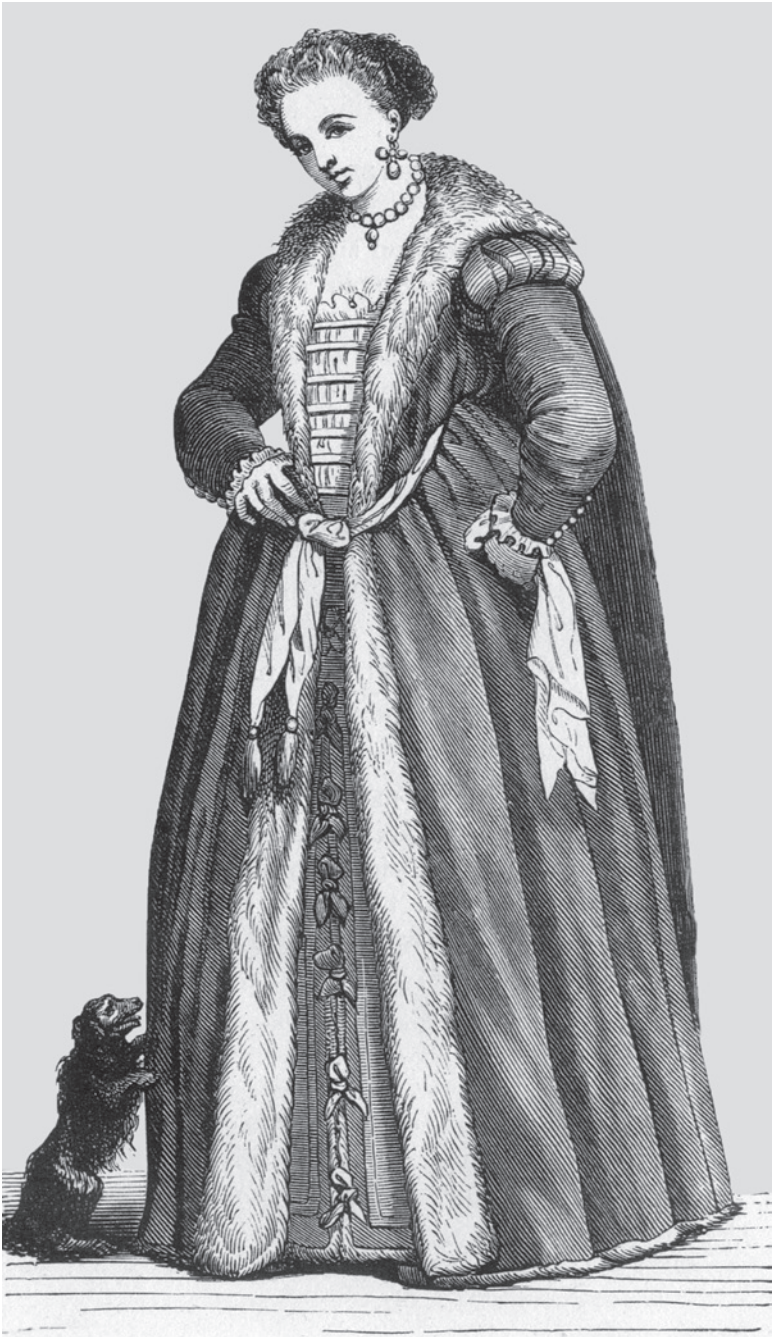

Fig. 7. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 117. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

Fig. 8. – Cesare Vecellio, *Costumes anciens et modernes. Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Paris: Tipographie de Firmin Didot Frères Fils & C., 1859). GT 513. V42 v. 1. Plate 113. Main Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA.

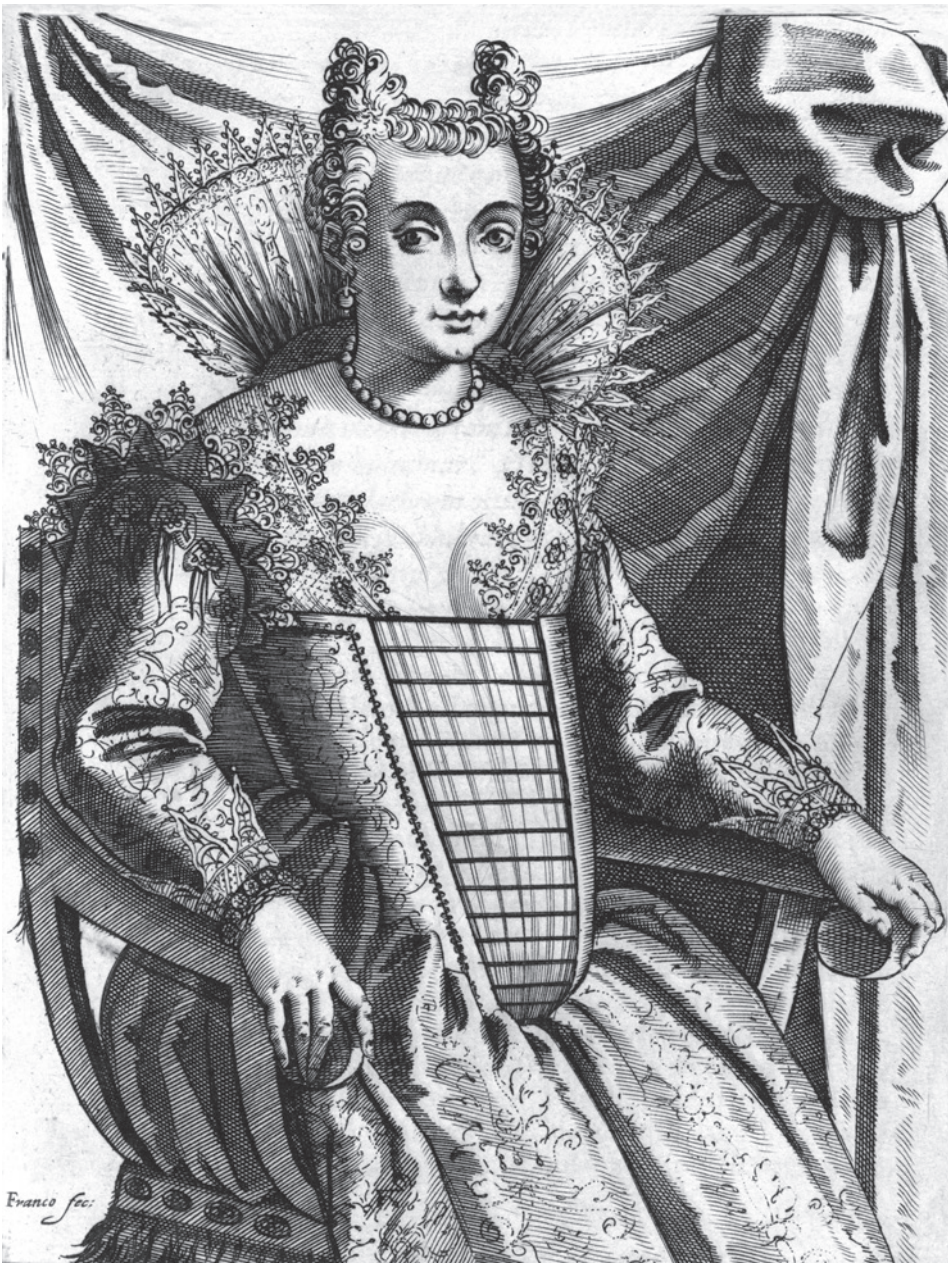

Fig. 9. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 3.
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

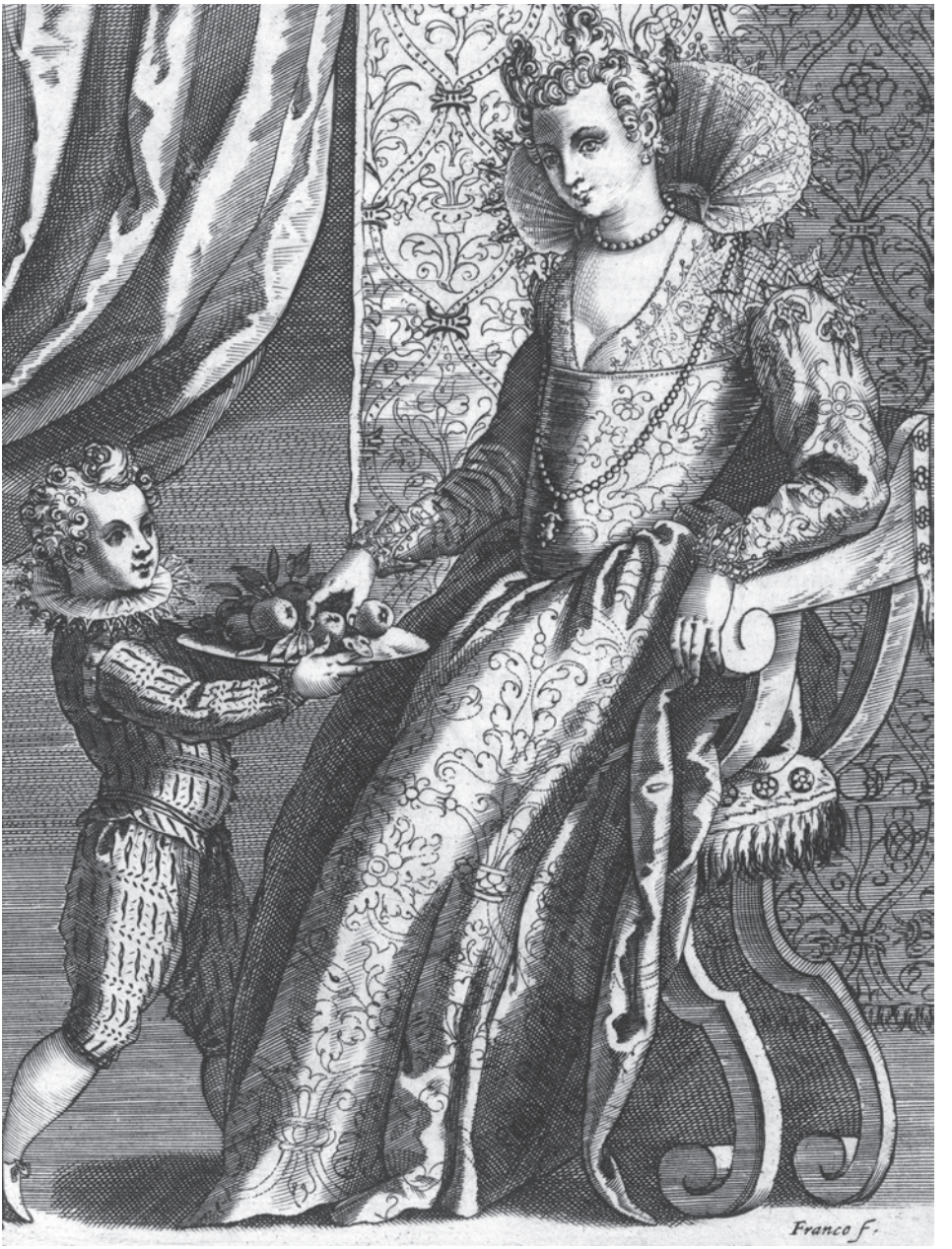

Fig. 10. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nouuamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 4.
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

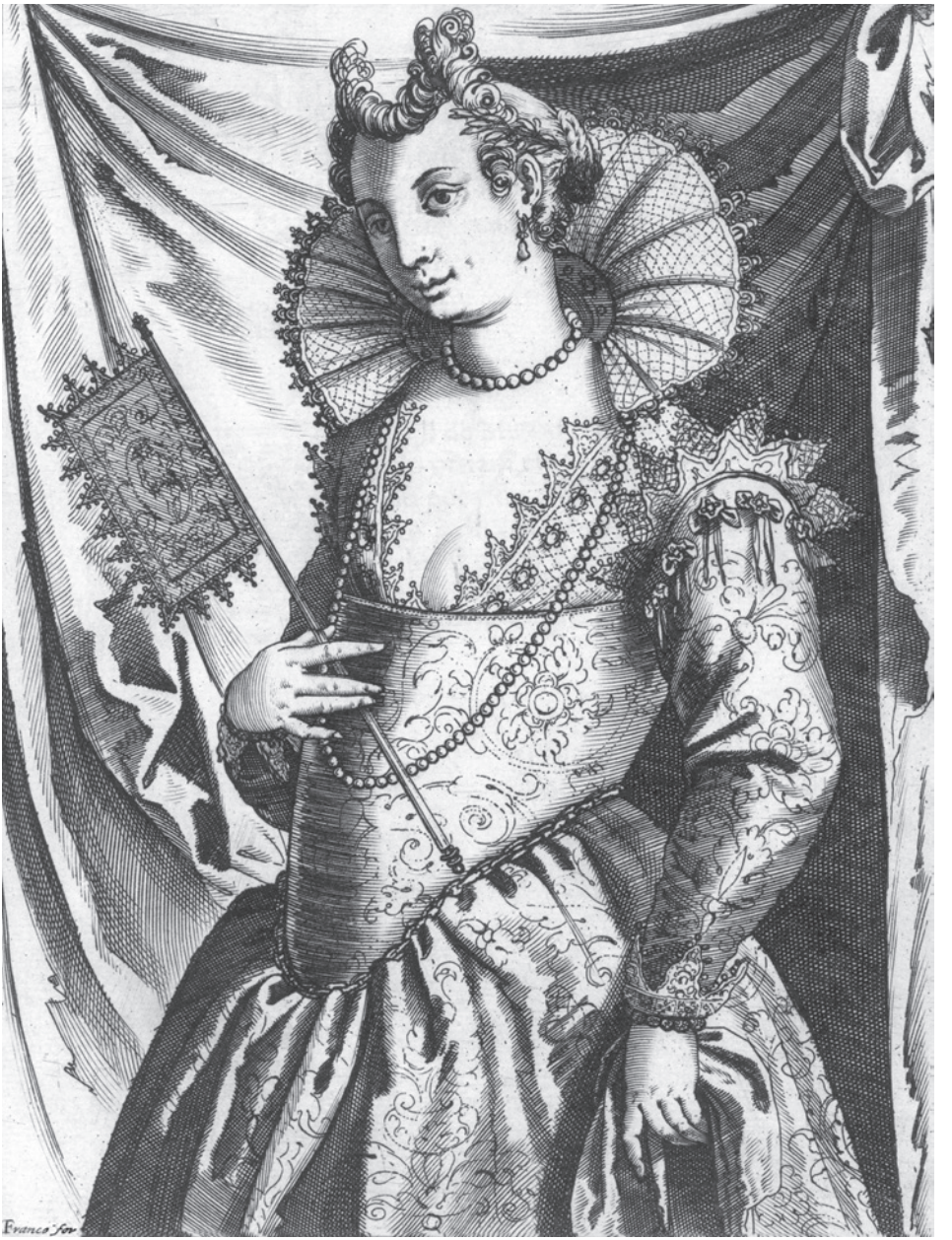

Fig. 11. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620). *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 10.
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

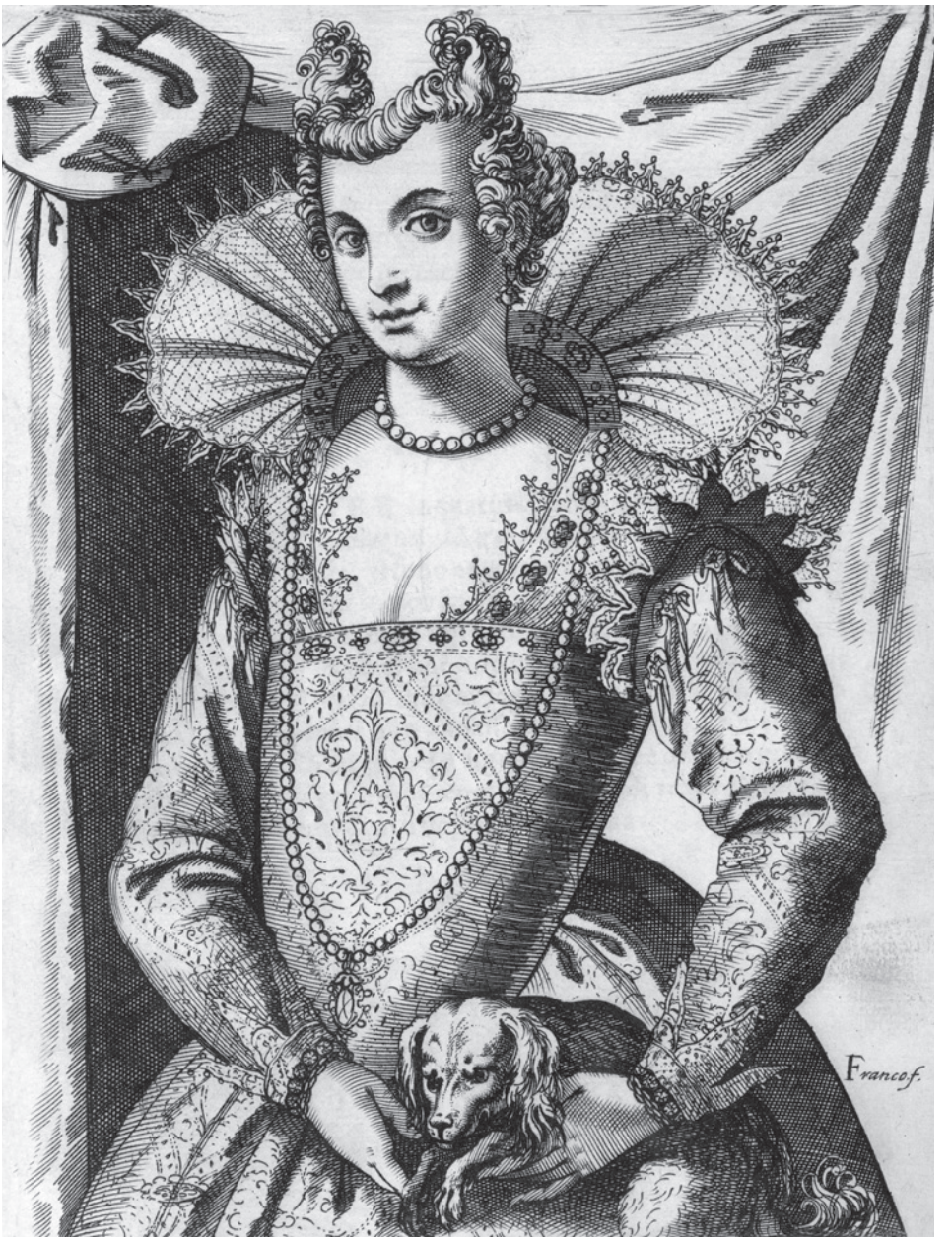

Fig. 12. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 11. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

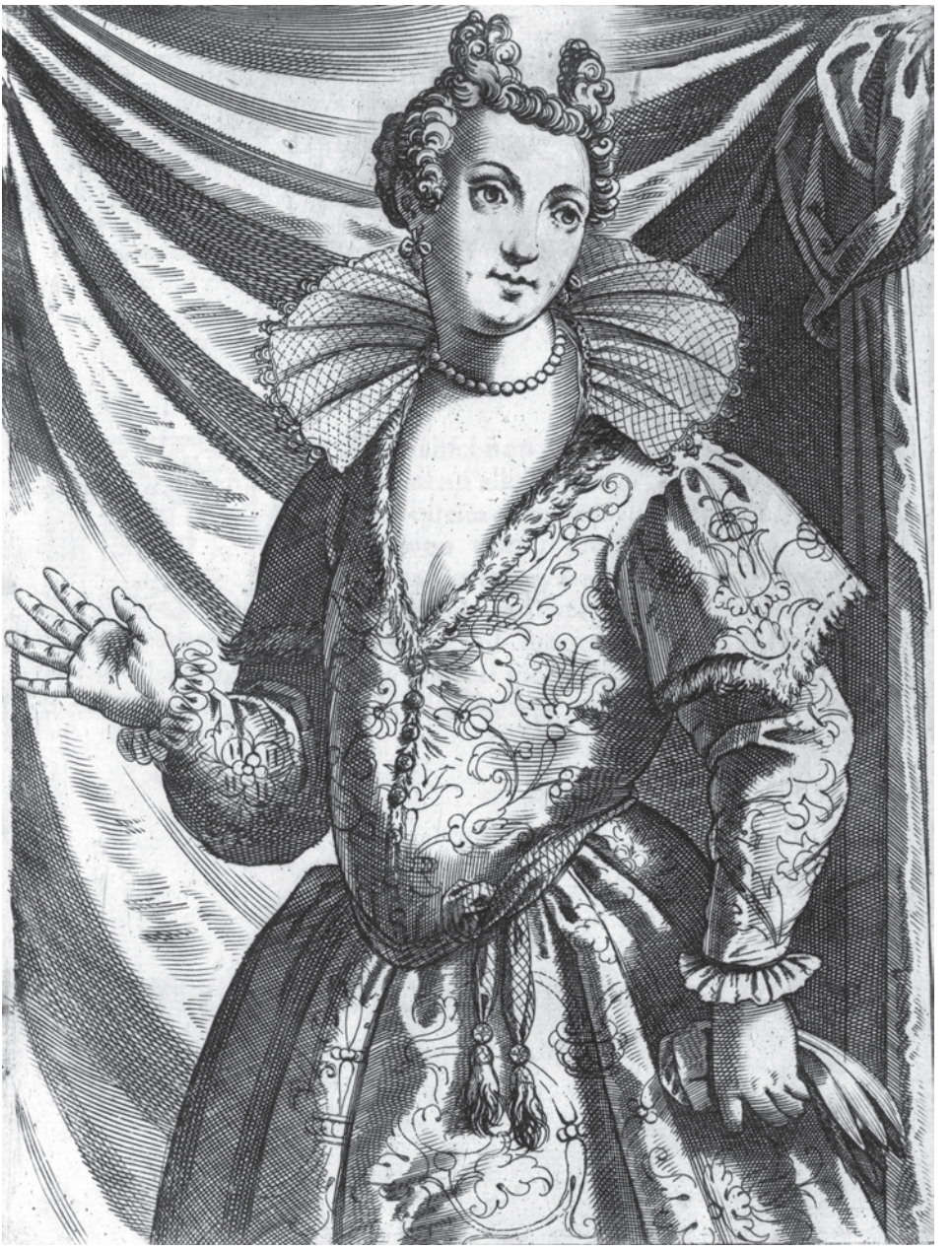

Fig. 13. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 12.
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

Fig. 14. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 14.
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

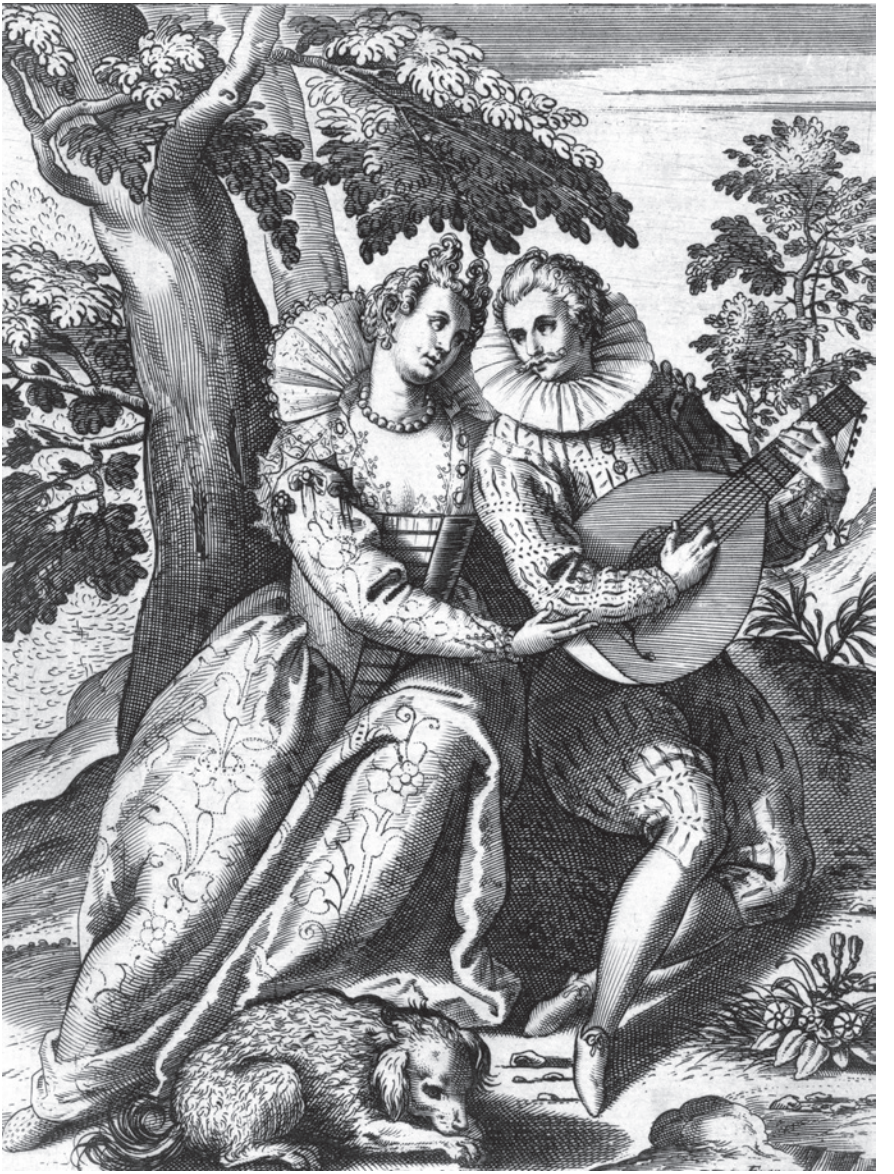

Fig. 15. – Franco, Giacomo (1550-1620), *Habiti delle donne venetiane intagliate in rame nuouamente da Giacomo Franco* [Venice, 1609?]. Typ 625 09.405. Plate 15. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.

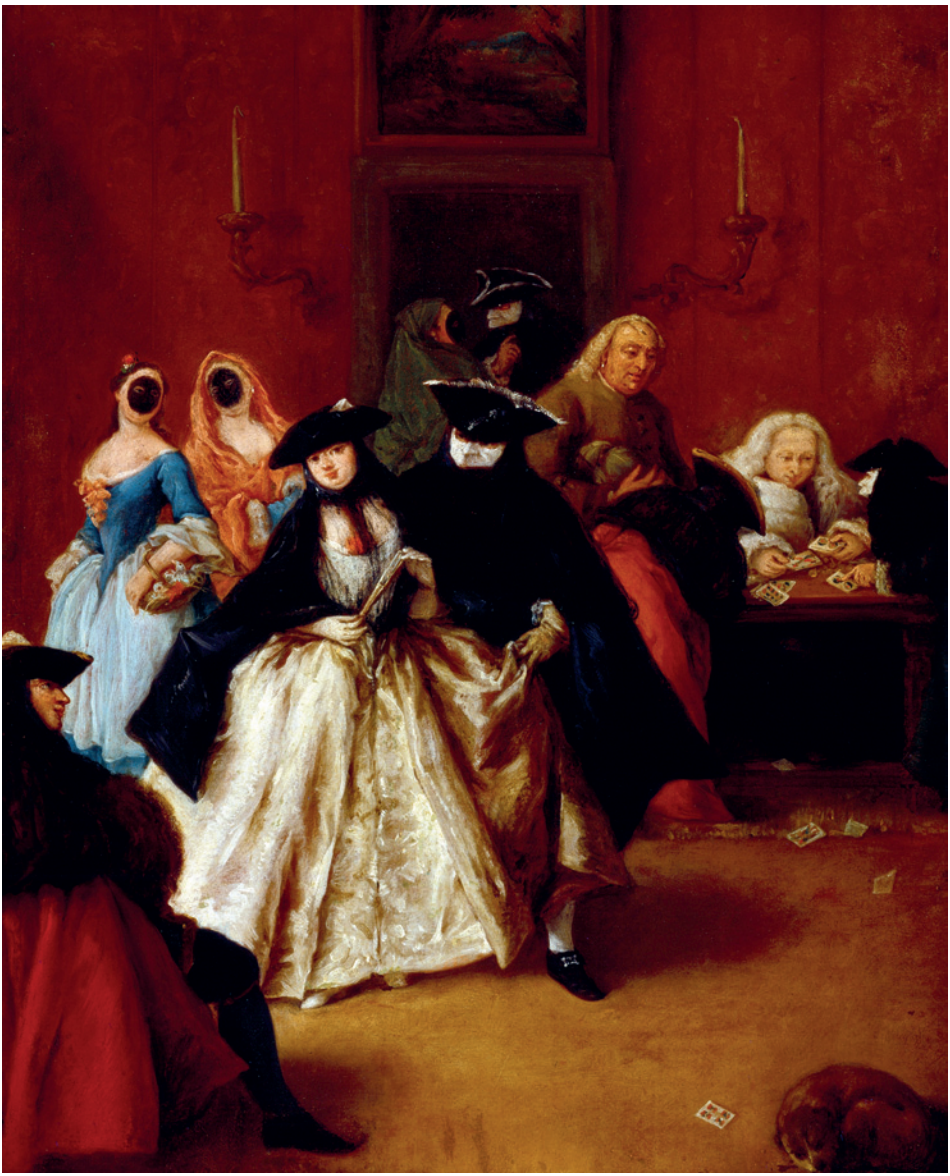

Fig. 16. – Pietro Longhi (Italian, 1701-1785), «Il ridotto», 1757-1760 (?).
Oil on canvas, 62 × 51 cm.
Fondazione Querini Stampalia Onlus, Venice, Italy.

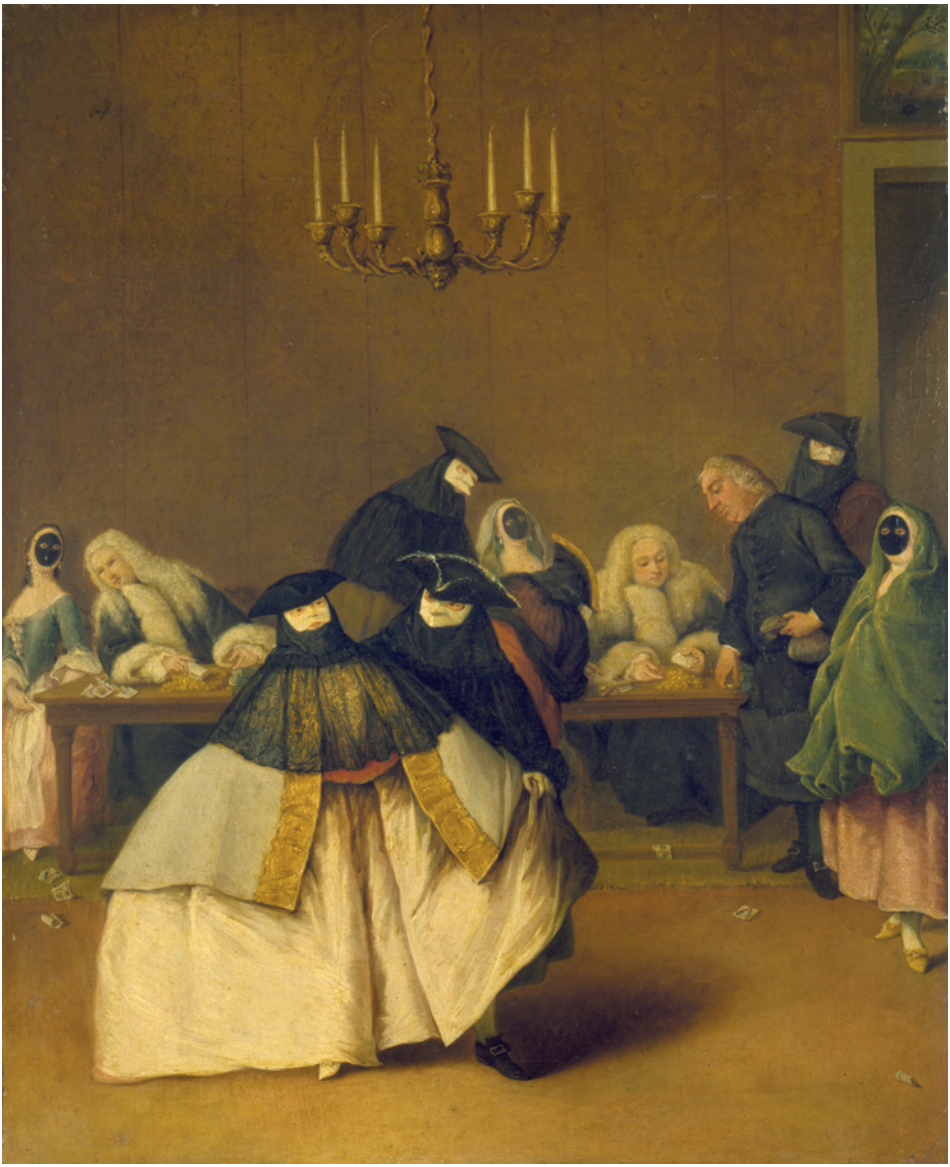

Fig. 17. – Pietro Falca detto Longhi (Italian, 1701-1785),
«Il ridotto (Maschere veneziane)», 1740-1750 (?).
Oil on canvas, 20 × 26 in. Dip. 81LC00060.
Accademia Carrara, Bergamo, Italy.

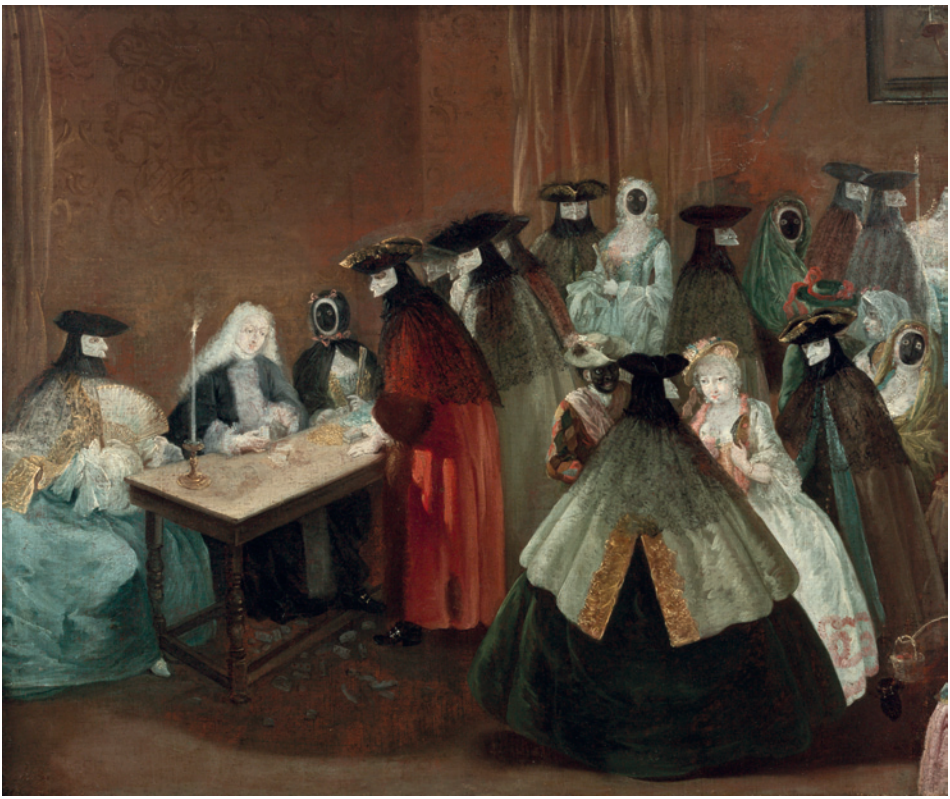

Fig. 18. – Follower of Pietro Longhi (Italian, 1702-1785),
«Bal Masque», 18th century.
Oil on canvas, 33 × 39 in. (83.8 × 99.1 cm). Gift of Lily Carstairs. 1952.62.
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA.

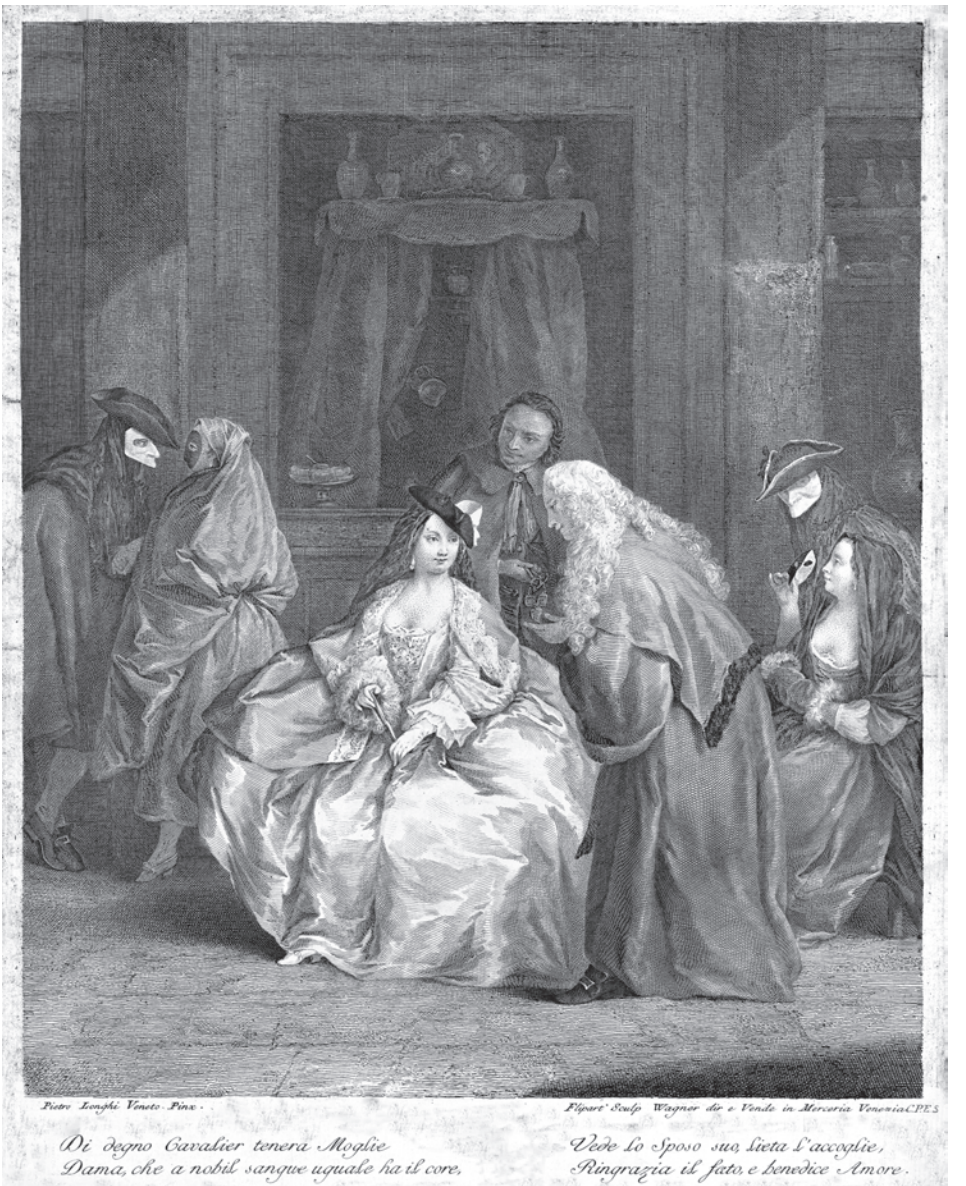

Fig. 19. – Jean-Jacques Flipart (French, 1719-1782), after Pietro Longhi (Italian, 1701-1785), «Di degno cavalier tenera moglie (The Masked Ball)», 18th century. Etching and engraving. Image: 408 × 339 mm (16 1/6 × 13 3/8 in.); Sheet: 452 × 360 mm (17 13/16 × 14 3/16 in.) Cropped. Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts. 1952.37.
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA.

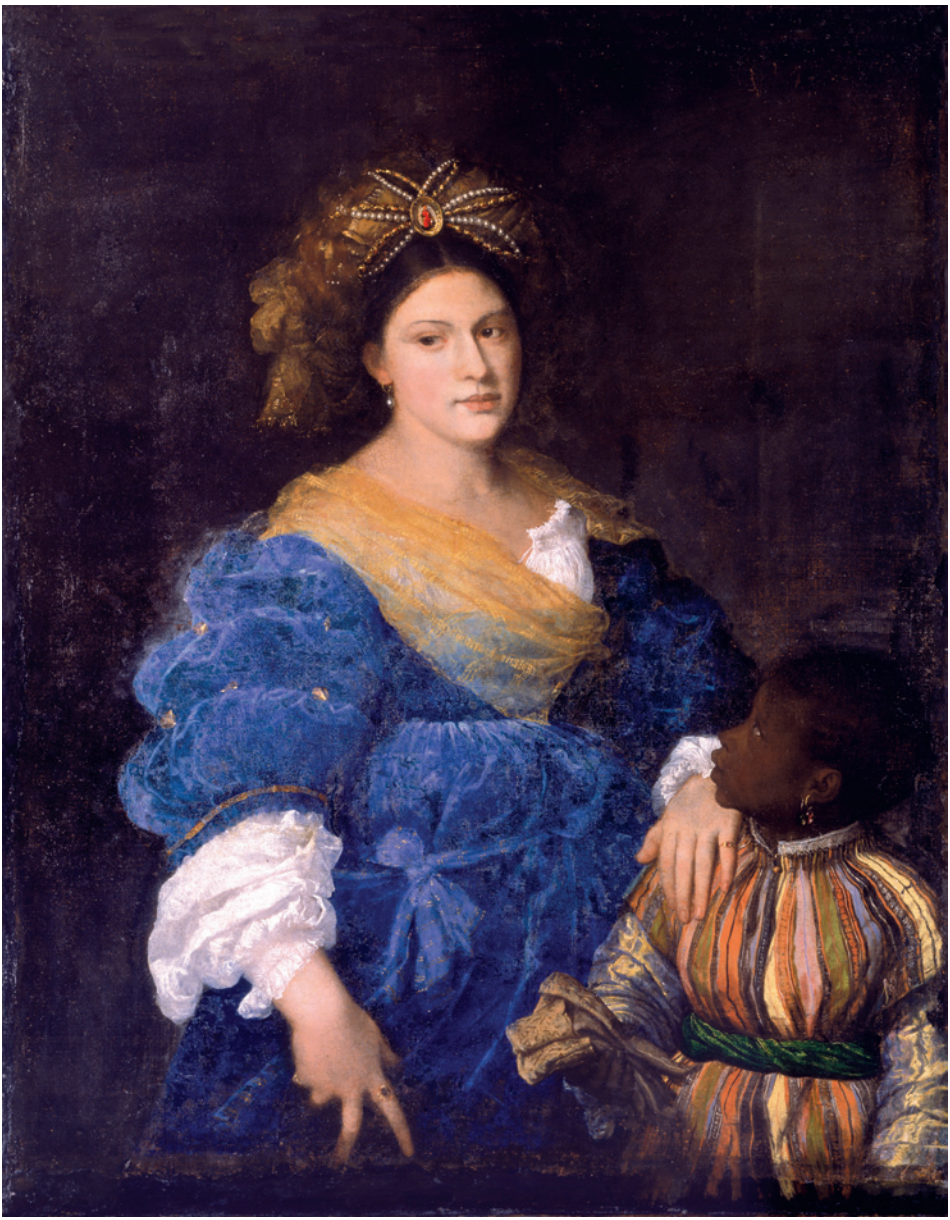

Fig. 20. – Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) (Italian, ca. 1488-1576), «Laura de' Dianti», 1520-1525.
Oil on canvas, 119 × 93 cm.
Collection Heinz Kisters, Kreuzlingen, Switzerland.

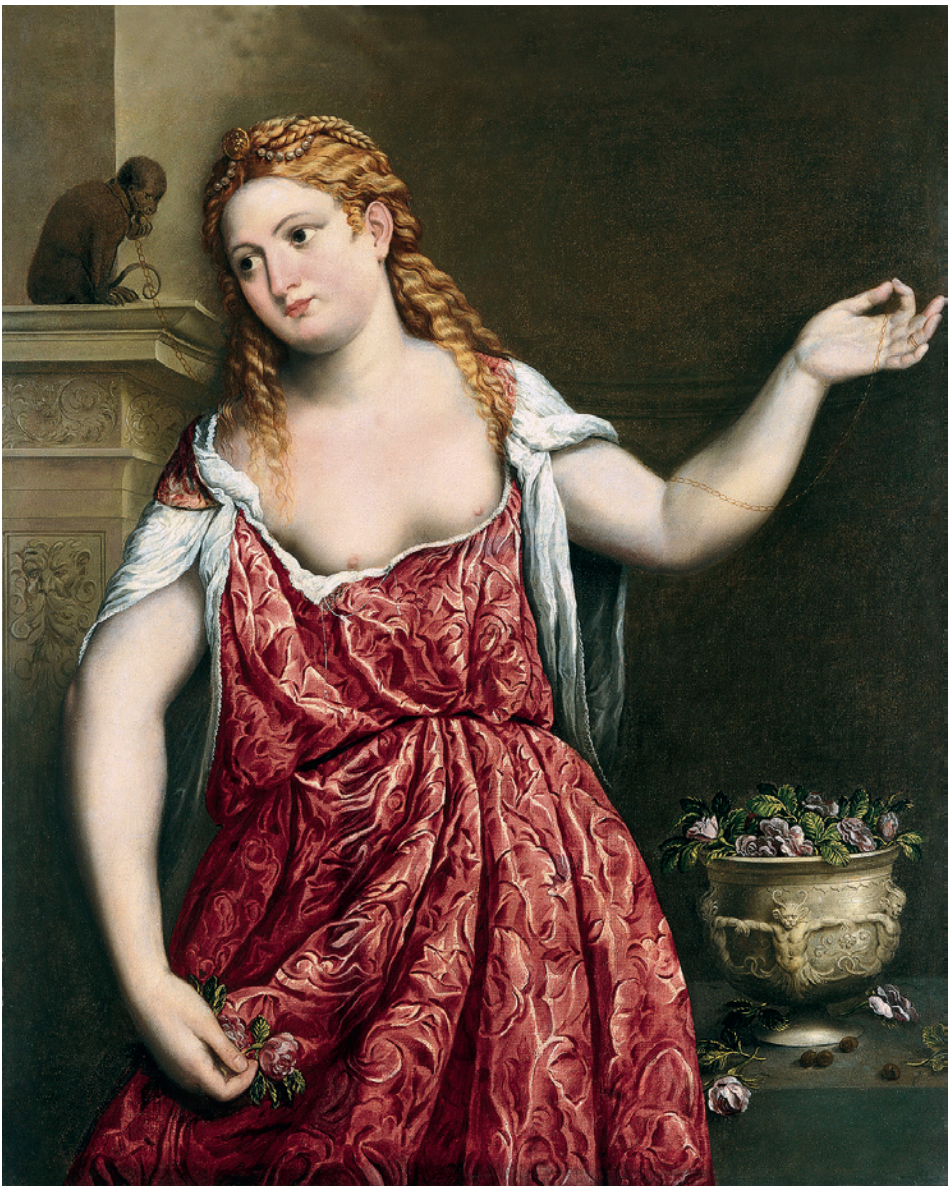

Fig. 21. – Paris Bordone (1500-1571),
«Portrait of a Young Woman», ca. 1543-1550.
Oil on canvas, 103 × 83 cm. INV. 55 (1936.5).
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain.

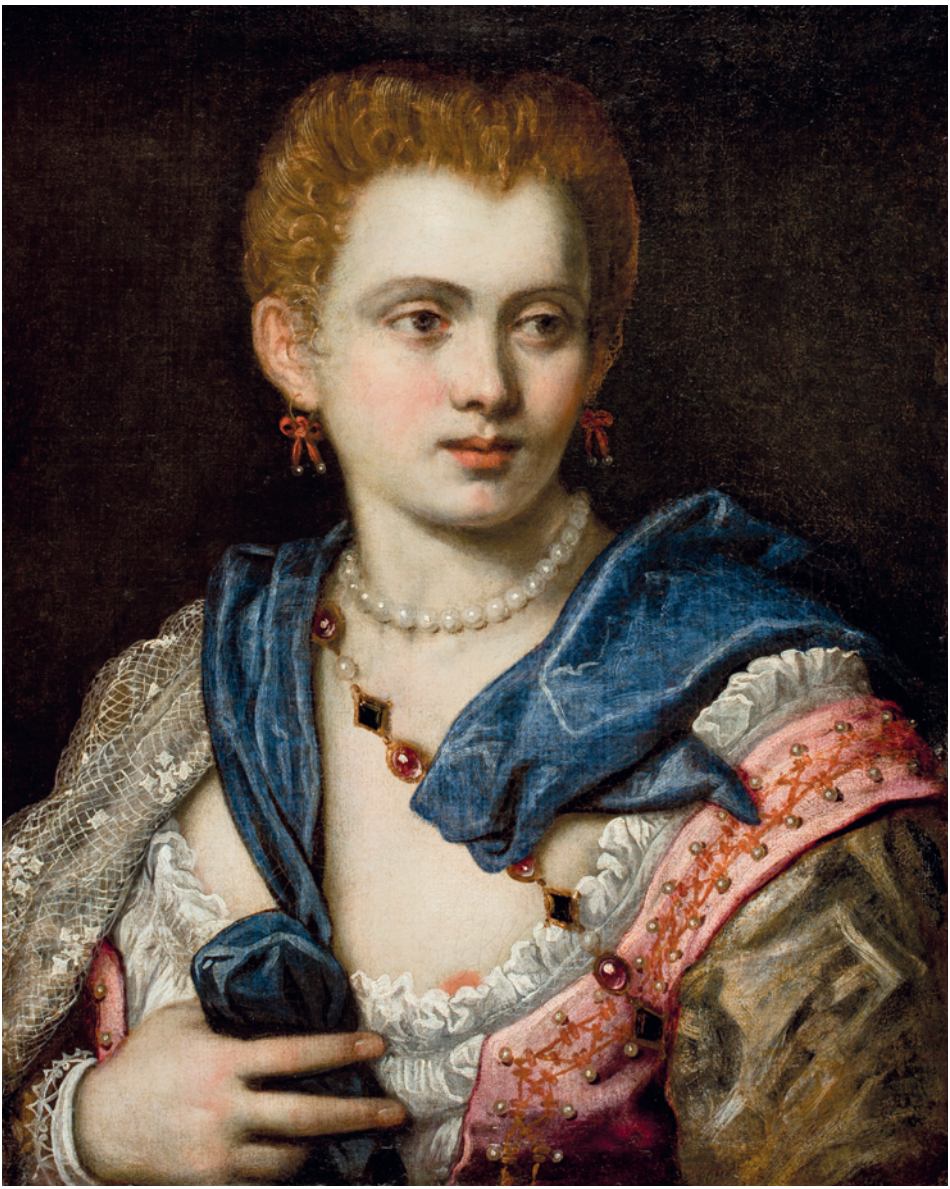

Fig. 22. – Follower of Jacopo Tintoretto (Italian, 1519-1594), «Portrait of a Lady», 16th century.
Oil on canvas, 61.4 × 47.1 cm (24 3/16 × 18 9/16 in.).
Austin S. Garver Fund and Sarah C. Garver Fund. 1948.22.
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA, USA.

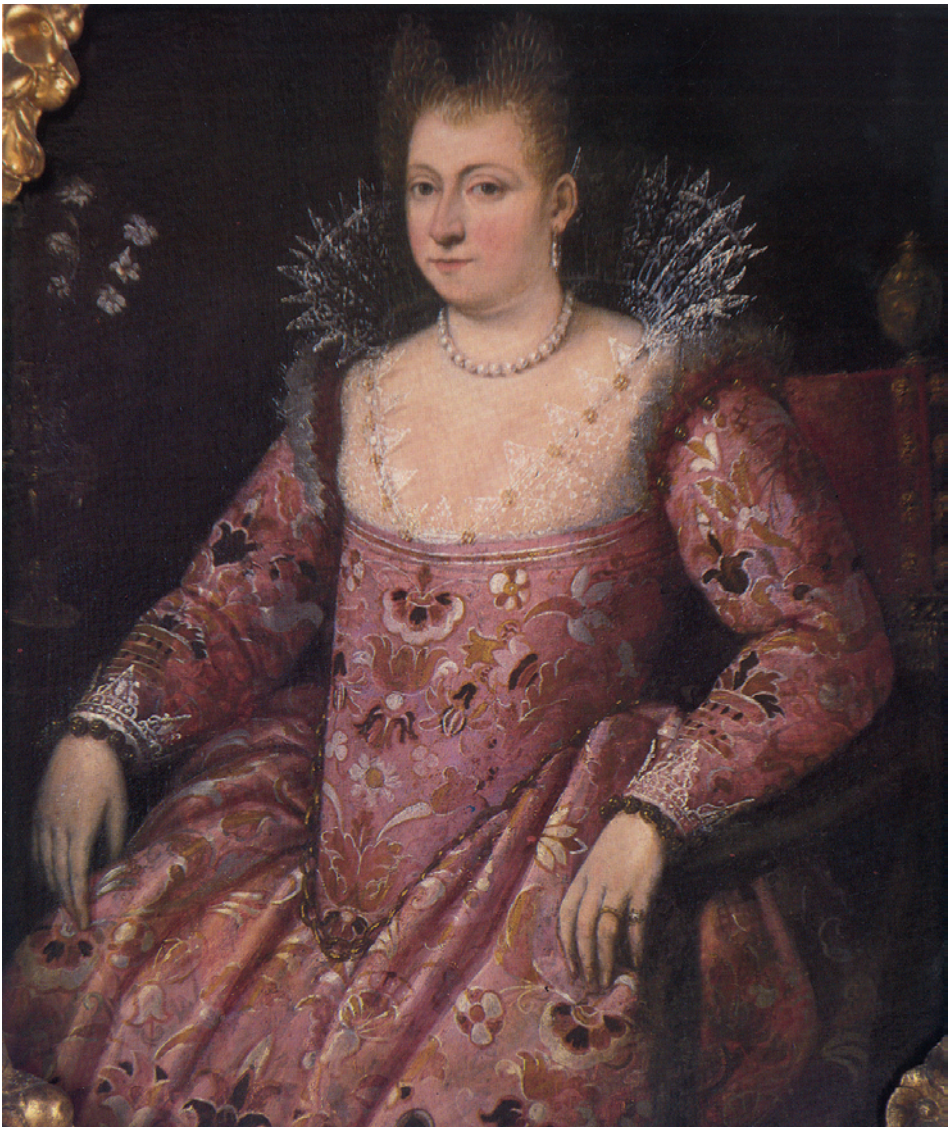

Fig. 23. – Domenico Tintoretto (Italian, 1560-1635)
«Ritratto di cortigiana» [?] (Portrait of a Courtesan).
Oil on canvas, 100 × 84 cm.
Private Collection, Venice, Italy.

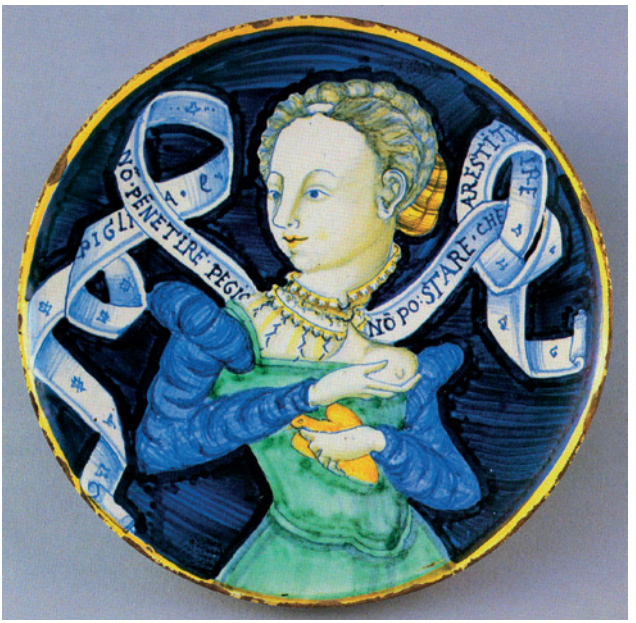

Fig. 24. – Unknown, «Dish with Allegorical Subject», ca. 1520-1540.
Tin-glazed earthware, 1 5/8 in. (height) × 9 1/4 in. (diameter).
Corcoran Gallery of Art, William A. Clarck Collection. Washington, DC, USA.

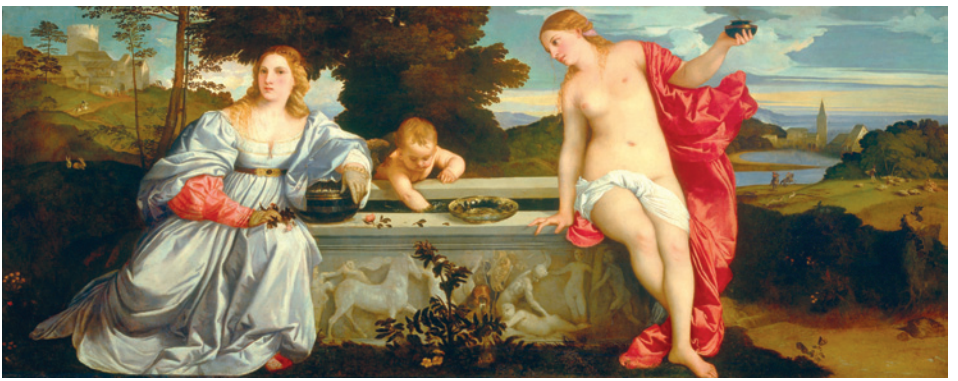

Fig. 25. – Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) (Italian, ca. 1488-1576),
«Amor sacro e amor profano» (Sacred and Profane Love), ca. 1515.
Oil on canvas, 118 × 279 cm.
Galleria Borghese, Rome, Italy.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1998 the movie *Dangerous Beauty*, an adaptation of Margaret Rosenthal's book *The Honest Courtesan*, was released. The alluring title of this mass-culture movie [1] not surprisingly contrasts with its actual plot, which moralistically revises what we historically know about the life of its protagonist, Veronica Franco. A young Veronica loves and is loved by the noble Venetian Marco Venier. He cannot marry her because of their different social status. A saddened Veronica, instructed by her mother, becomes the most renowned courtesan and poetess in Venice. But her prestige and independence are not long lasting. Accused of witchcraft, she is required to appear in front of the Inquisition. Veronica is determined to be true to herself, and risk being burned at the stake. A dramatic intervention of Marco saves her, and their love triumphs. But this idealistic woman who ultimately survives only with the intervention of her man is a far-flung version of the Veronica Franco of «Capitolo 2» in her *Terze rime*. Here Veronica responds to requests made by Marco in «Capitolo 1». Marco's request for Veronica's amorous favors follows traditional Courtly Love / Petrarchan patterns. He affirms his love for her, his service, and suffering from her lack of reward. He references one of Dante's two rules of Courtly Love: «Amor ch'a nullo amato amar perdona» («Love that exempts no one loved from loving in return») [2], but in a less courtly manner he underlines the fleeting nature of Veronica's physical beauty, in order to convince her to oblige his request.

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[1] In an interesting marketing decision the movie was released in Europe in 1999 with the same title as the book, *The Honest Courtesan*. In this case the cover of the DVD underlines the historical traits of the plots (Veronica Franco, Marco Venier, and a Venetian panorama) instead of the sexual innuendo of its American version, where a beautiful blonde woman, wearing white lingerie, lies among red satin sheets.

[2] Translation from «Lectura Dantis», in *Inferno*, V. Brown University - Italian Studies Department. Web, January 14, 2014, http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/LD/numbers/01/bergin.htm.

Then, while he praises Veronica's Apollonian skill of poetry, he warns her against not availing herself of the beauty and amorous skills Venus has granted her. Although her intellectual skills are recognized and paired to her amorous ones [3], Apollo should not reject Venus, because after all *omnia vincit Amor*, and Apollo himself is subject to Venus' amorous power [4]. For Marco Veronica is an object of physical desire, and her intellectual skills, although praised to support his request, may be a hindrance to his amorous intent. In her reply to Marco, Veronica reclaims his mythological reference but this time there is no opposition between Venus and Apollo, actually they establish a symbiotic relation based on truth and pragmatism. Veronica does not trust Marco's words because they are not followed by facts. She asks to be pleased with deeds and not with praises [5]. She reclaims the unity of sign and signifier. Once Marco's words are followed by deeds, and, as he well knows, what is most dear to her is not of great cost to him [6], then Veronica will summon the skills of both Apollo and Venus in order to please him. It is from this unity of mind and body, Apollo and Venus, that Veronica, in order to appease Marco's plea, exalts her amorous talent over her poetic one. But once again Apollo, i.e. her intellect, will be the one to inspire her amorous, physical talent [7]. In developing her argument Veronica

[3] «E così 'l vanto avete tra le belle / di dotta, e tra le dotte di bellezza, / e d'ambo superate e queste e quelle» (And so among beauties you are famous for your learning, / and among learned women you are known for your beauty, / and in both you excel one group and the other), in Veronica Franco, *Poems*, 56-57, vv. 133-135.

[4] «Non lasciate Ciprigna per seguire / Delio, né contra lei tentate schermo; / ché Febo se le inchina ad obedire, / né può far altrimenti, se ben poi / gran piacer tragge in ciò dal suo servire. / Così dovete far ancora voi, / seguitando l'essempio di quell dio, / che v'infonde i concetti ed i pensier suoi» (Do not desert Cypris to follow after Delios, / or attempt to defend yourself against her. / For Phoebus himself bows down to obey her, / and he cannot do otherwise, though in the end / he takes great pleasure in service to her / so you, as well, must do the same, / imitating the example set by this god / who inspires you with his ideas and thoughts), *ivi*, 58-59, vv. 161-162. I would like to add another possible translation to the line «se ben poi gran piacer tragge» and change the 'though' to 'if' indicating that Phoebus, aware that great pleasure will follow his service, he is not able (or willing) to do otherwise.

[5] «Più mi giovi con fatti, e men di lodi» (Please me more with deeds and praise me less), *ivi*, 62-63, v. 58.

[6] «Voi ben sapete quel che m'è più caro / […] se mi darete quel che, benché vaglia / al mio giudicio assai, nulla a voi costa» (You know well what I most cherish / […] If you will give me what / though in my opinion has great value, cost you not a thing), *ivi*, 64-65, v. 103, and 66-67, vv. 140-141.

[7] «Febo, che serve all'amorosa dea, / e in dolce guiderdon da lei ottiene / quel che via più che l'esser dio il bea / a rivelar nel mio pensier ne viene / quei modi che con lui Venere adopra, / mentre in soavi abbracciamenti il tiene; / ond'io instrutta a quei so dar opra / sì ben nel letto, che d'Apollo a l'arte / questa ne va d'assai spazio di sopra, / e 'l mio

moves between these different talents, never moralistically ranking them, but instead making use of one or the other, according to the needs of the moment and the affirmation of her own argument, and ultimately, of her own persona.

The affirmation of one's own individuality, and the chastising reaction which it often produced, and still produces, in society is what shaped Marco Venier's words, the sumptuary rulings of the Ventian senate, the rubrics of Franco and Vecellio, the interpretation of Pedrocco and other art historians, as well as the *Dangerous Beauty* movie title, and even a most recent caption of a *National Geographic*'s photo of a lioness by photographer Beverly Joubert. The photo was part of the 2012 photo exhibit *Wild Supreme*, sponsored by *National Geographic*, and dedicated to the preservation of big cats. The photo, which shows a lioness in the tall grass of the savanna, is titled «Lioness of Lace, Mist and Finery» and a brief caption reads: «Lioness of lace, draped in mist and fineries, graceful and intense with an innate stare, that says: blood. In low light the dust particles hang in the air like a *fine veil of* a *Venetian courtesan, seductive but deadly*: she was hunting buffalos» [8].

This image of a female moving through tall grass as if it was a veil, brings us back to Helen Ettlinger's title «Visibilis et Invisibilis», which also perfectly suits Vecellio's description of the courtesan's behavior in I, 113. But Vecellio's rubric, as well as Joubert's caption, underlines the moral and physical danger hidden behind those veils. This is not the case with Ettlinger, where being visible and invisible becomes a way of social transformation and affirmation. In describing the women who populated the Italian Renaissance courts, Ettlinger offers a series of titles and possibilities, from *uxor* or consort, to «concubina», and again among them the «prima favorita» (the favored one) and even the maid [9]. And all of these women were honored ladies, who, in same cases, could become 'visible pseudo-

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cantar e 'l mio scriver in carte / s'oblìa da chi mi prova in questa guisa, / ch'a' suoi seguaci Venere comparte» (Phoebus, who serves the goddess of love, / and obtains from her as a sweet reward / what blesses him far more than being a god, / comes from her to reveal to my mind / the positions that Venus assumes with him / when she holds him in sweet embraces; / so that I, well taught in such matters, / know how to perform so well in bed / that this art exceeds Apollo's by far, / and my singing and writing are both forgotten / by the man who experiences me in this way, / which Venus reveals to people who serve her), *ivi*, 68-69, vv. 160-171.

[8] The italics are mine. The image and description of the exhibit can be found at Web, January 14, 2014, http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2012/06/07/wild-supreme-photo-exhibit-opens-in-nyc/.

[9] Hettlinger, «Visibilis et Invisibilis», 779.

wives' [10]. And if we continue the social spectrum of labels and possibilities, from the princely courts to the streets, Elisabeth Cohen's conclusion of her article entitled «'Courtesans' and 'Whores': Words and Behavior in Roman Streets», seems particularly appropriate:

> To her fellow Romans and, I would more tentatively suggest, to herself, she was at some moments 'donna', at others 'cortigiana', at others yet 'puttana'. [11]

And to Cohen's words I would add that it is such social amphibology, which allowed these women to climb the social ladder, populate courts, salons, «ridotti», and other spaces prohibited to them, and make a successful use of both their bodies and minds. A lesson in self-affirmation and individual freedom, which is still crucial today as it was five centuries ago.

[10] *Ivi*, 777.

[11] Elizabeth Cohen, «'Courtesans' and 'Whores': Words and Behavior in Roman Streets», *Women's Studies* 19 (1991): 206. Also by Elizabeth Cohen, «Seen and Known: Prostitutes in the Cityscape of Late-Sixteenth-Century Rome», *Renaissance Studies* 12, 3 (Sept. 1998): 392-409.

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