

# *Textual Collaboration and Spiritual Partnership in Sixteenth-Century Italy: The Case of Ortensio Lando and Lucrezia Gonzaga\**

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*The sixteenth-century writer Ortensio Lando (ca. 1512–ca. 1553) wrote many of his works pseudonymously and borrowed liberally from the works of others. Part of a community of professional writers who experimented with collaborative modes of literary production, Lando was also deeply invested in the currents of religious reform that swept through sixteenth-century Italy. In his extensive literary recourse to female personas, Lando privileged contemporary women who shared his own heterodox religious views. This essay examines Lando's female impersonations with particular attention to his use of Lucrezia Gonzaga da Gazzuolo (ca. 1521–76), whose complex literary relationship with Lando is illustrated by her presence throughout his literary corpus, and by his role in the book of Lettere published under her name. It argues that the relationship between these two figures can be best understood as a literary and spiritual partnership, one that meshed Lando's editorial expertise with Gonzaga's fame as a woman of extraordinary virtue and spiritual authority, a reputation that Lando himself helped to create. In an era when print publication by women was still far from common, such collaboration constituted an alternative path to literary expression.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The prolific sixteenth-century writer Ortensio Lando consistently tested the literary borders of genre, gender, and authorship. Lando composed treatises and letters, books of paradox and spiritual meditations, many of

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which were published pseudonymously — often under women’s names — and borrowed liberally from other works, including his own. A writer whose entire literary corpus would be placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1544, Lando had good reason to disguise the authorship of his works. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the elusive nature of Lando’s authorial persona and the views he expressed can be attributed in large part to his involvement in the heterodox religious culture of mid-sixteenth-century Italy.<sup>1</sup> Yet his consistent recourse to assumed personas, particularly female ones, raises interesting questions about the literary construction of gender and the interactions between men and women in the literary and religious culture of sixteenth-century Italy. Lando was part of a community of professional writers that included Nicolò Franco (1515–70), Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), Lodovico Dolce (1508–68), and Ludovico Domenichi (1515–64) — the so-called *poligrafi* described by Paul Grendler<sup>2</sup> — who experimented with different genres and strived to produce texts that would appeal to a growing commercial market for vernacular works. As Diana Robin has recently shown, these *poligrafi* worked increasingly closely with women writers, helping to bring their works to press and benefiting from their patronage.<sup>3</sup> Lando, however, is unique in his persistent and elaborate use of the voices and images of real women as frames and façades for his texts and as vehicles for the discourse within them. This masquerade resulted not only in accolades for Lando’s skillful literary impersonations but also in public fame and recognition for the women who inspired them. Lando played a fundamental role in what we may call the manufacture of female cultural reputation; in turn, the acquiescence and, in some instances, the active collaboration of these female muses conferred complexity and prestige on his literary projects and benefited his own literary reputation. In

<sup>1</sup>Although there was no codified heterodox position — the term connotes a general questioning of orthodox tenets in sixteenth-century Italy — heterodox views were influenced by Erasmus and Luther, particularly with regard to such issues as the reform of abuses within the Church, justification by faith alone, and the reading of scripture. Emphasizing the loosely organized nature of Italian heterodoxy, Rambaldi, 54, explains: “After the 1540s, the entire Italian heterodox movement was characterized by the formation of small groups that met clandestinely in private homes and cultivated bonds of friendship.” For a general discussion of Italian evangelism and heterodoxy, see Simoncelli; Gleason. On Lando’s position specifically, see Grendler; Seidel Menchi, 1974a, 1974b, and 1979; Daenens, 1999. On Lando and his works more generally, see also Seidel Menchi, 1994; Corsaro.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Grendler.

<sup>3</sup>Robin, xviii. On Lando as a professional writer who sought to meet the demands of a literary market, see Grendler. On the efforts of editors and publishers to promote women writers and patrons and to capitalize on readers’ interest in such texts, see Robin, esp. 51–57.

both regards, the masquerade served a deeper purpose beyond the commercial one, subtly articulating and circulating heterodox views among an audience of the initiated. Lando's female impersonations can therefore help us to think about modes of both textual and spiritual collaboration in sixteenth-century Italy in new ways.

The most extensive example of such a case is Lando's partnership with Lucrezia Gonzaga da Gazzuolo, a noblewoman from a minor branch of the ruling family whose complex relationship with Lando is illustrated by her prominence throughout his literary corpus and by his presence in her single published work. Gonzaga first appears as the author and recipient of a handful of letters in an anthology put together by Lando in 1548, the *Lettere di molte valorose donne* (*Letters of Many Valorous Women*), and again in his *Consolatorie* (*Letters of Consolation*) of 1550. She then assumes a much greater role as Lando's interlocutor and student in a religious dialogue published by him in 1552, the *Dialogo . . . nel quale si ragiona della consolatione & utilità che si gusta leggendo le Sacre Scritture* (*Dialogue . . . on the Consolation and Usefulness Enjoyed upon Reading the Holy Scriptures*) and as the subject of his admiration in his *Due panegirici* (*Two Panegyrics*) of the same year. Her literary presence culminates in a book of letters published under her name, also in 1552. This work, the *Lettere della signora Lucretia Gonzaga . . . a gloria del sesso femminile . . . in luce poste* (*Letters of the Lady Lucrezia Gonzaga . . . Published for the Glory of the Female Sex*), cemented Gonzaga's public image as a woman both learned and virtuous, detailing her girlhood studies in Latin and Greek under the tutelage of the writer Matteo Bandello, her early marriage to a notorious *condottiere* later arrested for trying to murder the Duke of Ferrara, and her dutiful efforts on her husband's behalf despite his crimes. Although Gonzaga's contemporaries admired her literary talents, some recent scholarship has suggested that her letterbook was the work of Lando: his most outrageous and elaborate work of epistolary impersonation yet, eclipsing even his anthology of *Lettere di molte valorose donne*.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the little modern attention to Gonzaga has focused almost entirely on this problem of attribution, privileging the role of Lando in the volume while dismissing that of Gonzaga.

While Lando's influence may be present in this work at an editorial level, however, such wholesale attribution of Gonzaga's letters to Lando overreaches for a number of reasons, including archival evidence of

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Seidel Menchi, 1979, 575, n. 7; most recently, Steland. I was not able to take into consideration a new edition of Gonzaga's *Lettere*, which was published after this article was completed: see Gonzaga, 2009.

Gonzaga's activity as a letter-writer and contemporary recognition of her as an accomplished author. Perhaps more importantly, such an approach fails to address the complex and bidirectional nature of the literary interaction between Lando and Gonzaga, and the issues of gender and literary impersonation that arise from it. Regardless of whether or to what extent Gonzaga penned the letters published in her letterbook, it is clear from their repeated literary invocations of one another that Lando and Gonzaga had a long and mutually beneficial association. Each influenced and profited the other throughout this association: Lando by using Gonzaga's name and persona both to authorize and enliven his works, Gonzaga by the celebrity and fame she gained through Lando's repeated invocations of her virtue. Not only did their collaboration bring increased literary recognition to them both, but it also reflects deeper connections that bound the two together. Like Lando, Gonzaga was immersed in the heterodox religious currents that swept through much of Italy in the mid-sixteenth century, sharing many of the convictions held by the Italian *spirituali* regarding justification by faith alone (*sola fides*), the privileging of the Gospels, and a deemphasis of the sacraments.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Gonzaga would be prosecuted toward the end of her life by the Inquisition of Mantua, questioned on an article of faith that had once brought Lando to the attention of Church authorities in Venice.<sup>6</sup> Not only did Lando and Gonzaga's partnership advance the literary stature of both over a period of several years, but it also served as a means to circulate religious views that would become increasingly controversial with the passage of the decades.

This essay examines the problem of Lando's female impersonation as a literary strategy in the years leading up to the publication of Gonzaga's *Lettere*. Why did Lando repeatedly assume female guises throughout his

<sup>5</sup>Recent work on the Italian *spirituali* and other Reformist circles in Italy includes Bowd; Brundin, 2008; Furey, 2006. Schutte, 1989, provides a useful overview of the shifts in historiographical periodization of the Reform period in Italy.

<sup>6</sup>Daenens, 1994, 672, n. 17, cites the heresy trial of Pietro de Meis, who attributed his views on points of faith, including purgatory, to discussions with Lando and Vincenzo Maggi. Lucrezia Gonzaga's trial for heresy seems to have included a similar doctrinal deviation regarding purgatory, although she protests vigorously in an autograph letter to one of her sisters that she is shocked at having been named by the Inquisition: ASM, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, fols. 370–71; in Pagano, 24, n. 69 (see Appendix below, letter VI, and fig. 1). I have not been able to locate the documents from Gonzaga's trials, which may have been lost, but the trial is referred to in a series of letters sent by Camillo Campeggi, the Inquisitor in Mantua, preserved in the Archivio del Sant'Uffizio at the Vatican (now the Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede) (cf. Pagano, 40, n. 14) and Gonzaga's name arises in several other trials, including those of Endimio Calandra (1567) and Odoardo Thiene (1571): see *ibid.*, 262, 323, 326; Seidel Menchi, 1994, 535–37.

career, and what did he hope to gain from writing in the female voice that he could not otherwise accomplish?<sup>7</sup> Are Lando's female impersonations most accurately characterized as appropriations of the female voice, or do they result from a more complex dynamic? This essay also investigates Lando's use of the persona of Lucrezia Gonzaga throughout his works, and his role — which became progressively more complex during the four-year period of their association — in contributing to the creation of this persona. Although critics often mention Gonzaga in relation to Lando, little serious study has been made of her or of their association.<sup>8</sup> By examining their shared literary history leading up to 1552, however, we may open a window on a new kind of literary and cultural relationship, one based on collaboration and cooperation. Ultimately, we can more usefully understand the Gonzaga letterbook as the product of a partnership, one that meshed Lando's editorial expertise and knowledge of the literary market with the literary potential and exemplary reputation of Gonzaga, in the process joining two like minds in a common goal, that of spreading their evangelistic views. In an era when print publication of women was still much less common than that of men, such collaboration constituted an alternative path to literary and spiritual expression than the conventional one of single authorship.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>By “female voice” I do not mean to suggest an innately feminine quality to women's writing; rather, I refer to the concept of a writing that was intended to reflect — in its style, content, or authorship — a female experience. Ideas about what constitute a “female voice” are, of course, the reflection of cultural concepts of gender at any given time. For a discussion of the manipulation of a female-gendered voice in one early modern context, see Daybell.

<sup>8</sup>On Lando and Gonzaga, see Ray, 2009, 45–120. See also Griguolo, 1988; Malavasi, 301–14.

<sup>9</sup>Scholars have begun to address the rich modes of early modern authorship in interesting ways: see, for example, McKenzie on the sociology of texts; Ezell on social authorship; and North on the facets and functions of anonymity. There are many cases in which different kinds of literary partnerships allowed learned women to achieve a larger degree of recognition and exposure. For example, poets such as Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna were promoted by male supporters in various poetic and epistolary anthologies: on several such anthologies, see Robin, 41–78. Tullia d'Aragona appears as an interlocutor in Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo sull'Amore*, and later published her own Neoplatonic work, perhaps in response to the one-dimensional portrait of her offered by Speroni: see Smarr, 106–17. Kirkham describes the creative partnership of the poet Laura Battiferra and her husband, the artist Bartolomeo Ammannati. The protracted (and exclusively positive) nature of Lando's literary and spiritual relationship with Gonzaga, however, seems to be unique.

## 2. LANDO'S FEMALE VENTRILOQUISM

The earliest major example of Lando writing as a woman is the spiritual treatise *Della vera tranquillità dell'animo* (*On the True Peace of the Spirit*, 1544), which bears the name not of Lucrezia Gonzaga but of Isabella Sforza (1503–61), an illegitimate daughter of a branch of the powerful Milanese family. Scholars have attributed this work to Lando on the basis of similarities to Lando's other works as well as contemporary evidence supporting his authorship; Sforza's role as a partner in the volume's conception and production is unknown.<sup>10</sup> What little biographical information exists regarding Isabella Sforza suggests that she was known, at least for a time, to espouse the spiritualist and quietistic views attributed to her in this treatise.<sup>11</sup> As the title suggests, the *Vera tranquillità dell'animo* celebrates faith as an internal experience — a kind of personal illumination — and as a serenity that derives from the certainty of salvation: as Francine Daenens explains, “an inner peace . . . with a clear connotation of reformist dogma.”<sup>12</sup> Lando, whose belief in justification by faith alone and in the direct and exclusive reading of holy scripture is reflected in many of his works,<sup>13</sup> may have been Sforza's spiritual guide, although in the treatise's *dedicatoria* he acknowledges her superiority; and this text, as Daenens has shown, contributed in a major way to solidifying Sforza's fame on the basis of her religious views.<sup>14</sup> Although the *Vera tranquillità* quietly echoed the

<sup>10</sup>Given the attribution of this work to Lando in the sixteenth century and the lack of evidence to suggest that Sforza authored it or any other literary work, I am less inclined to argue for her intensive collaboration here than in the case of Lucrezia Gonzaga. The most recent biographic studies of Sforza are Daenens, 1994 and 2000; see also Ratti, 2:172–82. Lando's contemporary Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter attributed the treatise to Lando: on Lando and Widmanstetter, see Fahy.

<sup>11</sup>Literary sources such as Lodovico Domenichi's anthology of *Rime* and Anton Francesco Doni's *Lettere* (both 1544) seem to confirm this portrait, stressing Sforza's religious austerity and serenity of faith: cf. Daenens, 2000, 36–37.

<sup>12</sup>Daenens, 1994, 667: “quiete dell'anima . . . con una chiara connotazione dogmatica riformata.” Ibid., 694, speculates that when Sforza later distanced herself from the *spirituali* and the views attributed to her in the treatise she met with Lando's disapproval and their relationship ended: she is no longer mentioned in his works after 1550.

<sup>13</sup>For example, in Lando, 1550d (*Vita del Beato Ermodoro*), which emphasizes the *imitatio Christi* through poverty, humility, and solitude. Most of Lando's works are characterized by what Seidel Menchi, 1974a, 252, terms “*exclusivismo biblico*,” an emphasis on the Bible as the one true book, a position that aligns itself with the views of Anabaptists in the Veneto region, about whom see Stella, 1967 and 1969.

<sup>14</sup>Without, Daenens, 2000, 35–56, argues, taking sufficient account of the realities of her social position: see also Seidel Menchi, 1994, 505, n. 17. For Lando as Sforza's spiritual guide, see Daenens, 2000, 35.

fundamental tenet — that mankind is justified by faith alone — of the very popular, and even more controversial, *Beneficio di Cristo* (banned in 1549), in 1544 similar views could still be expressed prudently with some liberty, and Daenens argues that Lando's use of Sforza as a persona had more to do with his wish to benefit from her family and political connections than with an effort to hide behind her identity as a purely protective mechanism.<sup>15</sup>

While Lando may well have been seeking Sforza's social and political prestige, spiritual partnerships between men and women were not uncommon among the heterodox circles of this period. As Robin's study illustrates, proponents of the *spirituali* movement — of which Sforza's text bears the influence — exchanged ideas with one another against the backdrop of vibrant salons throughout Italy, such as those presided over by Giulia Gonzaga (1513–66) and Juan de Valdés (1509[?]-41) in Naples and by Vittoria Colonna (1490[?]-1547) and Costanza d'Avalos (1460–1541) in Ischia.<sup>16</sup> Like men, women were deeply involved in the dissemination of new religious doctrine. The exchanges between Juan de Valdés and Giulia Gonzaga; between Vittoria Colonna, Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564), and Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500–58); and between other members of similar partnerships played an important role in the circulation of heterodox and Reformist thought, leading in many cases to literary production in support of it.<sup>17</sup> Abigail Brundin speculates, for example, that Colonna's acquaintance with Ochino, whom she followed throughout Italy to hear preach, inspired the famed poet's innovative form of spiritual *petrarchismo*: “[Ochino's] influence could well have led Colonna to consider the poetic potential of evangelism and, vice versa, the enormous evangelizing potential of poetry.”<sup>18</sup> More broadly, Constance Furey notes that educated and talented laywomen such as Colonna held a special authority among *spirituali*

<sup>15</sup>Daenens, 2000, 47. Daenens, 1994, 665–67, notes, however, that because Lando had incurred controversy with his previous publication, the *Paradossi*, he had particular need of Sforza's connections for this one, which was published with the reputable press Manuzio and with all the necessary licenses and privileges. On the emergence of the *Vera tranquillità* in parallel with the *Beneficio di Cristo*, see *ibid.*, 665–66; on the *Beneficio del Cristo*, see Caponetto.

<sup>16</sup>On the origins and development of these and other similar salons, see Robin, esp. 1–40, who investigates their subsequent relocation to the environment of print in anthologies such as those published by Lodovico Domenichi in Lucca and Gabriel Giolito in Venice.

<sup>17</sup>Notably in the case of Valdés's *Alfabeto cristiano* and Ochino's *Dialogi sette*: on these texts, see Robin, 18–26, 163–69.

<sup>18</sup>Brundin, 2002, 68. Furey, 2006, 87, notes that Colonna conceptualizes her writing as a form of spiritual practice, as in her sonnet “Qual digiuno augellin.” On Colonna's interactions with Pole and Ochino, see also Firpo, 1988.

circles, where they were seen as fusing humanist ideals about learning with a nonintellectual, feminized spirituality.<sup>19</sup> From this position, women such as Colonna, Isabella Sforza, and Lucrezia Gonzaga could participate in intellectual culture without transgressing gender norms, using their status as promoters of Reformist ideas to authorize their appearance in the literary sphere.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that the *Vera tranquillità*, with its exhortations to profound inner peace, its privileging of scripture, and its spirit of compromise over radical reform, rests on a spiritual foundation that linked Lando and Sforza through their shared beliefs. Lando's female impersonation, however, must also be seen within the cultural context of the *querelle des femmes* and the defense-of-women texts to which this debate gave rise throughout the mid-sixteenth century. Nearly all of Lando's works are marked to some degree by the cultural polemics over women, and the *Vera tranquillità* is no exception. The work's dedicatory letter, signed "il Tranquillo" with one of Lando's pseudonyms, explains that, although he had been working on a similar religious treatise himself, intended for Paolino Manfredi of Lucca (a hotbed of heterodoxy), he found Isabella's far superior to his own and decided to publish it instead.<sup>21</sup> Through this pretext, Lando highlights Sforza's literary achievement (as well as her increased spiritual authority) with regard to his own: the female student has overtaken the male teacher. (Several years later, in his *Dialogo* on scripture, Lando relocated himself in the position of authority, with Lucrezia Gonzaga as his pupil.) The *Vera tranquillità* functions both as a religious treatise — an advocacy of complete detachment from the joys and trials of the world — and as a celebration of the female author's extraordinary moral and religious virtue and literary ability. The exaltation of women's intellectual and moral qualities was at the heart of a wide range of literary works in the early modern period, from Juan Luis Vives's influential *De institutione feminae christianae* (*The Education of a Christian Woman*, 1524) to later works such

<sup>19</sup>Furey, 2004, 3–4: "A kind of religious authority accrued to these women — an authority derived from existing notions of patron, muse, and intercessor that men and women of letters reworked to create a new image of learned, spiritual virtuosos."

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>21</sup>See Sforza, 3<sup>v</sup>: "nor should you marvel in the least . . . that a woman should be capable of writing so well . . . being of the highest intellect, the most formidable memory, and a great repository of wise sayings" ("né vi prenda di ciò meraviglia alcuna . . . che sí dottamente possa scrivere una donna . . . essendo di ingegno elevatissima, di memoria tenacissima, e grandissima osservatrice de savi detti"). The pseudonym *il Tranquillo* was used by Lando after becoming a member of the Accademia degli Elevati of Ferrara in 1540. On Lando's pseudonyms, see Seidel Menchi, 1994, 505; Grendler, 36–37.



as Lucrezia Marinella's *Della nobiltà et eccellenza delle donne* (*On the Nobility and Excellence of Women*, 1600) and Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* (*The Worth of Women*, 1600).

Whether or not such discussions were rhetorical, or, rather, reflected the progressive social views of their authors, they brought women's experience and the obstacles they faced to the forefront of literary debate, as Albert J. Rabil, Jr., points out in his edition of one such fundamental contribution, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentiae foeminei sexus* (*Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 1529).<sup>22</sup> They contributed to a renewed interest in literary discussions of all aspects of female experience, as the sheer number of texts that touch on the topic — including medical manuals, domestic handbooks, and books of secrets — attests.<sup>23</sup> While these texts, which proliferated throughout the sixteenth century, spoke both to an increasing interest in women's experience and an expanding public of women readers, few were actually written by women, who still faced greater obstacles to print publication than did men.<sup>24</sup> Thus writers and publishers faced a kind of editorial paradox: the market for women's texts was there, but the authorship was not. Lando's choice of a female persona in the *Vera tranquillità*, then, stemmed not only from an effort to seek access to Isabella's patronage and social and political connections, as well as to circulate heterodox religious views, but also from a desire to capitalize on a growing demand for texts concerned with women, an interest fueled by, but certainly not limited to, the humanist context of the *querelle des femmes*. As evidenced by the variety of his publications, Lando was an astute assessor of literary trends, trying his hand at a range of genres with market appeal. In mid-sixteenth-century Italy female authorship, real or assumed, added interest and the aura of authenticity to works relating to the woman question and increased their appeal. The debate over women thus became an integral part of Lando's literary production beginning with the *Vera tranquillità* in 1544 as Lando — whether motivated by the demands of the literary market,

<sup>22</sup>Rabil, 13.

<sup>23</sup>Campbell highlights the ways in which the debate gave rise to dialogues on the subject in a variety of settings, including pastoral and treatise.

<sup>24</sup>Despite the emerging primacy of the vernacular in Italy that fostered the entry into the literary arena of marginalized groups with limited access to formal, humanist educations, including women (described in Dionisotti), the number of women who published their works in print was fewer than the number of men, although it certainly began to rise. On the importance of considering manuscript as well as print production when assessing women's literary production, and for an incisive critique of Dionisotti's periodization, see Cox, 2008, 82–84.

the desire to test his own rhetorical skill, or a genuine defense of women — began adopting women's voices to frame his discussions of literature, religion, and culture.

Subsequent to his portrayal of Isabella Sforza, Lando did not abandon her, but rather made her a protagonist in his next experiment with the female voice, the *Lettere di molte valorose donne* of 1548, an epistolary anthology that is worth examining here in some detail. A text that defies easy categorization and analysis, the *Valorose donne* has often been dismissed as an oddity, a minor project thrown together by Lando in response to market demand for women's letters.<sup>25</sup> Here some 250 letters on subjects ranging from marriage and childbirth to religion and literature, including several attributed to Sforza and to Lucrezia Gonzaga, constitute a stunningly complex impersonation of gender on Lando's part, one that has never received the attention it deserves.<sup>26</sup> The only anthology of the period to consist entirely of letters exchanged between women, Lando's epistolary experiment participates in two concurrent literary trends: the interest in texts relating to women's experience described above, and the new vogue for vernacular letter collections that began with Pietro Aretino in 1538 and continued well into the next century.<sup>27</sup> While the vast majority of epistolary texts published in this period were authored by men and not by women, letter-writing was commonly theorized as a feminine genre, one that required the feminine qualities of sentiment and spontaneity rather than the

<sup>25</sup>For example, Grendler, 34, dismisses the *Valorose donne* as mere "hackwork for Giolito . . . edited (and probably partly written) by Lando." The market interest in epistolary writing by women is attested to by the publication of a variety of women's letterbooks over the course of the sixteenth century, including works by Vittoria Colonna (1544), Veronica Franco (1580), and Chiara Matraini (1595), as well as by the inclusion of women's letters in anthologies such as Paolo Manuzio's *Lettere volgari di diversi uomini eccellentissimi* (1545). The *Lettere amoroze di Madonna Celia Romana* (1562) and Girolamo Parabosco's *Lettere amoroze* (1564) — which included a group of letters written in a female voice — each went through numerous editions.

<sup>26</sup>Exceptions are Bellucci; Ray, 2001 and 2009; and Daenens, 1999, a valuable resource both for a possible interpretation of the text as well as for the identification of the women represented in it. See also Pezzini. The anthology contains just over a dozen letters attributed to or addressed to Isabella Sforza and two attributed or addressed to Lucrezia Gonzaga. Five letters are attributed to Lucrezia's sister, Isabella of Puvino, who was evidently of greater interest to Lando at this stage than Lucrezia herself.

<sup>27</sup>Although it was not uncommon for the occasional woman's letter to be inserted into predominately male anthologies — Manuzio's *Lettere volgari*, for example, contains six letters by women: four by Vittoria Colonna and two by Veronica Gambara — a collection comprised solely of women's letters was in 1548 an anomaly. Women's letter collections became more common in subsequent decades.

masculine qualities of reason and art: literary models of female epistolarity from Ovid's *Heroides* to Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* fueled this characterization.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence there was great interest in, and admiration for, examples of female epistolarity in sixteenth-century Italy — if not a wide supply of such texts.<sup>29</sup> Lando's anthology thus capitalized on an interest in women's experience and, more specifically, in women as writers of letters, that was coupled with the conviction that men, with proper instruction, could convincingly learn to write like women.<sup>30</sup> Like the *Vera tranquillità*, the *Valorose donne* proposes to showcase and publish the real writing of women: here, the letters have been "collected from a variety of places and written by wise women."<sup>31</sup> Even more explicitly than the *Vera tranquillità*, the *Valorose donne* stakes a position within the ongoing *querelle des femmes*, claiming in the dedicatory letter that the purpose of the collection is to show the range of female erudition and defend women against their detractors, "so that wicked tongues, enemies of women's honor, stunned, might cease to bite and wound women, indeed . . . that they might now learn to respect and honor this most noble sex."<sup>32</sup> Although a number of the letters do focus on the praise of women, it is difficult to discern any dominant point of view

<sup>28</sup>The success of an epistolary text such as the *Lettere amorose di Madonna Celia Romana*, serves as a case in point: touching on the major elements of female epistolarity — sentiment, passion, despair, absence — the book was enormously popular and was reprinted numerous times. On the woman letter-writer as a figure of passion and suffering, see Jensen. On the popularity of Ovid's *Heroides* and Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* in the sixteenth century, see Hagedorn.

<sup>29</sup>Although the real flowering of women's vernacular epistolary collections came after the 1552 publication of Lucrezia Gonzaga's *Lettere* (see n. 25 above), a few small collections preceded it, such as Vittoria Colonna's spiritual letters (1544). There were many Latin models for women's letters dating to the previous century, for example in the work of the humanist writers Cassandra Fedele, Isotta Nogarola, and Laura Cereta. On early modern women's vernacular letterbooks with particular reference to Gonzaga, Franco, Andreini, and Tarabotti, see Ray, 2009.

<sup>30</sup>As dozens of Renaissance epistolary formularies attest, letter-writing came increasingly to be considered a skill that could be acquired by imitating models, many of which offered specific advice on constructing the gendered epistolary voice, with sections explaining not only how to write to a woman, but also how to write like a woman. It was artistry, not authenticity, that counted. The extensive female impersonation of a work like Lando's *Valorose donne* would have attracted the admiration and interest of readers regardless of the real sex of the author.

<sup>31</sup>Lando, 1548 (hereafter *Valorose donne*), 2<sup>r</sup>: "da vari luoghi raccolte et da savie donne scritte."

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 2<sup>r-v</sup>: "accioché le mali lingue nemiche degli onori femminili, sbigotite si rimanessero di mordere, e di lacerar le donne, anzi . . . imparassero ormai a riverire et onorare questo nobilissimo sesso." For printed works, I have modernized the original's spelling, accents, and punctuation.

in the collection, for, in typical Landian fashion, one letter's argument is frequently contested by another.<sup>33</sup> A deeper reading reveals the anthology's inconsistencies with regard to a defense of women, indicating that it was composed as a rhetorical experiment in *querelle des femmes* discourse.

This was not the first time that Lando had purported to present the voices of a group of women, as opposed to the single female voice of the *Vera tranquillità*: his *Paradossi* (1543) attributes part of its content to women, and his later *Consolatorie* and *Ragionamenti familiari* (both 1550) do the same. However, the *Valorose donne* is a particularly elaborate case of female impersonation, mixing letters attributed to women who really existed with those of other women who were almost certainly invented by Lando. Although published anonymously, the anthology was widely recognized as Lando's work by contemporaries such as Anton Francesco Doni (1513–74), who in his *Libreria* of 1550 listed it under Lando's name;<sup>34</sup> this attribution has been accepted by most critics over the centuries who agree that the overall stylistic uniformity of the volume attests to Lando's hand in its production.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the content of the letters — which in addition to discussions of women's issues such as marriage and childbearing includes evaluations of various professions, recipes for miraculous remedies, stern letters of consolation, and stories of bizarre deaths — points to Lando's presence, echoing themes addressed in his other works. For example, many of the arguments taken up in the *Valorose donne*'s numerous moral letters, such as the

<sup>33</sup>Although the paradox is a central rhetorical tool for Lando, in many of his other works it serves to strengthen a particular point by approaching it from both sides. In the *Valorose donne*, by contrast, no such resolution is achieved, and the paradox serves rather to showcase Lando's ability to argue any subject, point, or point of view, and to mimic the multiplicity of epistolary exchange. On Lando's use of the paradox, see Grendler, 31.

<sup>34</sup>Doni, 27<sup>r</sup>. Although Lando's name does not appear on the frontispiece, it figures in a postscript by Bartolommeo Pestalozza naming him as the compiler of the anthology: "Here, studious reader, are letters . . . that were collected by Ortensio Lando from many parts of Italy, with much effort, and much expense" (*ibid.*, 161<sup>v</sup>), and again in a sonnet by Francesco Sansovino appended to the text and addressed to the "Onorato M. Ortensio." Lando's only other appearance is within certain of the letters themselves, for example, when Lucietta Soranza writes to Lucretia Masippa that "Messer Ortensio . . . was oddly scandalized by you": *Valorose donne*, 32<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>35</sup>See, for example, Bongi, 1965, 1:213, who writes that Lando's authorship is proven by the "identical nature of language, style, and expression among all the *Valorose donne*, and its similarity to [Lando's] other works"; Bellucci, 263, who, while admitting the letters could be "genuine," finds that "overall, the *Valorose donne* are uniform in style and governed by a homogeneous logic and a clear criteria of organization"; Seidel Menchi, 1994, 504, who notes more generally that the "unifying element" of all of Lando's texts, both anonymous and signed, "*is not the identity of the author*: it is the stylistic homogeneity, the unmistakable stamp of a careless and incoherent prose" (italics in original).

perils of avarice, lust, and women's unrestrained speech, reappear in other Landian texts, such as the *Ragionamenti familiari*, while the unsentimental letters of consolation contained in the *Valorose donne* echo sentiments expressed in the *Paradossi* and the *Consolatorie*.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the frequent use of the paradox, juxtaposing letters arguing for and against a particular position, and of the *dubbio*, which employs long lists of rhetorical questions, further suggests Lando's presence, recalling structural techniques he employs elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the rhetorical similarities between the *Valorose donne* and Lando's other works, the anthology also shares cultural concerns often expressed by Lando. The *Valorose donne* is not only an exercise in assuming the female voice, but a vehicle for broader cultural critique.<sup>38</sup> For example, the letters' constant recourse to long lists of classical and modern *exempla*, particularly in discussions both for and against women's literary aptitude and activity, fits neatly into the *querelle* context, but the long lists of women worthies furnished there also serve another purpose. Gleaned, often verbatim, from the *Officina*, a humanist repertory Lando freely plunders in a number of his other works, such rote recitation functions as a critique of the humanist culture Lando had come to find empty, inferior to the one true source of knowledge, scripture.<sup>39</sup> Silvana Seidel Menchi and Sabina Pezzini have shown that some of the letters in the anthology derive from other sources as well, including works by Erasmus and Equicola, reflecting Lando's practice — not uncommon in the early modern period — of copying and translating other works in his own.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, Lando's

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, Lando, 1550c (hereafter the *Ragionamenti*), 15, 24, 39, 42. In the *Valorose donne*, 78<sup>r-v</sup>, for example, the Marchesa di Meregnano consoles a widowed friend that sudden death at least spares us becoming "hateful to relatives and friends," while Contessa Tassona Etrata accuses the grieving Isabella Tassona Beltrama of envying her father for preceding her to a happier state: rather than mourn him, she ought rejoice for him (ibid., 97<sup>r-v</sup>). Similarly, in the *Consolatoria del S. Nicolò delli Alberti, alla S. Agnesa di Besta nella morte d'un suo figliuolo*, 7, the bereaved mother is reminded: "you should . . . rejoice in your soul" rather than mourn, and the *Paradossi* include compositions entitled "It is better to die, than to live a long life" ("Meglio è morire, che longamente campare") and "There is no reason to grieve the death of one's wife" ("Non essere da dolersi che la moglie muoia").

<sup>37</sup>Paradox is a central element, obviously, of Lando's *Paradossi*, as well as the *Ragionamenti*, which contains letter-treatises both for and against a variety of subjects.

<sup>38</sup>Ray, 2001.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. On Lando's use of the *Officina* and other source material in his other works, see Cherchi, 1979 and 1980.

<sup>40</sup>On the phenomenon of *risrittura* among early modern writers, see Cherchi, 1998a and b; see also Quondam. On Lando's incorporation of Erasmus, see Seidel Menchi, 1987; on his reuse of Equicola's *Libro di natura d'amore* as well as Betussi's *Raverta* in the *Valorose donne*, see Pezzini.

assumption of female personas in the *Valorose donne* merely adds another dimension to an intertextual literary practice to which terms like *authentic* and *original* are ill-applied.

If these pseudo-erudite letters are the product of Lando's intertextual practice, which is linked in turn to his critical stance toward humanist learning, they are also connected to a subtext of *spiritualismo* similar to that found in the *Vera tranquillità*. As is often remarked, epistolary texts reveal important information through the networks of correspondents they address. Many of the learned female protagonists of the *Valorose donne*, including Isabella Sforza and Giulia Gonzaga, are deliberately chosen, as Daenens has noted, for their relevance to the heterodox sensibility the letters convey beneath the façade of the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>41</sup> For example, the very first letter in the collection, an exchange between Isabella Sforza and Bona Sforza, Queen of Poland, suggests that the anthology may be read as a covert exposition of certain views shared by reform-minded Italians. Reminding Bona that she is now a role model for all women, Isabella advises: "It will behoove you, my lady, prudently to dissimulate many things, and to know everything."<sup>42</sup> According to Daenens, the verb *dissimulare* stands as a Nicodemitic sign of the text's hidden core of religious dissent, a reminder that one's outer appearance need not correspond to one's true beliefs — an attitude adopted by many among Italy's heterodox circles during the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Heterodoxy is without question an important element in the *Valorose donne*, most frequently in letters regarding scripture, which presage later discussion by Lando and Lucrezia Gonzaga in Lando's *Dialogo* on scripture.<sup>44</sup> As we see in both texts, scripture, for Lando, freed of the complications and distortions of interpretation, commentary, and allegory, stands at the base of religion.<sup>45</sup>

For example, a letter attributed to Giovanna Cavalleria in the *Valorose donne* praises scripture over all other forms of writing: in true Landoian fashion,

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Daenens, 1999, 183: "only if isolated from historical context can they seem to be an arbitrary gallery of illustrious women or an abstract paradigm."

<sup>42</sup>*Valorose donne*, 3<sup>a</sup>: "Converavi, Signora, molte cose prudentemente dissimulare, e il tutto però sapere."

<sup>43</sup>Daenens, 1999, 183. The Nicodemitic position is that the prudent expression of one's religious views can be more effective than an open proclamation that might result in imprisonment, exile, or even death. On this subject, see Ginzburg.

<sup>44</sup>Grendler, 120, notes that "Throughout his life, Lando emphasized Scripture as the foundation of religion"; Lando, 1552a (hereafter the *Dialogo*), is entirely devoted to the discussion of scripture. In spite of its tendency to stray from orthodoxy, Lando himself must not have thought the *Dialogo* a risk, for it is one of the few books published under his own name: cf. Grendler, 125.

<sup>45</sup>An "antidote," as Grendler, 120, notes, "for the ills of the Church."

Giovanna resorts to extensive lists to make her point, arguing that having read widely herself, she regrets it. She fervently asserts her devotion to scripture, the only true book: “Ever since I came to know the holy Cross, I have wished never to have read anything but the divine scripture; I wish I had consumed this holy book as God commanded through the prophet; I wish I had turned it into nectar and blood because it would have been as a lantern at my feet.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Francesca Ruvisa urges a simple, straightforward approach to scripture as the true path to God: “if you treat the holy scripture with humility, not ambition (as many do these days), you will have the Holy Spirit for your teacher.”<sup>47</sup> Isabella Sforza herself commends Fulvia Colonna for having begun to study scripture, and encourages her not to be overwhelmed by commentators who distort and corrupt it; elsewhere she complains to Isabetta Castigliona that priests stray too far from scripture in their sermons: “these preachers of ours seem to me not preachers and ministers of the word of God, but performers; it would certainly seem to me less of a sin to go to see the Circean or Nemean games, if they still existed, than to listen to these charlatans who recount their dreams with cabalistic fictions, and ignore the holy mysteries of scripture.”<sup>48</sup> In contrast, a letter from Apollonia Rovella to Leonora da Vertema praises a priest who interprets scripture faithfully: “He is not puffed up, nor pompous, he doesn’t spout sesquipedalian words, he doesn’t claim to be a prophet, he is sparing with allegory knowing that it is not an effective means for teaching the dogma of the faith.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Valorose donne*, 18<sup>v</sup>–20<sup>v</sup>: “non vorrei da che appresi la santa Croce aver mai letto altra cosa che la divina scrittura; vorrei aver mangiato questo sacro volume come per il profeta Iddio comandò; vorrei avermelo convertito in succo et in sangue perché egli sarebbe stato come una lucerna a’ piedi miei.” This sentiment is repeated in Lando’s *Dialogo*, 32<sup>v</sup>: “study nothing but this holy text, devour it . . . transform it to nectar & blood, so that it will be as a light at your feet.”

<sup>47</sup> *Valorose donne*, 146<sup>v</sup>–147<sup>r</sup>: “se con umiltà trattarete la sacra scrittura, e non ambiziosamente (come oggidì molti fanno) avrete per vostro maestro lo Spirito Santo.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 35<sup>r</sup>: “questi nostri predicatori mi paiono non predicatori e ministri della parola d’Iddio, ma istrioni; certamente parrebbero di commettere minor peccato andando a vedere i giuochi Circensi o li Nemei, se ora si usassero, che ad udir questi parabolani che ci contano i lor sogni con le lor cabalistiche fizioni, et lasciano star i sacri misteri della scrittura.” Cf. also *ibid.*, 26<sup>v</sup>–27<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 37<sup>v</sup>–38<sup>v</sup>: “Non è gonfio, non è pettoruto, non sputa parole sesquipedali, non si vendica spirito di profezia, usa parcamente le allegorie conoscendo per il lor mezo non potersi efficacemente insegnar i dogmi della fede.” Numerous similar examples abound in the *Valorose donne*, see, for example, Margherita Pellegrina’s letter (*ibid.*, 47<sup>r</sup>–48<sup>r</sup>), which sums up Lando’s distrust in the trappings of Christianity and his desire for a pure, stripped-down reliance on the Bible.

For Lando, the misuse of religion verges on superstition, and superstition in all forms is anathema to him.<sup>50</sup> Lando's opinions are certainly provocative: it is perhaps to the credit of the elaborate disguise he enacts in the *Valorose donne* that they have passed largely unnoticed over the centuries.<sup>51</sup> Lando's emphasis on scripture thus combines a heterodox sensibility with a more general manifestation of his rejection of humanist learning to launch a pointed social and cultural critique: if the Bible represents the true source of all learning, then humanist erudition, as well as biblical commentary, is unnecessary.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, however, other groups of letters in the *Valorose donne* that deal with quotidian aspects of early modern women's lives such as pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation — as well as education and erudition — are set firmly against the backdrop of the woman question, seemingly in response to the many male-authored efforts to codify female experience that circulated in early modern Italy, from humanist texts like Matteo Palmieri's 1439 *La vita civile* (which took up the problem of breastfeeding) to the *libri di segreti*, or books of secrets, that provided tips for healthy pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>53</sup> Clearly there was an audience for such discussions, but most of the authors dealing with them spoke only from the male perspective. If the male voice had traditionally conferred authority on literary texts, in the case of the *Valorose donne* it is the many voices of female experience that purport to add authenticity. Lando grants the reader a seemingly intimate glimpse into the private world of women, a female network in which advice and comfort are shared.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Interestingly, several letters in the anthology attributed to Isabella Sforza paint her as a dupe of fraudulent beliefs — specifically, alchemy — seemingly reflecting a divergence of paths between the former spiritual partners. See, for example, Isabella's detailed description of a miraculous distilled water that cures leprosy, cleans soiled laundry, clears the vision, and preserves youth in *ibid.*, 114<sup>r-v</sup>. On the presumed falling out between Lando and Sforza, see n. 12 above.

<sup>51</sup>A notable exception is Daenens, 1999.

<sup>52</sup>See Grendler, 124, on Lando's *Dialogo* on scripture, whose comments are equally applicable to the *Valorose donne*: "In a corollary to his rejection of Renaissance learning, Lando argued that the Bible was superior to all other models of conduct and learning . . . scripture was better than Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch . . . for teaching virtue." Lando would seem to echo Erasmus's promise to put aside all other scholarship in order to study the Bible: see Furey, 2004, 20.

<sup>53</sup>Palmieri, 17–20; see also Dolce, 6<sup>v</sup>; Rabil, 57–59. Also, see books of secrets such as Celebrino, 11<sup>v</sup>; Piemontese, 90–91.

<sup>54</sup>In keeping with Lando's affinity for paradox, however, he appears both to admire the knowledge passed along this route, and to mock it. For example, Maddalena Delli Alberti's letter to Cassandra Lanfreducci derides her for the excessive time she spends attending to her skin: so intent is Cassandra on keeping her face smooth with mixtures of egg yolks, dried hare's blood, and horse's urine that she completely neglects her household, leaving her husband and children to go about in rags. Yet these were common recipes: see, for example, Cortese, 100; Celebrino, 3<sup>v</sup>–4<sup>r</sup>. See also Marinello, 159.



The complex gender impersonation of the *Valorose donne*, then, is simultaneously pro- and contra-woman, both an endorsement and a condemnation of female intellect and virtue. Female gender is the costume Lando assumes to grant increased authenticity to the cultural critique he makes, allowing him to reach a wider audience curious about the female perspective on issues familiar from male-authored texts. His female personas also draw power and legitimacy from the real involvement of sixteenth-century Italian women such as Isabella Sforza and others, including Giulia Gonzaga, in the promotion and circulation of new religious doctrine. The question for the reader, of course, is whether the actual sex of Lando's text matters. Can a male author presume to represent female discourse, or is this necessarily an act of appropriation?

### 3. LANDO AND GONZAGA

In her discussion of Lando's impersonation of Isabella Sforza, Daenens, using a term employed by Gérard Genette, suggests we characterize the *Vera tranquillità* as an *apocryphe consenti* (that is, published with permission), with Sforza the *garant du texte* (textual guarantor): surely the impersonation was so extensive that Isabella must have been a party to it and the text must have had the authority of her assent.<sup>55</sup> As we consider Lando's literary interactions with Lucrezia Gonzaga, I suggest we keep in mind this useful characterization. Could Lando have appropriated so thoroughly Gonzaga's name and public image without her consent and participation? And if Gonzaga did play an active role in Lando's literary construction of her persona, what would this suggest about modes of early modern textual production, not to mention literary and spiritual partnerships?

The relationship between Lando and Gonzaga can be seen most clearly in a trilogy of works dating to 1552, beginning with two that appeared under Lando's name or pseudonym, the *Panegirici* and the *Dialogo . . . nel quale si ragiona della consolatione & utilità che si gusta leggendo le Sacre Scritture*, and culminating in Gonzaga's *Lettere*, which, like the *Valorose donne*, positions itself as a volley in the *querelle des femmes*, published "for the glory of women." Printed within a month of one another, the *Dialogo* on scripture and the *Panegirici* constituted two elements in a campaign by Lando — and, I suggest, by Gonzaga herself — to lay the groundwork for a third, and far more extensive, representation, the letter collection bearing

<sup>55</sup>Daenens, 2000, 36, 47.

her name that was published later in the same year.<sup>56</sup> As noted above, the vernacular *lettera familiare* was by 1552 at the height of its success in Italy, and there was a great demand for women's letters, which were considered to possess the prized qualities of sincerity and spontaneity. Simultaneously, the literature engendered by *querelle des femmes* polemics was in full flower, with writers arguing for and against women's virtues and capacities and seeking to define their various roles, as Lando himself had done in the *Valorose donne*. It is against this literary and cultural backdrop that the partnership of Lando and Gonzaga must be seen, as together they first created, and then capitalized on, Gonzaga's fame and exemplary reputation. The *Panegirici* and the *Dialogo* established Gonzaga as a literary, moral, and spiritual model, one who espoused many of Lando's own beliefs. The *Lettere* profited from the reputation created by these two works, offering an authoritative first-person view of this exemplary female experience, based on the real events of Gonzaga's life. In keeping with what was increasingly becoming the purpose of the vernacular letterbook, the *Lettere* now proposed Gonzaga as a model — here, of female epistolarity and feminine virtue — for readers to imitate.

Before turning to these three works, however, it will be useful to review what is known about the historical Gonzaga, who was celebrated in her day by literary figures such as Girolamo Ruscelli, Giulio Cesare Scaligero, and Matteo Bandello for her virtue, intellect, and wifely fidelity.<sup>57</sup> Much of the information we have about Gonzaga's life derives from Lando's *Panegirici*, which divides its praise between Gonzaga and Maria de Cardona, the Marchioness of Padulla (known, like Gonzaga, for her

<sup>56</sup>Accompanying letters by Ruscelli appended to the *Dialogo* on scripture and to Lando, 1552b (hereafter *Panegirici*) are dated 27 April 1552 and 3 May 1552, respectively — less than a week apart — while the dedicatory letter to the *Lettere* is dated 30 September of the same year.

<sup>57</sup>Bandello dedicated the *Canti XI* and one of his *Novelle* (XXI) to Gonzaga; Scaligero composed an eclogue and an epigram in her honor (*Carm.* vol. I). Ruscelli dedicated his *Imprese illustri* to her; Lando mentions her in a number of works. A volume of poems in her honor published in 1565, the *Rime . . . in lode dell'illustrissima signora . . . Lucrezia Gonzaga*, contains the poetic contributions of a number of Gonzaga's contemporaries, including Bandello, Dolce, and Laura Terracina. Many of the compositions praise Lucrezia's beauty, virtue, and chastity as a young widow who chose not to remarry, and several make specific reference to her literary gifts. Gonzaga's friend Giovan Maria Bonardo was probably behind the *Rime*, although the book is also catalogued under the name of Cornelio Cattaneo at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. Gonzaga is also praised in a chivalric poem by Vincenzo Brusantino, *Angelica innamorata* (1553), where she appears in a list of illustrious men and women alongside Laura Terracina and others: on this poem, see Pettinelli.

devotion to scripture); and from the *Lettere* themselves. Archival sources and contemporary chronicles confirm most of the facts that underlie these literary portraits.

Born near Mantua around 1521, Gonzaga was taken in by her uncle, Luigi Gonzaga of Castelgoffredo (or Castel Giuffrè), after the deaths of her parents in 1529.<sup>58</sup> There she was educated by Bandello himself, who taught her Latin and Greek during his sojourn at the court of Castelgoffredo as secretary to Cesare Fregoso, Luigi's brother-in-law.<sup>59</sup> When she was about fourteen, arrangements were made for Gonzaga to marry Giampaolo "Fortebraccio" Manfrone (d. 1552), a *condottiere* for the Venetian Republic.<sup>60</sup> Manfrone was known for his violent temper: his murder of a servant while lodged in the house of Gonzaga's relatives in Mantua resulted in his exile from that city, while the scandalous story of Manfrone's attempt on the life of Duke Ercole II d'Este of Ferrara and his subsequent imprisonment would later become well known throughout Northern Italy — Filippo Rodi's *Annuali di Ferrara*, for example, recounts how Manfrone, enraged over the duke's designs on his widowed sister, attempted first to poison and later to ambush him.<sup>61</sup> When Manfrone was eventually arrested

<sup>58</sup>Some historians including Bergamaschi and Malavasi date Gonzaga's birth to 1522. The *Registro dell'Ufficio della Sanità di Mantova*, however, records her death at age fifty-five in 1576, dating her birth to 1521: Affò, 78, n. 2; it is possible that this discrepancy may be explained by the use of different calendars. Her parents were Pirro Gonzaga, the eldest son of the Bozzolo line, and Camilla Bentivoglio; she had two brothers, Federico and Carlo, and four sisters, Ippolita, Emilia, Camilla, and Isabella.

<sup>59</sup>Bandello remained with Luigi's household until the death of Fregoso and the departure of his wife Costanza, whom Bandello followed into exile. On Bandello as Gonzaga's tutor, see Gonzaga, 1552 (hereafter *Lettere*), 62, where she recalls studying with him.

<sup>60</sup>The son of Giulio Manfrone and Beatrice Roverella, Giampaolo Manfrone (sometimes spelled "Manfroni") is not to be confused with his grandfather of the same name, also a *condottiere*. The appellation *Fortebraccio* derives from Manfrone's membership in a particular division of mercenary soldiers, the *compagnia braccasca* (from its early member Braccio da Montone): Griguolo, 1988, 13–14. Manfrone's violent nature is recalled almost wherever he is remembered; in Lando's *Panegirici*, 40, for example, he is described as "the most unpleasant . . . stubborn . . . mad . . . bizarre man ever born." Bergamaschi calls him "a cunning, hypocritical, intolerant, and fierce man": *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>61</sup>Biblioteca Estense, mss. Filippo Rodi, 431–34 (Rodi, *Annuali di Ferrara*). Brasavola, 5–39, who administered an antidote to the poisoned pears (tainted with arsenic) sent by Manfrone to his sister, the duke, and their families, also records the episode. The event is also recalled in Casalini, 107. Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga complained of his immense disgust with Manfrone after the latter's murder of a servant in a letter to Benedetto Agnello: Vatican Library, Fondo Barberini Latini 5790, "Libro segreto di Cardinale Ercole Gonzaga," 53<sup>v</sup>–54<sup>v</sup>.

for the attempted murder of the duke, and led back to Ferrara handcuffed and bound, even the Venetian Republic, which had long employed him, declined to come to his aid.<sup>62</sup> However, in spite of her husband's deplorable conduct, Gonzaga sought to help him. A 1552 composition by Bartolommeo Ricci recounts her tearful intervention on behalf of her husband, and suggests that it was she who persuaded the duke to commute Manfrone's sentence from death to life in prison.<sup>63</sup> According to Gonzaga's *Lettere*, she tirelessly petitioned everyone, from minor officials to the king of France and the duke himself, on Manfrone's behalf. It was this unhappy union that provided the basis for contemporary accounts of Gonzaga's virtue and devotion.

Less is known of Gonzaga's life following her husband's death in a Ferrarese prison in 1552.<sup>64</sup> We know from Manfrone's will that her dowry was returned to her, although her husband left her nothing else.<sup>65</sup> Not long after Manfrone's death, Gonzaga was sent, probably under the authority of her cousin Vespasiano Gonzaga, to a convent in Bozzolo, where she

<sup>62</sup>Rodi, 354<sup>v</sup>: "[Manfrone] was led, in chains, upon a horse with cuffs on his wrist and with his legs bound underneath his mount, toward the city of Ferrara." I have located a letter in the Archivio di Stato di Modena that describes in detail the arrest and Duke Ercole II's decision to grant clemency, corroborating Rodi's account: Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2, no date or signature. The letter notes Manfrone's arrest "in Poviglio, near Parma" ("in Poviglio, loco del Parmagiano"), where the duke's spies had been following him, and explains that although his crimes would warrant "ten deaths, not just one" ("dieci non che una morte"), the duke was moved "to grant him life out of respect for his family, after first condemning him to death and keeping him a while in this agony so that he might repent in some part for his wickedness" ("li havemo donato la vita per honor dei suoi parenti, ben dopo haverli fatto denontiare la morte, e di tenerlo un pezzo in questa agonia, accioché facci in parte penitentia della sua temeritate e tristitie"). The event is also described in Gonzaga's *Lettere*, for example, 229–30, to Claudio Tolomei. For manuscript letters here and in the Appendix, I have modernized punctuation and diacritics but preserved original spelling.

<sup>63</sup>Ricci. Rodi's *Annuali*, on the other hand, make no mention of Gonzaga's role in the change in sentence.

<sup>64</sup>Not in a Turkish prison, as Grendler, 35, erroneously states.

<sup>65</sup>According to her published letters, she encountered problems administering what property she did have; for example, in a letter to Luigi da Novale (*Lettere*, 259) she complains: "Deprived of my spouse . . . and with part of our property in question, I can only place my hopes, after God, in your prudence." Manfrone's will is in the Archivio di Stato di Rovigo, Archivio Notarile: notaio Francesco Campagenella, b. 315, cancello n. 7, fols. 116–123. It is published in Griguolo, 1988, 33–38. Manfrone leaves some money for the dowry of his sister Giulia; to Lucrezia he returns her dowry and allows her to retain custody of their daughters so long as she continues to live "chastely" rather than remarry. Manfrone also makes provisions for his two illegitimate daughters.

remained for at least three years.<sup>66</sup> By the mid-1560s she was back in Mantua, having seen at least one of her two daughters married. Caught up in the undercurrents of religious dissent that swept through Mantua in the late sixteenth century, Gonzaga appeared on the periphery of several Inquisition trials, and in June 1567 was herself tried on suspicion of heresy.<sup>67</sup> However, because of her social status and family connections, arrangements were made for the trial and her subsequent abjuration to be conducted quickly and in secrecy.<sup>68</sup> Two months later, in a letter to her sister Isabella, Gonzaga expresses amazement and dismay that she could have come under suspicion.<sup>69</sup> Yet Gonzaga's *Lettere* do touch upon sensitive religious themes, particularly with regard to scripture and references to the Lutheran tenet of justification by faith. Gonzaga died in Mantua in 1576, twenty-four years after the publication of her only book and nine years after her Inquisition trial.

Gonzaga spent much of her married life alone with her children and servants in her husband's palazzo in the small village of Fratta Polesine in the Veneto region. According to Lando's account of these years in the *Panegirici*, she lived there "in total solitude, enclosed almost perpetually in a squalid tower."<sup>70</sup> In Lando's account, Gonzaga becomes a kind of fairy-tale princess, her essential goodness unblemished by the wretched conditions of her life and her unremitting solitude. In reality, though, Fratta lay on the route from Mantua to Venice, and Gonzaga often had visitors on their way from one city to the next.<sup>71</sup> In this way she was able to establish contact with important figures from the Venetian literary world, including the editors

<sup>66</sup>I have located five letters in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena written by Gonzaga from the convent in Bozzolo (possibly the Madri della Consolazione, although I have not been able to establish this with certainty) that attest to her evidently unwilling and uncomfortable stay among the sisters; in all of them Gonzaga implores that she be sent money for food and clothes: Biblioteca Estense di Modena, Autografi Campori, "Lucrezia Gonzaga." Two of these letters are addressed to Vespasiano Gonzaga (see Appendix, letter IV, for an example), two to his secretary, and one to his first wife, Diana de Contrade (later, legend has it, murdered by her husband). A sixth letter addressed to Raniero de' Ranieri concerns a dispute over a new road and is dated Mantua 1570, many years after Gonzaga had left the convent.

<sup>67</sup>See n. 6 above.

<sup>68</sup>Pagano, 7.

<sup>69</sup>In the letter (Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, c. 371; partially reproduced in Pagano, 24, n. 69; see Appendix, letter VI, and fig. 1), Lucrezia writes, "I was amazed and astonished to have been named in such a matter, being, as in fact I am, so far from these thoughts and from these practices."

<sup>70</sup>*Panegirici*, 43: "in somma solitudine, chiusa quasi che del continuo in una squallida torre."

<sup>71</sup>Griguolo, 1984, 82.

Dolce and Domenichi; the writer Luigi Groto, called the “Cieco d’Adria” (1541–85); and, of course, Lando himself. By the early 1550s, an informal *cenacolo* had sprung up around Gonzaga’s palazzo in Fratta, organized, according to Stefania Malavasi, by Giovan Maria Bonardo (d. 1584) and Gonzaga herself.<sup>72</sup> Although Gonzaga was not an official member of the Accademia dei pastori fratteggiani, she was certainly an integral part of this loosely knit society that also included Ruscelli, Parabosco, and Orazio Toscanella.<sup>73</sup> Lando was not a member of the Pastori, but he, too, participated in the group’s meetings.<sup>74</sup>

These contacts were important for Gonzaga’s literary formation: according to the *Lettere*, she read their works avidly and often requested their latest publications. Her relationship with these literary figures was central to her own positioning as a literary and cultural figure as well, for just as she singles out and praises the Pastori in her *Lettere*, so they applaud her by dedicating many of their works to her. It is likely, moreover, that the Pastori — wishing, perhaps, to lend support to the participation of women in culture — played a role, along with Lando, in encouraging the publication of the *Lettere*. Certainly the publication of Bonardo’s *Rime* in honor of Gonzaga in 1565 and his *Madrigali* (which contain a dedication by Toscanella to Gonzaga) in 1571 would seem to indicate that Gonzaga retained the support of her old literary circle long after the Pastori fratteggiani had ceased to gather at her Fratta residence. It is also likely that it was during this same period, in which Gonzaga’s contact with writers from all over Northern Italy was at its most intense, that she encountered the religious debates and discussions that flourished in Italy in the years before the Counter-Reformation reached the peak of its repressive influence. As her letters — not to mention her later Inquisition trial — reflect, Gonzaga was influenced by many aspects of evangelist and Reform thought, and was almost certainly introduced to some of the views she espouses in the *Lettere* by members of the Pastori fratteggiani. Groto, for example, had previously been involved with the Accademia degli Addormentati in Rovigo, which was forced to disband under suspicion of heresy.<sup>75</sup> Dolce and Domenichi both had heterodox sympathies and were associated with Andrea

<sup>72</sup>Malavasi, 304.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 304–05; Maylender, 268. Malavasi’s dating of the Academy’s formation to around 1555 should be pushed back to before 1552 if Gonzaga’s role in the group is not to be discounted, since, as the manuscript letters cited in n. 66 above indicate, Gonzaga was cloistered at a convent in Bozzolo for at least three years after Manfrone’s death, probably from 1552 to 1555.

<sup>74</sup>Malavasi, 304.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

Arrivabene, a printer who in 1549 was warned by the Holy Office against selling heretical books.<sup>76</sup> Lando expressed heterodox views in the *Valorose donne* and other works. The print diffusion of heterodox ideas in the mid-sixteenth century was vast, and affected the entire peninsula.<sup>77</sup> Like many other men and women, Gonzaga was exposed to these ideas and incorporated some of them into her own religious beliefs and writing.<sup>78</sup>

Gonzaga first appears in Lando's work as the author and recipient of two letters in his 1548 anthology, the *Lettere di molte valorose donne*, and again in his *Consolatorie* of 1550; Lando's *Cataloghi* of 1552 are also studded with admiring references to her.<sup>79</sup> In these appearances, she is but one member of a large cast of female characters, along with others like Isabella Sforza, Alda Torella, and her own sister Isabella of Puvino, adopted by Lando to play a role in his foray into *querelle des femmes* polemics. As Lando's ventures into female impersonation became more elaborate, however, Gonzaga assumed an even greater role, as evidenced by a trilogy of texts all published in 1552. She appears as Lando's interlocutor and student in the *Dialogo . . . nel quale si ragiona della consolatione & utilità che si gusta leggendo le sacre scritture*, one of the few works published, despite its heterodox content, under Lando's own name. She appears again as the subject of admiration in the *Panegirici* published shortly thereafter. Her literary presence culminated, however, in the book of letters published under her own name, also in 1552, the *Lettere della signora Lucretia Gonzaga . . . a gloria del sesso femminile . . . in luce poste*. Gonzaga's contemporaries accepted the letterbook as hers, although some scholars have since suggested that it was in fact the work of Lando. Doni, for example, lists Gonzaga as the author of the *epistolario* in his *Libreria* (while attributing the *Valorose donne* to Lando); Groto mentions Gonzaga's *Lettere* in a list of epistolary collections that includes works by Gerolamo Parabosco, Bernardo Tasso, and Claudio Tolomei.<sup>80</sup> Many of the contributors to Bonardo's *Rime*

<sup>76</sup>See Martin, 132, n. 14.

<sup>77</sup>See Caponetto, 49. Venice, the clandestine center for philo-Protestant ideas, was infused with Reformists from nearby Padua and Vicenza, as well as Rovigo and Mantua, while Modena — not far from Fratta — was the “largest center of anti-Roman dissent in all of Emilia” after the 1540s: *ibid.*, 227, 303. Mantua, where Gonzaga spent her later years, was greatly influenced by the ideas of Luther, Erasmus, Valdes, Bucer, and others. The Mantuan Inquisition attempted to curb this influence, which had penetrated at all social levels.

<sup>78</sup>On vernacular letterbooks in particular as a vehicle — one that did not appear to run into any obstacles to publication even in the early 1550s — for the circulation of evangelist ideas in this period, see Schutte, 1975.

<sup>79</sup>For the *Cataloghi*, see Lando, 1552c.

<sup>80</sup>Doni, 67, 77; Groto, 17. Both Doni and Groto are cited in Affò, 65.

refer admiringly to Gonzaga's literary talents, even describing her as a new Vittoria Colonna, implicitly suggesting a link to Colonna's own epistolary activity as the author of a 1544 volume of spiritual letters, as well as to Colonna's poetic production.<sup>81</sup> Later, Pierre Bayle's encyclopedic *Dictionnaire historique et critique* attributes the *Lettere* to Gonzaga, praising them effusively.<sup>82</sup> Even Apostolo Zeno, one of the first to suggest that Lando composed the *Lettere*, admitted he had no evidence to this effect: "I have found no other writer who declares these *Letters* to be the work of Gonzaga's friend."<sup>83</sup>

The attribution to Lando stems from the close relationship between the two, documented by Gonzaga's frequent presence in Lando's works and by Lando's appearance in her *Lettere*, thirty-four of which are addressed to him. Together with Lando's prior appropriation of women's epistolary voices in the *Valorose donne*, the literary association of Lando and Gonzaga has caused critics to turn to him instinctively as Gonzaga's ghostwriter, her letters thereby constituting the climax of a long process of appropriation on Lando's part. Some assertions of Lando's authorship have been fueled by critical bias. Ireneo Sanesi, for example, who has given the most attention to the problem of authorship, argues that stylistic similarities between the *Valorose donne* and the *Lettere* constitute proof of their common authorship, seemingly ignoring that Gonzaga's letters are almost entirely lacking in the *exempla* and *detti* that characterize many of Lando's works and the *Valorose donne* in particular — diverging, that is, from what Seidel Menchi has termed the "stylistic homogeneity" of Lando's corpus.<sup>84</sup> At

<sup>81</sup>A sonnet in *Rime*, 2, describes Gonzaga as "the noble Gonzaga, akin to Colonna in valor." The comparison suggests not only an equivalence in authorial status between Gonzaga and the more famous Colonna, but also their common role in using their pens to spread their religious views in the context of the *spirituali* circles in which they both moved. It is likely that Gonzaga did compose poetry. Quadrio, 2:240, later attributes a volume of *Rime* to Gonzaga, in addition to her letters, claiming: "There are several accomplished works by her, and a little volume of *Rime*, among others, which was published in Venice"; while a letter to Gonzaga from Luigi Groto in Groto, 223, begs her to entrust him with "the task of revising your verse, as you promised to do, and returning them to print." I have not located a volume of Gonzaga's *Rime*; it may have existed only in manuscript form.

<sup>82</sup>Bayle, 2:573 ("Gonzague, Lucrece de").

<sup>83</sup>Cited in Sanesi, 14: "Non ho per altro scrittore, che dichiara esser le dette Lettere componimento dell'amico della Gonzaga." Zeno's best evidence, in fact, was a lack of documentation asserting Gonzaga's authorship of the text (see *ibid.* for his letter to Parisotti, dated 1740, in the *Lettere di Apostolo Zeno* [Venice, Sansoni, 1785]). This is disproved by Doni's inclusion of Gonzaga in the *Libreria* (cited in Affò, 65). For additional sixteenth- and seventeenth-century citations and an eloquent defense of Gonzaga's authorship, see *ibid.*, 64–69.

<sup>84</sup>Cited in n. 35 above.



the same time, however, Sanesi accepts close stylistic correspondences between the *Valorose donne* and a male-authored text, Pietro Lauro's *Lettere* (1552), as a valid example of direct literary imitation.<sup>85</sup> Sanesi further claims the "contradictory" nature of Gonzaga's *Lettere* as proof of their inauthenticity, citing Gonzaga's characterizations of her imprisoned husband (which vary dramatically depending on her audience) and a pair of letters concerning Lando's *Panegirici*. In one of these, Gonzaga thanks Lando, while in the second she professes ignorance of the book's author.<sup>86</sup> According to Sanesi, these "numerous contradictions" were "inexplicable if we maintain [the letters] were written by Gonzaga, utterly reasonable if we instead acknowledge Lando as their author."<sup>87</sup> This explanation ignores the dynamic, evolving nature of epistolary exchange, which when captured in a printed *epistolario* can, and usually does, reflect changes in knowledge or point of view over time — not to mention the varying demands raised by the expectations of the internal reader to whom a letter is directed.<sup>88</sup> By describing Manfrone differently to different readers, Gonzaga could expect to elicit various reactions. Her letters regarding the *Panegirici* show a natural progression from an earlier state of ignorance to a later one of knowledge, suggesting that the letters were written at different times.<sup>89</sup> Rather than indicate a Landian element of epistolary paradox, the contradictions noted by Sanesi are in fact integral to both real and verisimilar epistolary exchange.

Finally, although many of Gonzaga's letters were prompted by historical events, such as the arrest and imprisonment of Manfrone, Sanesi is unwilling to accept that Gonzaga might have written about her own life. He argues, rather, that Lando, as Gonzaga's contemporary and friend, was equally acquainted with general current events and with Gonzaga's own family drama, and therefore similarly qualified to compose fictional letters about these subjects.<sup>90</sup> Yet the archival evidence I have located, in the form of thirteen manuscript letters by Gonzaga,

<sup>85</sup>See Lauro. Cf. Sanesi, 21, "[Lauro's book is a] rhetorical composition, a collection of letters that were never sent to the recipients named as addressees, in a word, an imitation of the *Paradossi* and *Lettere delle Donne* by Lando."

<sup>86</sup>*Lettere*, 30–31, 76–77.

<sup>87</sup>Sanesi, 26: "numerosa contraddizioni"; "inesplicabili quando vogliansi ritenere scritte da Gonzaga, spiegabilissime invece ove se ne ammetta autore il Lando."

<sup>88</sup>I draw here on the distinction in Altman, 19, between "internal" and "external" readers of epistolary texts. In Gonzaga's case, an internal reader is the recipient of a single letter; an external reader one with access to the whole letter collection.

<sup>89</sup>Or meant to appear so. Gonzaga might have initially wished to appear ignorant of the book's author.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. Sanesi, 22.

shows that she was in fact a writer of letters, that she wrote letters to some of the same people she addresses in her *epistolario*, and that she lobbied for the commutation of Manfrone's sentence.<sup>91</sup> For example, letters exchanged between Gonzaga and her husband (and preserved today in the Archivio di Stato di Modena) are proof that the epistolary relationship so central to the structure of Gonzaga's *epistolario* did in fact exist. The surviving letters from Gonzaga to Manfrone are dated 1546 and 1548, while his to her cover the entire period of his incarceration, from his arrest in 1546 to his death in 1552. Much like her published letters to Manfrone, Gonzaga's brief, to-the-point manuscript missives urge the prisoner to put his faith in God and bear his lot patiently. In a letter dated Venice, 22 November 1546, for example, she writes, "From messer Marcello's letter, you will understand the reason for my coming to Venice, as well as what was accomplished and what one hopes to accomplish for the welfare and honor of Your Lordship. I won't explain further. I will say only this: that you must be of good spirit, and look after yourself and be well, for the lord God will see to everything, and it will be — soon — time for good to come to us once more."<sup>92</sup> Taking a similar tone, a letter to Manfrone published in Gonzaga's *epistolario* states, "Messer Leonardo Raymondo brought me a letter from you. . . . To be sure, it would be beyond my imagination and hopes to think that any good might come to us, were it not that one must never despair of

<sup>91</sup>For a transcription and translation of a selection of these letters, see the Appendix below. Of the thirteen manuscript letters I have found, written over a twenty-four-year period from 1546 (the year of Manfrone's arrest) to 1570 (six years before Gonzaga's death), two are addressed to Manfrone in prison, one to the Duke of Ferrara, whom Gonzaga addresses in the *Lettere* on two occasions, and one to a sister, probably Isabella, a frequent *destinataria* in the *Lettere*. Several of these are written in Gonzaga's own hand, while for others, written in what seems to be a scribal hand, she likely used a secretary, as was common practice. Although Gonzaga's correspondence seems to have been less carefully preserved than that of her husband, I suspect that many more of her letters remain to be found. See the Appendix for a provisional list of Gonzaga's manuscript letters and their locations.

<sup>92</sup>ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2 (Lucrezia Gonzaga to Giampaolo Manfrone, Venice, 22 November 1546): "Per la litera di messere Marcello la inte[n]derà la causa della mia venuta in Venetia, et ancho la saperà quello che si è operato e si spera di operare per util et honore di vostra signoria. Non starò replicharlo altramente. Li dirò sol questo, che la stii de bon animo et gubernasi benne et stia sanna, che il Signor Idio provederà al tutto et che serà — ora mai — il tempo che ancora nui abiamo benne." The full text of this letter is provided in the Appendix, letter I.

God's grace."<sup>93</sup> Suggesting that Gonzaga did attempt to garner support for Manfrone's case as indicated throughout the *Lettere*, the manuscript letter of 22 November 1546 (quoted above), as well as another dated 13 April 1548, both refer to journeys undertaken by Gonzaga on his behalf.<sup>94</sup>

Manfrone's own manuscript letters contain pleas for just the sort of help his wife offers in the *Lettere*. In one case, for example, he begs her to "placate" the Duke of Ferrara.<sup>95</sup> The published *epistolario* contains a number of letters seeking Manfrone's release, including two letters to Ercole II d'Este, just as Manfrone requests in his missive from prison. Moreover — although it is a request for the duke's intervention in a land dispute that arose as a result of Manfrone's absence rather than a direct request for Manfrone's release — the one manuscript letter we possess from Gonzaga to Ercole d'Este demonstrates that she was accustomed to approaching the duke for help.<sup>96</sup> Manfrone's repeated requests that his wife write to him in prison — in one letter he pleads, "send me . . . at least a few lines, regularly, apprising me as to your welfare, for the love of God"<sup>97</sup> — suggest that it would have been likely, even necessary, that Gonzaga correspond regularly with her imprisoned spouse, just as she appears to do in the *Lettere*. Finally, other manuscript letters at the Biblioteca Estense and the Archivio di Stato di Mantua document the years following Manfrone's death and the publication of the *Lettere*, including the period spent in a convent in Bozzolo and, later, the Inquisition trial, underscoring Gonzaga's habitual recourse to letter-writing in documenting the events of her life. This is not to argue that Gonzaga's published letters were pieces of genuine correspondence reproduced for publication. On the contrary, many were composed expressly

<sup>93</sup> *Lettere*, 56: "Messer Leonardo Raymondo mi ha portato una vostra lettera. . . . Certa cosa è che tutto quello che ci averrebbe di bene, sarebbe fuor della opinione et speranza mia, se non fusse che disperar non posso mai della grazia di Dio."

<sup>94</sup> In her letter of 22 November 1546, cited above and in n. 92, Gonzaga mentions a trip to Venice, promising to let her husband know "what has been done and what is hoped to be done for your benefit and honor." The "benefit and honor" to which Gonzaga alludes likely concern her efforts to obtain Manfrone's freedom. See also ASMò, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2 (Gonzaga's letter to Manfrone dated Fratta, 13 April 1548): "my going this month will be much more useful."

<sup>95</sup> ASMò, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2 (Giampaolo Manfrone to Lucrezia Gonzaga, n.d.): "I beg you . . . to see if there is any way to placate the heart of the lord Duke of Ferrara." See Appendix, letter II.

<sup>96</sup> ASMò, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Letterati, b. 24 (Lucrezia Gonzaga to Ercole II d'Este, Fratta, 1 June 1550): see Appendix, letter III. One of Gonzaga's published letters refers to a dispute of this nature (cited above in n. 65).

<sup>97</sup> ASMò, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2 (see Appendix, letter II): "mi avisi due righe almeno et spesso del ben star suo, per l'amor di Dio."

for publication or at least revised before going to print, as was most often the case with sixteenth-century *epistolari*. But there is ample evidence that Gonzaga was a capable and prolific writer of letters in her own right, one who had access to the creative and rhetorical tools necessary to produce an *epistolario* based on (but not the same as) her real correspondence with many of the same people who appear in her published letters: her husband Manfrone, her sister Isabella and her family, members of the Pastori frattegiati, and the Duke of Ferrara.

Moreover, textual evidence of Lando's intervention in Gonzaga's text is ambiguous, calling into question issues of textual practice and literary imitation that were widespread in sixteenth-century culture. Various forms of literary collaboration were common in Gonzaga's time: writers enlisted one another to edit or revise their work before publication, and the widespread practice of *risrittura*, a form of literary "plagiarism," created complex intertextual links between writers.<sup>98</sup> Such practices tend to conflict with modern ideas about individual authorship. Yet a scenario of collaboration and intertextuality could account for certain overlaps between Gonzaga's *Lettere* and Lando's works — the same kinds of overlaps that exist between Lando's work and the letters of Pietro Lauro, for example, without calling the latter's authorial status into question.<sup>99</sup> A similar problem arises with respect to Dieter Steland's recent discovery that the content of some of Gonzaga's letters can be traced to a repertory collection called the *Concetti di Ieronimo Garimberto*, published in 1551. Steland's description of the corresponding passages is clearly valuable for the light it sheds on the way Gonzaga's text was constructed with material from a repertory. Yet an attribution to Lando of the collection as a whole based solely on similar textual strategy — that of incorporating existing texts into one's own — is not convincing, for letter-writers frequently turned to repertories and manuals for guidance.

More indicative of a Landian influence in Gonzaga's *Lettere* is the appearance of the same lines from Garimberto in Lando's own works as well as in Gonzaga's letters. For example, a letter from Gonzaga to Pietro Paolo Manfrone that asserts that unjust imprisonment is preferable to undeserved liberty can be traced to the *Concetti*, but could also have

<sup>98</sup>On the phenomenon of Renaissance "plagiarism," see nn. 39–40 above. Such collaboration took many forms: for example, Bausi, 278, points to the editorial assistance provided to Tullia d'Aragona by Benedetto Varchi; Zanré describes collaboration among male writers in the academies and *ridotti*, or salons, of Florence.

<sup>99</sup>For example, Bonghi, 1851, lvii, cites a pair of similar passages from Lando, 1552d (*Vari Componimenti*) and Gonzaga's *Lettere*: cf. Lando, *Vari componimenti*, 273–74; *Lettere*, 54–55. On similarities between Lando and Lauro, see n. 85 above.

reached Gonzaga via Lando's *Oracoli de moderni ingegni* (1550).<sup>100</sup> Lando could have added this internal reference himself; on the other hand, Gonzaga may have borrowed the phrase from either Lando or Garimberto. Similarly, a consolatory letter from Gonzaga to a grieving mother, warning her not to mourn excessively nor doubt in the resurrection of the body, echoes a sentiment expressed in Lando's *Consolatorie*.<sup>101</sup> Does a thematic, and even linguistic, link between the two texts deny the possibility of Gonzaga's authorship? Or does it merely demonstrate that Gonzaga and Lando shared similar views? The idea that we ought to rejoice in, rather than lament, the death of a loved one is unremarkable in consolatory letters of this period. Pietro Lauro uses similar reasoning in a consolatory letter addressed to Gonzaga herself, while a manuscript letter of consolation written by Gonzaga includes the same sentiment.<sup>102</sup> Framing death as a welcome return to God is a concept particular neither to Lando nor Gonzaga. However, the brief (and similarly phrased) flirtation with the denial of the resurrection of the body put forth in both cases could denote a more specific point of contact. Again, this textual overlap might indicate Lando's editorial influence on the passage. Alternatively, Gonzaga may have borrowed some of the elegant wording of Lando's *Consolatorie* for her own discussion of the concepts of death and resurrection.

Silvana Seidel Menchi points out a final area of textual intersection: her attribution of Gonzaga's *Lettere* to Lando is based on several letters that espouse Erasmian (and, by 1552, suspect) themes taken up by Lando in his own work. Seidel Menchi notes, for example, that a letter from Gonzaga to Elena Vigonza urging her to make Christ's teachings of simplicity, charity, and patience her life's principal aspiration closely echoes an Italian translation of Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, a text used by Lando on other occasions.<sup>103</sup> However, Lando was not the only writer to make use of Erasmus in his

<sup>100</sup>Cf. *Lettere*, 156–57, asking Pietro Paolo to convince her husband “that an unworthy prison is preferable to unearned freedom”; she echoes a *detto* attributed to a Bishop Dandino of Carseta in Lando, 1550b (*Oracoli*), 10, that reads “Better a dark prison than an unearned freedom.” Both references can be traced to Garimberto's *Concetti*, 101 (“Consolare di prigionia”): “Better an undeserved imprisonment than an undeserved freedom.”

<sup>101</sup>Cf. *Lettere*, 11; Lando, 1550a (*Consolatorie*), 7.

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Lauro, 156. Gonzaga's manuscript letter regarding the death of an acquaintance is dated 10 April 1567 and states, “I am certain that your Highness, in your prudence, will mitigate your suffering by conforming to divine will”: ASM, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, fol. 371<sup>r-v</sup>; see Appendix, letter VII.

<sup>103</sup>Cf. Seidel Menchi, 1987, 381, n. 71. See also Seidel Menchi, 1979, 575; *ibid.*, n. 7; Seidel Menchi, 1974b, 540.

works, as Seidel Menchi herself points out.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Seidel Menchi notes that the insertion of passages from Erasmus, Luther, and other philo-Protestant thinkers into otherwise orthodox texts was a common method for attempting to elicit thoughts and doubts about traditional theology and teachings.<sup>105</sup> While it is possible that Lando was responsible for the insertion of these passages as he edited Gonzaga's letters, it is also possible that Gonzaga shared the religious views of Lando and others in the heterodox circles of which she was a part, and that she was familiar with the practice of inserting heterodox passages into new texts.

Ultimately, the most likely indication of Lando's collaboration in Gonzaga's text is the remarkable frequency of his appearances in it. Lando is more present than any other *destinatario* in Gonzaga's collection, suggesting that he and Gonzaga were in active dialogue during the production of this volume. A number of playful letters chronicle the gossip and criticism that periodically endanger Gonzaga's relationship with Lando, initially calling to mind Lando's own *Valorose donne*, in which his female epistolarians constantly accuse one another of similar offenses. For example, Gonzaga rebukes Lando, saying that a mutual friend "told me clearly, by letter and in person, that you heard I had spoken ill of you, which caused my heart great distress. . . . I can't believe, however, that you would think so little of me, that I could have used words so alien to my nature"; and, again, scolding that "Every day I feel more taken in by the depth of my affection for you, and you doubt that I love you? And you can believe that some gossiping tongue could impede the direction of my goodwill?"<sup>106</sup> Although Gonzaga's interest in gossip here is to dismiss it, a letter to Bonardo, another close

<sup>104</sup> Seidel Menchi, 1979, cites several writers who rewrite Erasmus in their own works, such as Antonio Brucioli (*Dialogi*, 1537) and Marsilio Andreasi (*Trattato divoto et utilissimo della divina misericordia*, 1542). Seidel Menchi, 1979, 573, further explains that there is still much to be learned about the circulation of Erasmian texts in Italy in this period, noting that the history and landscape of the "clandestine diffusion" of the works of Erasmus in Italy "remains almost entirely to be reconstructed." The possibility that Gonzaga, part of a vibrant literary community that counted among its members many figures known for their Reformist views, may have had access to and even partially reproduced sections of Erasmus's works should not, therefore, be discounted.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Caponetto, 49.

<sup>106</sup> *Lettere*, 64, "Il Raymondo mi ha fatto più che certa, e con lettere, e con la viva voce, esservi stato riferito che io abbia detto mal di voi, il ché mi ha causato al core un estremo dispiacere. . . . Non posso però pensare che mi abbiate per donna sí leggiera, che io avessi usato parole così aliene dalla natura mia"; *ibid.*, 92, "Di giorno in giorno sentomi adunque ingannata dalla grandezza dell'amore che vi porto, e voi dubiterete che non vi ami? E voi penserete che alcuna mala lingua possa impedire il corso della benivoglienza mia?"

friend, frames gossip as a useful vehicle for information. Gonzaga urges Bonardo to keep her posted with all the news from Venice, no matter how mundane, an attitude that is reflected in a manuscript letter by Gonzaga to yet another acquaintance in which she begs for news of her friend's Ferrarese life and loves. As can be seen in the passages quoted below, the theme of news — or gossip — is characteristic of both the published *Lettere* and Gonzaga's manuscript correspondence:

I will be most grateful if, while you are in Venice, you will send me your news frequently, and, for my part . . . I will write to you . . . perhaps [you don't write often] because you don't have anything worthwhile for me to read or hear about; nonetheless I would like you to write me with what news you have, whatever it might be.<sup>107</sup>

Kindly write to me about what you are doing and what is going on there [in Ferrara], and if you should lack for a subject, write to me about your love life. Indeed I am certain that a thousand nice things must happen to you. . . . Write to me about it, for I will answer you.<sup>108</sup>

If some letters to Lando center on gossiping tongues, others touch on literary matters. These missives might be interpreted as Lando's effort to draw attention to himself, or as Gonzaga's own repayment for his lavish praise of her. In one instance, for example, Gonzaga thanks Lando for immortalizing her in "little books that contain my ill-deserved praise" and expresses regret that she is unable to do the same for him: "but, poor me . . . what shall I do for you?"<sup>109</sup> Elsewhere, Gonzaga tells Lando that she loves him "for your virtue, and the many things you do in my honor."<sup>110</sup> These things might well refer to Lando's public praise of Gonzaga in such texts as the *Panegirici* and the *Cataloghi*. Another letter that refers to Gonzaga's indebtedness toward Lando draws attention to her own generosity as a literary patron. Gonzaga declares her willingness to

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 18 (to Gioan Maria Bonardi): "Gratissima cosa mi sarà se mentre starai in Vinegia, mi darai spesso delle nuove, et io all'oncontro come averò messo a proposito, ti scriverò; ne guarderò che tu mi scrivi più di rado, et più brevemente di quello ch'eri solito di scrivere; ma forse che tu lo fai per non aver cosa che tu pensi che io debba leggere o sentir volentieri; non dimeno vorrei che mi scrivessi di quel che hai, tal quale si sia."

<sup>108</sup>ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Particolari, Gonzaga, b. 818 (Lucrezia Gonzaga to Paolo Quaresima, letter dated Mantua, 29 October 1555): "Di gratia scrivetemi ciò che fate et quel che si fa de lí et quando vi mancherà soggetto scrivetemi lí vostri amori. So pur che vi deve occorrer mille belle cose. . . . Avisateme, che vi risponderò"; see Appendix, letter V.

<sup>109</sup>*Lettere*, 285: "libretti dove si chiudono le mie poche meritate lodi"; "ma io misera . . . che farò per voi?"

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 92: "per le vostre virtù, e per i molti uffici fatti in onor mio."

support Lando materially, asking in return only that he share his work with her: “ask freely for anything that strikes your fancy . . . if you think I might have anything at all that could result in your honor or comfort, such as money or anything else I can provide, I promise you that my sincere wish that you will avail yourself of it corresponds to the obligation I have that you should avail yourself of it . . . be healthy and happy, and share with me any works that your divine and fertile mind might produce.”<sup>111</sup> In the *Cataloghi* Lando praises Gonzaga’s generosity; here she returns the favor not only by behaving generously, but by praising Lando’s literary gifts and “divine” mind. (If the sentiment appears genuine, it is worth noting that this passage derives directly from Garimberto’s *Concetti*.)<sup>112</sup> By asking to read his works, moreover, Gonzaga appears learned as well as generous.

This constant invocation of Lando is certainly not coincidental. These letters have a dual function: they promote Lando and call attention to his relationship with Gonzaga, while simultaneously presenting Gonzaga as an admired member of literary society, capable of reading and appreciating the works of her contemporaries. The publicity benefits both Lando and Gonzaga, and the elaborate intertwining of their personas here and in Lando’s other works, along with their similar intertextual practice, suggests some degree of literary collaboration in the production of Gonzaga’s *Lettere*, without, however, negating her role as the letters’ author.<sup>113</sup> As William E. A. Axon notes, “That [Lando] should forge three hundred letters, print them with [Gonzaga’s] name on the title, and dedicate them to her relation Pietro Paolo Manfrone, and do this without reproof or repudiation, is incredible. That he acted as her secretary in the composition of many of these

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 14: “chiedete pur liberamente quanto vi va per la fantasia . . . se vi pare che io abbia cosa alcuna che sia per risultare in onore e commodo vostro, come sono danari o qualche altra cosa che io possa, che vi prometto che tanto mi sarà caro che ve ne vagliate, quanto si ricerca agli oblighi che io ho che ve ne debbiat valere . . . state sano e lieto, parte facendomi dei vostri dolcissimi componimenti quando avviene che il vostro divino e fecondo ingegno alcuno ne partorisca.”

<sup>112</sup>Cf. Garimberto, 156 (“Offerire/Impresto”): “Se vi par ch’io abbia cosa alcuna, che sia per risultar in onor, et commondo vostro; come sono danari, o qualche altra cosa, ch’io possa prestarvi, tanto mi sarà caro che ve ne vagliate quanto si ricerca a gli’ oblighi ch’io ho che ve ne debbiat valere.” Cited in Steland, 13.

<sup>113</sup>Gamba, 127–28, was among the first to suggest some form of collaboration, arguing that Gonzaga had written the “domestic” (autobiographical) letters herself, Lando the other (humanist) ones. Curiously, as Steland, 6–7, demonstrates, it is actually the most “personal” letters that tend to derive from Garimberto’s *Concetti*. Grendler, 35, suggests that Lando “edited a collection of Lucrezia’s letters for the printer Gualtiero Scotto, and . . . possibly wrote part of it.” Pagano, 279, n. 106, is based on Grendler.



epistles is a much more reasonable theory.”<sup>114</sup> Surely Lando could not have produced this work without Gonzaga’s assent and participation. The evidence I have presented here strongly suggests that this collaboration was an active one in which Gonzaga herself contributed the core material for her *epistolario*, while Lando likely helped to polish it and shape it for the literary market.

Lando’s *Panegirici*, the model that shaped subsequent eulogies of Gonzaga by her contemporaries, demonstrates how this collaboration took shape. Published the same year as Gonzaga’s letterbook, the portrait offered by the *Panegirici* — most of which is based on fact, embroidered to emphasize her status as an exemplary figure of female virtue — is the male-authored complement to that offered by the *Lettere* themselves. It lays out Gonzaga’s biography in romantic terms, recounting historically accurate details of her life in a manner that emphasizes her exemplary feminine virtue. The *Panegirici* makes much of the contrast between Gonzaga and her husband: she the epitome of innocence and goodness, he of wickedness. It emphasizes her young age at marriage and her mistreatment at the hands of Manfrone, whose “harsh reproaches,” “bestial actions,” and “reprehensible habits” she bears with admirable fortitude.<sup>115</sup> It praises the combination of feminine loyalty and masculine courage with which she greets the news of her husband’s arrest for attempting to murder the Duke of Ferrara, an episode that was widely documented.<sup>116</sup> It underscores the loneliness of the years she spent in her husband’s palazzo in Fratta.<sup>117</sup> Despite her wretched circumstances, we learn in the *Panegirici* that through her virtue and intelligence Gonzaga was able to make of Fratta an “earthly paradise,” a haven of literature, culture, and even political debate, presumably through the *cenacolo* she helped organize and host: “Every time I pass through Fratta, gentlemen, it seems to me that I go to an earthly paradise, so numerous are the consolations I feel upon hearing her read with perfect Roman pronunciation, and hearing her discuss matters of state with a wisdom worthy

<sup>114</sup>Axon, 31.

<sup>115</sup>*Panegirici*, 51: “duri rimprocci,” “bestiale attioni,” “pessimi costumi.” In a commentary to a *canzoniere* that circulated describing Manfrone’s arrest, Andrea Alciato, recalls an episode in which Manfrone, angered by his wife’s dancing at the house of her Gonzaga relatives, beat her severely: “[Lucrezia] danced against the will of her husband . . . irate, Manfrone returned to the room and beat his wife” (in da Ostiglia, 35).

<sup>116</sup>Da Ostiglia, 35: “in feminine guise she showed a soul that was more than manly; and forgetting his repeated mistreatment of her, she dedicated herself to procuring, with every effort, his welfare, and what was there that she did not do? That she did not say? That she did not attempt?”

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

of ancient Athens.”<sup>118</sup> Using a technique characteristic of many of his works, including the *Valorose donne*, Lando compares Gonzaga throughout the *Panegirici* to long catalogues of famous women. Gonzaga equals or outshines them all. In the words of the author, this is a portrait of female virtue to rival any produced by the most famous artists, “the portrait of the most singular woman I have ever known: nor was it created by the brush of Michelangelo or Titian, but by the pen of a writer who is the enemy of lies and flattery, and a stranger, more than any other, to every passion.”<sup>119</sup> It is, therefore, one in which Lando’s role as writer and Gonzaga’s as muse and model are of equal import.

If the *Panegirici* writes the exemplary biography of Gonzaga, Lando’s *Dialogo* on scripture recounts the story of her spiritual development. Previously, in the *Vera tranquillità dell’animo*, Lando had granted to Isabella Sforza the role of spiritual advisor. Now, in the role of the guide Philalete, he relocates himself, assuming an increased masculine authority while also positioning Gonzaga as a student worthy to take up the mantle of religious reform subsequent to his instruction. In a kind of Socratic dialogue, Philalete counsels Lucrezia on points including the interpretation and centrality of the Gospels, criticism of religious ritual, and justification by faith alone. He explains, for example, that “all the faithful are priests of the inner priesthood, and not the external. You will learn that neither words, nor miracles, nor ceremonies make us Christians, but only the renewal of our true life.”<sup>120</sup> He urges her to study no other text but scripture, and praises the community of the elect. These were all ideas that circulated in the heterodox religious culture of Italy in these years, and women were deeply involved in their dissemination, as seen in the linking of Isabella Sforza to the *Vera tranquillità dell’animo*. Models for the theological dialogue between Philalete and Lucrezia can be found in earlier works that center on conversations between a male religious counselor and a female disciple, for example, Bernardino Ochino’s *Dialogi sette* with Caterina Cibo or (perhaps a closer model) the *Alfabeto Cristiano*, a dialogue between Juan de Valdés and Giulia Gonzaga, major figures in the *spirituali* movement.

<sup>118</sup> *Panegirici*, 52: “Tutte le volte Signori che alla Fratta mi conduco, parmi veramente di gire ad un terrestre Paradiso, tante sono le consolationi, che io sento, hor dall’udir la leggere con una pronuntia più che Romana; hor dall’udir la discorrere dei stati con un senno più che Atheniense.”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 37: “il ritratto della più singolar Donna, ch’io mi conoscessi giamai: né fu egli fatto per lo penello di Michel Agnolo; o di Titiano: ma per penna di un scrittore nemico delle bugie, & delle adulationi, & alieno, quanto mai altri ne fusse da ogni passione.”

<sup>120</sup> *Dialogo*, 5<sup>v</sup>: “tutti i fedeli sono sacerdoti del sacerdotio interno; e non dell’esterno. Imparerete, che né il nome, né i miracoli, né le ceremonie sono quelle, che ci faccian christiani, ma solo il rinovare la vita nostra.”

Like the dialogue of Philalete and Lucrezia, the *Alfabeto cristiano*, published in 1545, emphasizes the interiority of faith and draws its narrative power from the real friendship between the interlocutors.<sup>121</sup> As Robin maintains, one might view Giulia, whose conversations figure so centrally in the dialogue, as the coauthor, with Valdés, of this work, for her persona and reputation are central to the way in which this text produces meaning.<sup>122</sup> We might say the same for Lando's *Dialogo*, which is ostensibly founded upon his own conversations with Lucrezia, emphasizing her ability to grasp complex issues of faith despite her young age and her sex.<sup>123</sup> The volume marks the transformation of Gonzaga from a woman of merely literary authority, adept in the study of classical and humanist texts, to one of spiritual and moral authority, who now renounces any text other than the Gospels. The *Dialogo* on scripture establishes Gonzaga's religious and spiritual reputation, offering a portrait of Gonzaga that both complements and expands upon that painted by the *Panegirici*.

Following her appearance in the *Panegirici* and the *Dialogo* on scripture — in addition to the fame she had acquired in chronicles describing Manfrone's arrest — Gonzaga's reputation was sufficiently established to ensure that her *Lettere* would find an audience. In fact, the *Lettere* elaborate on many of the themes addressed in the *Panegirici* and in the dialogue on the *Sacre Scritture*, enveloping heterodox religious points, such as justification through faith alone and the primacy of scripture, within the narrative frame of Manfrone's apprehension by the duke's men and Gonzaga's efforts to free him. Given the unsympathetic portrait they provide, it is no accident that the letters appeared in 1552, the year of Manfrone's death: freed from the weight of her imprisoned husband's reputation, Gonzaga could now publicly affirm the negative place he had earned in the popular imagination without undermining her own status as a faithful and admirable wife. Indeed, the story of Manfrone's arrest and imprisonment was well known, described in contemporary chronicles and *canzonieri*. For example, the *Rime* of Pier Francesco Bertoli da Ostiglia, who was accused of conspiring with Manfrone, offered a poetic account of the episode that circulated with

<sup>121</sup>Robin, 19.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 18: "While Valdés testified to having used his conversations with Gonzaga as the basis for the work, there are other reasons for acknowledging Gonzaga not only as the editor and producer of the *Alfabeto* but also as Valdés's coauthor," including her role in bringing the work to the attention of publishers and negotiating a contract to have it printed.

<sup>123</sup>Philalete praises Lucrezia by saying, "you speak very sensibly, such that no one would take you for a woman of twenty-five, but rather as older than the Cumaean Sibyl" ("parlate molto sensatamente, a tal che niuno vi giudicherebbe donna di venticinque anni, ma bene più vecchia della Sibilla Cumana"): *Dialogo*, 12.

a detailed gloss by Andrea Alciato between 1546 and 1549. In a series of twelve Petrarchan sonnets, Bertioli described Manfrone's plot and his own capture, seeking to justify, through verse, his betrayal of Manfrone under torture, as in sonnet 2, which explains, "I was led to Ferrara and to torture / that I might tell what I knew, and tell the truth," and again in sonnet 9, "The sentence was justly passed, / That Manfrone should lose his head, / and that to me be granted liberty, / the liberty I dearly longed for."<sup>124</sup> Other accounts, from Rodi's *Annuali di Ferrara* to that of the doctor who treated the duke after Manfrone's first attempt on his life, provided other details of the episode.<sup>125</sup> What Gonzaga's *Lettere* add to the story is a record of her own agency, born on Manfrone's behalf but transformed into a true literary project, one that fitted neatly into the prevailing sixteenth-century fashion for vernacular letterbooks. Manfrone's disgrace motivates Gonzaga to write letters, out of feminine duty and as a consolatory endeavor, offsetting any suggestion of audacity in the publication of a volume of personal correspondence. For example, in the very first letter of the collection, Gonzaga tells her sister-in-law Emilia — wife of Gonzaga's brother Carlo, Count of Sanmartino — that only through study can she forget her unhappiness; writing itself she describes as a defense against the blows of fortune: "I can find few remedies capable of freeing my heart from the many troubles that gather around it . . . I try to spend a good part of the time in study . . . in order to outwit the grief that presses on me so heavily . . . but if my fortune will not change, either of its own accord or that of others, I will change it myself, aware from long experience that it is useless to struggle with it, and if I cannot fight against it with deeds, at least I can fight it with words and I give some vent to my grief by lamenting it."<sup>126</sup> The literary trope of writing as consolation — via the saga of Manfrone's arrest, imprisonment, and

<sup>124</sup>Da Ostiglia, 38 (ll. 9–10): "Condusemi a Ferrara alla tortura / A dir quel ch'io sapeva, a dir il vero"; and 63 (ll. 1–4): "La sententia giustissima, che'è data, / Che la testa 'l Manfron levata sia, / E a me la cara libertà si dia, / La libertà da me tant'aspettata." In addition to the twelve sonnets, the *canzoniere* includes a set of *capitoli* ascribed falsely to Manfrone and Bertioli. Rodi's *Annuali*, 355<sup>f</sup>, corroborates that torture was used to extract confessions in the Manfrone case.

<sup>125</sup>See the works cited above in n. 61.

<sup>126</sup>*Lettere*, 2, misnumbered (really 5–6): "pochi rimedi posso trovare potenti a sgombrarmi dall'animo quelle tante molestie che se gli avvolgono d'attorno . . . cerco di consumare buona parte del tempo nelle lettere . . . per ingannare il dolore che duramente mi preme . . . ma se la fortuna mia né per se stessa, né per altri si muterà, la muterò io sola, conoscendo ormai per lunga prova che non si può contrastare con essa e se non potrò valerli contro di lei co' fatti; me ne risentirò almeno con le parole e sfogherò in parte il mio dolore col dolermi di lei."

death — is thus enlisted to frame Gonzaga's act of authorial self-assertion in publishing a book of *lettere familiari*, not unlike Vittoria Colonna's poems mourning her own husband (albeit in different circumstances) some years earlier. The true subject of these letters, however, is not Manfrone's disgrace or death, but rather Gonzaga's own efforts to define herself as a literary figure and to articulate her deeply felt religious views. Her epistolary self-presentation as a long-suffering, devoted wife functions as the outward justification for another kind of literary project.

A significant part of this project concerns Gonzaga's efforts to gain legitimacy as a literary figure — both a writer and a critic — as evidenced by her network of correspondents, which includes so many of the Pastori frattegiati. However, in keeping with the portrait painted in Lando's *Dialogo* and with what we know about Gonzaga's real involvement with heterodox culture, the *Lettere* reveal a deeper subtext of *spiritualismo*, one that links Gonzaga not only to the views of Lando, but to those of Valdés, Ochino, and many others. In one letter, for example, Gonzaga makes the point that faith, not pilgrimage — that is, works or ritual — brings us closer to God: “if you wish to be a Christian, you needn't have constant pilgrimage to all the holy places as your primary goal. Not that I condemn such a goal, but I tell you truly that faith is the only door to Christ, and it is better to study his scripture that was inspired by his spirit.”<sup>127</sup> Repeatedly, Gonzaga's letters on scripture implicitly and explicitly locate the writer within a community of elect souls, those who have embarked on the true road to Christ, further situating the *Lettere* within the criteria of evangelist letter collections.<sup>128</sup> This spiritual positioning is evident in a letter to Francesco Carrettona describing the joys of true faith. “Do you wish to taste true joy? Taste the happiness of a pure conscience,” Gonzaga advises. “Do you wish to sample the most exquisite victuals there are? Sample them in the study of holy scripture. Do you wish to experience the warmest and most welcoming company there is? Experience

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 239: “se volete esser cristiana, non far bisogno che per vostro principale oggetto abbiate il voler tutto di peregrinando visitare i luoghi santi. Non dico già che io ve lo biasimi, ma ben vi affermo per la bocca del vero che la fede si è l'unica porta per andar a Cristo, e di più convenire, che, di lui e delle scritture date e ispirate dallo spirito suo, ottimamente e sinceramente se ne giudichi.” On Juan de Valdés, see Nieto; Firpo, 1998. On Ochino, see Bainton; Campi.

<sup>128</sup>In her study of evangelist content in vernacular letter anthologies, Schutte, 1975, 662, offers a useful checklist detailing some of the elements common to such collections. It includes advocacy of justification by faith alone, emphasis on scripture and particularly on Paul's epistles, the “evaluation of other religious books . . . in terms of their presentation of the pure Gospel message,” stress on personal religious development and the conviction that the writer and recipient are part of an elect group of souls, and concern with Church reform.

the community of the faithful and the gathering of the righteous.”<sup>129</sup> Clearly, the “community of the faithful” and the “gathering of the righteous” constitute a group of God’s elect of which Gonzaga feels she is a part and for whom she is authorized to speak. Similarly, Gonzaga reprimands an anonymous correspondent for not respecting God or his elect, thus excluding him from that group while including herself. A letter to Thomaso Ferufino refers to the small but select group of Christ’s true followers: “following Christ may appeal to few, but those few will be esteemed the best.”<sup>130</sup>

Gonzaga takes pains to justify herself as a woman possessed of the moral authority to speak on religious matters. In one of several letters that offers guidance and criticism to religious leaders, she confidently assures her correspondent that when he hears a certain “fra Cherubino” preach, “you will say that Lucrezia Gonzaga not only knows how to use a [sewing] needle, but she is also a good judge of preachers.”<sup>131</sup> Elsewhere, she acts as an advisor to fra Giovanfrancesco Libertà Trevigiano, encouraging him to continue composing his “learned” and “devout” sermons devoted to the teachings of the Gospels.<sup>132</sup> Another letter responds to her sister Camilla’s doubts about how best to pray to God, thus assuming a position of authority over a cloistered nun.<sup>133</sup> Gonzaga advises Camilla to be heartfelt, but not overly lengthy, in her prayers, citing the words of Paul (a touchstone for Italian evangelism): “Paul praises five words, more than ten thousand that are offered only with the lips and not understood.”<sup>134</sup>

Finally, in addition to reiterating the religious views expressed in the previous letters, a letter explaining how to draw closer to Christ may provide a key to interpreting the moral letters we have discussed here. To be “with Christ,” Gonzaga declares, we must leave behind all vice: “We must

<sup>129</sup> *Lettere*, 255: “Volete voi gustare una vera voluttà? Gustate l’allegrezza della pura coscienza. Volete assaggiare le più delicate vivande che gustar si possano? Assaggiatele nello studio delle sante scritture. Volete isperimentare la più festevole e la più gioconda compagnia che isperimentar si possa? Isperimentate la comunanza dei fedeli e la raunanza dei buoni.”

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 246: “seguendo Cristo a pochi piacerete, ma quei pochi saranno reputati i migliori.”

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 270: “direte Lucrezia Gonzaga non solo s’intende alquanto di adoperar l’aco, ma anche pò far giudizio dei predicatori.”

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 271–72: “la dottrina vangelica.”

<sup>133</sup> Although Gonzaga (*ibid.*, 75) points out that Camilla ought rather advise her: “although really you should know better than me what counsel to give here, since your convent is run by such prudent fathers and spiritual mothers” (“benché non doverebbe mancare che vi sapesse in ciò consigliare meglio di me, essendo retto questo vostro munistero da padri sí prudenti e madri tanto spiritali”).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 276: “Paulo loda più tosto cinque parole che diecimila profferite solo con le labbra e non punto intese”; cf. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, 14:19.

abandon ambition, pride, sloth, delight, pleasure, lust, unbridled desires, and dishonest appetites.”<sup>135</sup> Thus the letters on vice in the volume that deal with precisely these issues of ambition, pride, and lust, as well as the story of Manfrone, which functions as a kind of morality tale, not only set up Gonzaga as a moral figure attempting to guide her readers by turning them away from such vices, but also fit into her larger spiritual consciousness. To be part of the elect means to transcend these vices. The moral and spiritual letters are intertwined, mutually ancillary aspects of Gonzaga’s *epistolario*.

The religious aspect of Gonzaga’s letters is central to our understanding of the volume as a whole, for together with the narrative and literary elements, it constitutes the third of three principal threads — autobiographical, literary, and spiritual — that together form Gonzaga’s epistolary persona. These compositions not only help us to understand better where Gonzaga stood within the complex, shifting territory of religious debate in the early 1550s, but they also shed further light on her objectives for the published volume. Not only did Gonzaga’s letterbook aim to create an enduring public representation of its author, it also sought to disseminate her religious convictions through the popular new vehicle of the vernacular letterbook. Finally, the religious content of Gonzaga’s letters links her to Lando and to their literary and spiritual partnership. The ideas she expresses that privilege scripture, justification by faith, and the community of the elect are all present in Lando’s *Dialogo* on scripture. There Gonzaga plays the role of a student, bright and well educated, but obediently led by her teacher. In the *epistolario* she has become the teacher, assuming the active role played by many women within the evangelist movement in Italy. Lando’s clear fascination with Gonzaga, as demonstrated by his representation of her in the *Valorose donne*, the *Dialogo*, and the *Panegirici*, suggests that her *Lettere* might be seen as part of a broader Landian project to promote Gonzaga and, through her, his own religious views. At the same time, however, it is difficult to separate Lando’s views from Gonzaga’s, for they shared a common interest in evangelism as well as in literature, the former attested to by Gonzaga’s later Inquisition trial, the latter by the praise of her contemporaries. As the nineteenth-century critic Pietro Ferri judiciously pointed out, it is unlikely that the precise degree of Lando’s intervention (or lack thereof) in Gonzaga’s text can ever be definitively known.<sup>136</sup> A more productive way of thinking about Gonzaga’s letters is to see

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 241: “per esser con Cristo, che faremo noi? Lasciaremos l’ambizione, la superbia, l’ozio, le delizie, i piaceri, la libidine, i sfrenati desideri et i disonesti appetiti.”

<sup>136</sup>Ferri, 189, cautions that the problem of authorship is a “debate in which distinguished men have given different opinions” and predicts, “these letters will always leave some question as to their originality.”

them in the context of a broader partnership between her and Lando, one that unfolded against the backdrop of early modern Italian *evangelismo*. Rather than diminish Gonzaga's literary agency, such a collaboration can help us to refine our ideas about authorship and book production in the sixteenth century.

To return to our original question, then, does the sex of a text matter? In an article on female impersonations in English Renaissance literature, Elizabeth D. Harvey writes that "ventriloquism is an appropriation of the female voice [that] reflects and contributes to a larger cultural silencing of women."<sup>137</sup> That is, when male writers write as women, they speak for them, substituting the authentic speech of women with the views of male society. At the same time, however, such cases of ventriloquism illustrate the fundamentally artificial nature of gender distinctions, as Harvey (following Judith Butler) goes on to argue. When assuming a gendered persona, deliberately or otherwise, all authors, male and female, variously assume, incorporate, challenge, and subvert cultural conventions and notions regarding gender. In the case of Ortensio Lando's adoption of the persona of Lucrezia Gonzaga, whether in the *Valorose donne* or in the *Panegirici* and the *Dialogo*, what appears most significant is the way that this persona is made to exemplify ideal feminine virtues and a particular religious sensibility. When coupled with Gonzaga's own *Lettere*, a deeper layer of Lando's appropriation is revealed, demonstrating it to be not an act of silencing, but rather one of giving voice, a dynamic collaboration between literary and spiritual partners, with Gonzaga contributing actively to the construction of her own literary persona. Initially undertaken by Lando, the project of establishing Gonzaga's literary, moral, and spiritual reputation shifts to Gonzaga herself. The resulting epistolary portrait demonstrates not only how gender could be performed in the epistolary context, with Lucrezia Gonzaga's persona functioning as a model of exemplary womanhood, but also, and most importantly, how sixteenth-century texts were so often born not of the efforts of a single author, but from the influence and cooperation of individuals linked to one another by common literary, cultural, and religious views.

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<sup>137</sup>Harvey, esp. 16–32.



562: 27: a. 8. 0.  
 H ma m. s. sorella et mia s. m. ossz ma  
 1567  
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Et si suo molto ben ricordare che parlando seco di quei  
 rumori chi andavano in uolta y conto dell' inquisitione co  
 re saue marauigliata et stupetata chio fosse stata nominata in  
 cosa tale essendo come in fatto sono tanto lontana da  
 questi pensieri et da queste pratiche ne mi saprei immaginare  
 in cent'anni chi potesse esser stato chi mi hauesse accusato  
 y chio non parlai mai de questo parimente a inquisitione  
 se y forsi non hauesse y abbondanza di parole come si fa  
 detto qualche cosa, ma mancho di M<sup>o</sup> Camillo Nuno ho  
 ch' d' altro homo di questo mondo haueri potuto  
 dubitare ch' hauesse fatto tal ufficio y che no' trato con lui  
 et non lo uogo mai et so certo ch' mai di simil cosa gli  
 parlai et sorella certo ch' io hauesse hauto una minima  
 similita di suspitione di lui ch' io gli haueri detto come alio  
 detto tutte le altre cose ch' sono passate in torno a questa  
 negocio et ho M<sup>o</sup> Camillo y tanto homo da bene o'bra alli  
 molti rispetti che concorono in questo particolare ch' mi  
 rendo secura ch' esso no' haueria mai pensato di farmi  
 offesa preao dunque no' s' farmi gratia di farli sapere chio  
 no' ho tal offensione di lui et ch' lo uogo y amico: Di quelle

FIGURE 1 (above and facing). Letter from Lucrezia Gonzaga to her sister, 27 August 1567. Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, fols. 370–71. (See Appendix, letter VI.) By permission of the Archivio di Stato di Mantova.

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altre s.<sup>re</sup> non so che me ne debba dire y ch non ho spulato  
 loro di questo particolare ne so il suo pensiero come le  
 uoga non mancare y servir a. s. et far spiacere a M.  
 Camilo di designarle se conossero et habbiano tal  
 opinione contra di lui le rimando la lettera et gli  
 basio le mani pregando n. s. che la guardi sempre  
 Di mantua alli 27 agosto 1570

Tua V. S. M.<sup>ma</sup>

Sorella et S.<sup>ua</sup>  
 Lucretia Gonzaga

*Appendix: Selected Letters by Lucrezia Gonzaga  
(with a Letter by Giampaolo Manfrone)*<sup>138</sup>

*List of Letters by Location:*

1. Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMo):
  - Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2: two letters to Giampaolo Manfrone
  - Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Letterati, b. 24: one letter to Duke Ercole II d'Este
  - Cancelleria Ducale, Particolari, Gonzaga, b. 818: two letters to Paolo Quaresima
  
2. Biblioteca Estense, Modena
  - Autografoteca Campori, "Lucrezia Gonzaga": five letters written from a convent in Bozzolo to Vespasiano Gonzaga and his circle; one letter written from Mantua to Raniero de' Ranieri, also in Vespasiano's circle
  
3. Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASM):
  - Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, fols. 370–71: one letter to her sister [Isabella?] regarding the Inquisition's suspicions about Lucrezia
  - Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, c. 371: one letter of consolation to the Duchess of Mantua

*Selected Letters:*

- I. Lucrezia Gonzaga to Giampaolo Manfrone, 22 November 1546<sup>139</sup> (ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottieri, b. 2. Fortebraccio Manfrone)

Illustrissimo Signor Consorte et Signor mio honorandissimo.

Per la litera de mesere Marcello la inte[n]derà la causa dela mia venuta in Venetia, et ancho la saperà quello che si è operato et si spera di operare per util et honore de Vostra Signoria. Non starò replicharlo altramente. Li dirò sol questo, che la stii di bon animo et gubernasi benne et stia sanna, che il signor Idio provederà al tutto et che serà — ora mai — il tempo che anchora nui habiamo benne. Sonno stata dalla signora vostra matre et quella mi ha fatto asaisimi careze et alla putina tante del mondo. La signora sua cia sta bene et senpre siamo insieme salvo che la note, et usa ogni opera per aiuto dele cose dela Signoria Vostra et se areco[r]da per

<sup>138</sup>In transcribing the following letters, I have modernized punctuation and diacritics and dissolved abbreviations (where possible). I am grateful to Armando Petrucci and, especially, Franca Petrucci Nardelli, who at a 2001 Newberry Library Summer Institute in paleography helped me to unravel some of the thornier problems in several of these letters. I am also indebted to Elissa Weaver for her sharp eye and paleographical expertise.

<sup>139</sup>Gonzaga writes to her husband during the first year of his imprisonment in Ferrara. This letter is also reproduced, with some differences in transcription, in Griguolo, 1988, 42.

infinite vol[t]e; et io con tutto il core mi racomando et basio le mane, et il simile la Isabella, qual sta benne et se atrova qui mecho. Di Venetia alli 22 di novenbrio del xxx6.

Di Vostra illustrissima Signoria amorevole consorte et serva, Lucretia Gonzaga de Manfroni

Most illustrious Lord Husband and my most honored Lord.

From messer Marcello's<sup>140</sup> letter, you will understand the reason for my coming to Venice, and you will also discover what was accomplished and what one hopes to accomplish for the welfare and honor of Your Lordship. I won't explain further. I will say only this: that you must be of good spirit and look after yourself and be well, for the lord God will see to everything, and it will be — soon — time for good to come to us once more. I saw your lady mother and she showered me and the little one with affection. Your lady aunt is well and we are always together but for the nighttime, and she is doing everything to help Your Lordship and she sends her greetings a thousand times; and I commend myself to you with all my heart and kiss your hands, as does Isabella, who is well and is here with me. Venice, 22 November, xxx6.

Your illustrious Lordship's loving wife and servant, Lucretia Gonzaga Manfroni

II. Giampaolo Manfrone to Lucrezia Gonzaga [no date] (ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Condottiere, b. 1)

Illustrissima Signora Consorte et Signora mia osservandissima.

Ho visto la lettera dela Signoria Vostra in risposta dela mia circa al maravigliarsi che non voglia a modo alcuno che la vadi a Venetia, al che li replico il medesimo et la suplico attender a governar casa sua et non creder per niente che la sia pazia, ma non si può dir ogni cosa. Così vollesse Dio che un buon focco ardesse quella casa dalla Frata et l'aqua di Pò annegasse quel pocco che ci è restato, che havrei speranza de uscir vivo de qui et di vederla in breve. Le reputation sono bone et li honori et utilli a chi è libero et io le desidero più che la vita, ma in man de chi si sia non giova niente; et Vostra Signoria non pensasse de procurar l'honor alla casa in un modo et lo perdesse in un altro, tanto più che ci vego difficoltà in far niuna cosa bona sí per essere la Signoria Vostra incerta dela vita mia sí per saper quanti expressissimi torti mi hano fati quella illustrissima signoria. La Signoria Vostra non voglia far come quelli che pescano cum l'hano d'oro, che perdono più in una volta che non guadagnano in cento. Attendi Vostra Signoria cum ogni possibil mezo a farmi liberar allo eccellentissimo signor Ducca se si puol, se non mi contenteria de morir più presto, [ove] ne sentireia magior grado, et anche mi facesse uscir de tante pene ho qui, che star in questi tormenti, perchè uscendo ruinato mi bisognerà far come dicce quel verso del Petrarca certissimo. Io li bascio

<sup>140</sup>The reference is likely to that "Marcello Littigato" who was appointed as Gonzaga's procurator upon her husband's death in 1552 (cf. ASM, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 1827; see Griguolo, 1988, 44–46).

le mani et me li raccomando cosí alla signora Julia et alle putine et la supplico governar la sua casa et figlioli et veder se li è verso placcar il core del signor Ducca de Ferrara cum qualche buoni mezi. Se non, la non attendi a consigli de Marcello in questo caso ma al mio, perchè la va per mi, et di novo li bascio le mani.

Di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima servitor et consorte,

Giovan Paulo Fortebraccio Manfron

[postscript]

Io non dicco che potendo Vostra Signoria rimediar alla ruina dela casa et darmi la vita, non andando però a Vinetia, lei non lo debi far. Vostra Signoria è savia; la intendo et scio che la mi ama.

La Signoria Vostra manda deli pagini bianchi et mi avisi due righe almeno et spesso del ben star suo, per l'amore de Dio.

Most illustrious Lady Wife and my most honored Lady.

I saw Your Ladyship's letter in response to my own regarding your surprise that I should not wish you to go to Venice under any circumstances; to which I offer the same reply and I beg you to attend to your household and not to believe for a moment that this is folly, but one can't say every single thing. Would to God that a great fire might engulf that house in Fratta and that the waters of the Po drown what little is left to us, for I could hope to leave here alive and see you again soon. Reputations and honor are good and useful to one who is free, and these I desire more than life, but in the hands of just anyone they serve no purpose, and Your Ladyship must not think to procure our house's honor in one way while losing it in another, the more so since I see it will be difficult to accomplish anything useful, Your Ladyship being uncertain as to my fate and knowing how many clear wrongs that most illustrious signoria has done me. Your Ladyship must not do like those who in fishing with bait of gold lose more in one try than they earn in a hundred. Your Ladyship must attempt with every possible means to secure my freedom from the most excellent lord Duke if it is possible, if he will not grant me the satisfaction of dying quickly, which would please me the most, and it would also allow me to escape the great suffering I have here, rather than remain in torment, for in leaving as a ruined man, I will certainly have to do as it says in that verse by Petrarch. I kiss your hands and I commend myself to you and also to lady Julia and to the little girls and I beg you to tend to your household and children and to see if there is any way to placate the heart of the Duke of Ferrara by some honorable means. If not, do not heed the counsel of Marcello in this matter, but my own, because you are doing it for me, and I kiss your hands once more.

Your most illustrious Ladyship's servant and husband,

Giovan Paulo Fortebraccio Manfron

[postscript]

I do not say that, if Your Ladyship is able to put right the ruin of our house and grant me my life (without going to Venice, however), that you should not do so. Your Ladyship is wise; I understand this and I know that you love me.

Your Ladyship must send me some blank pages and at least a few lines, regularly, apprising me as to your welfare, for the love of God.

III. Lucrezia Gonzaga to Duke Ercole II d'Este of Ferrara, 1 June 1550 (ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Archivio per materie, Letterati, b. 24)

Illustrissimo et eccellentissimo Signor mio osservandissimo.

Fra li molti affanni dove mi attrovo, questo conforto mi resta: che dependendo la somma de le miserie mie da la volontà di Vostra Eccellenza, ho d'assicurarmi che essendo lei piena non men di clementia, che di giustitia, non potrà co [. . .] che non sia un giorno dato fine a le tante mie tribulationi, et se mirando ne la sua infinita bontà, sento questa speranza che non mi può [. . .] maggiormente mi confermo che la non sia per comportare che a le p[re]senti afflitioni mie sotto ombra sua me si aggiugna per li sudditi suoi ingiuria et danno. Il Conte Lorenzo Roverella, suddito di Vostra Eccellenza, vedendo ove s'atrova il consorte mio, ha presa occasione di far intendere al fattor mio da la Costa, et a li miei lavoratori, che si levino dal mio servitio se non che li farà amazzare. Io come parente sua, et come quella che desidero esserli amica, li ho scritto et pregatolo con ogni humanità che non vogli vessarmi, né darmi maggior travaglio che mi habbi. Non ha voluto riscrivermi, ma ha mandato il Capitano Baldessara Avogadro, qualle in risposta mi ha usato parole che mi confermano l'animo suo esser tale quale ha fatto intendere a li lavoratori et fattor mio; il che inteso, non ho voluto voltarmi altrove ch'a la bontà infinita di Vostra Eccellenza, la qualle è suo prencipe et mio signore, et con quella maggior humiltà che si conviene, la supplico che per giustitia et per pietà se degni cometter ad esso Conte Lorenzo che non mi travagli né mi aggiugna maggior affanno, che so bene che ad un minimo cenno di Lei sarà obbedientissimo; con che facendo fine, le bascio inchinevolmente le manni, et prego il signor Iddio che l'illustrissima sua perssona conservi. Dalla Fratta il primo giugno M.D.L.

Di Vostra illustrissima et eccellentissima Signoria affetionatisima serva,  
Lucretia Gonzaga Manfrona

To my most illustrious and excellent honored Lord,

Amid the many troubles in which I find myself, I still have this comfort: that, the sum of my misery depending on the will of Your Excellency, I may be assured that you, being no less full of clemency than justice, will not [. . .] that one day an end may be put to my tribulations, and if in looking to your infinite goodness, I feel such hope that cannot [. . .] I am the more certain that you will not permit that your subjects should add injury and damage to the pain and afflictions I now suffer under your protection. Your Excellency's subject Count Lorenzo Roverella,<sup>141</sup> seeing where

<sup>141</sup>Gonzaga was related to the Roverella by marriage, through her husband's mother Beatrice Roverella. Rodi's *Annuali di Ferrara*, 352<sup>t</sup>, attest to the bad blood between the Manfrone and Roverella families, suggesting that Giampaolo Manfrone had tried to kill "certain members of the Roverella family, who were his enemies" ("certi de' Roverella che erano suoi nemici").

my spouse finds himself, seized the occasion to warn my bailiff at La Costa, along with my workers, that they should leave my service or he will have them killed. As his relative, and as one who wishes to be his friend, I wrote to him and begged him for humanity's sake not to vex me, nor bring me more trouble than what I have. He chose not to write back, but sent Captain Baldessara Avogadro, who in response used words that confirmed to me that his mind is set exactly as he expressed it to my workers and my bailiff. Once I heard this, I thought of turning nowhere else but to the infinite goodness of Your Excellency, his prince and my lord, and with that great humility that is proper, I beg that for the sake of justice and compassion you deign to instruct this Count Lorenzo not to bother me nor add to my difficulties, for I well know that at the slightest sign from you, he will be most obedient; with which, in conclusion, I bow to kiss your hands, and beg the Lord God preserve your illustrious person. Fratta, the first of June, 1550.

Your illustrious and excellent Lordship's most affectionate servant, Lucretia Gonzaga Manfrona

IV. Lucrezia Gonzaga to Vespasiano Gonzaga, 9 October 1555<sup>142</sup> (Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Autografoteca Campori, Gonzaga)

Illustriissimo et Eccellentissimo Signore et Patrone mio osservandissimo,

Havendo inteso che Vostra Eccellentia è ritornata dal campo cesareo, m'è parso con questa mia pistola visitarla, fargli reverentia, et bassciargli le mani, poi che presentialmente non m'è concesso il comodo; et havendo inteso lei esser tornata sana, sia lodato il nostro signor Iddio qual sempre se degni haver soa protettione et guidarla de bene in meglio. Eccellentissimo signor mio, già sonno tre anni che io son confinata in questo loco, et hormai saria tempo che Vostra Eccellentia me ne liberasse, d'il ché humilmente ne la supplico, che certamente oltra alla passione che ne la persona mia patisco, altrettanto me dole del disturbo et dano che patise queste reverende madri et tutto il monasterio per me, perhò di novo la supplico haver compassione et di me, et de questo povero monastero, acciò che il nostro signor Iddio gli doni ancor a lei ciò che dessia; et perchè spero esser de ciò esaudita, non gli chiederò per hora de le cose che ne ho grandissimo bisogno, et così di nuovo le bassio le mani. Da Bozzolo, il 9 de ottobre, 1555.

Di Vostra Illustrissima et Eccellentissima Signoria humil serva, Lucretia Gonzaga

Most illustrious and excellent Lord and my honored Patron,

Having learned of Your Excellency's return from the Caesarean camp, I thought with this letter to greet you, honor you, and kiss your hands, since I have not the luxury of doing so in person; and having learned that you returned safely, may our lord God be praised, and may he always deign to protect you and guide you from good things to better. My most excellent Lord, three years have already

<sup>142</sup>One of five letters in this archive written by Gonzaga from the convent in Bozzolo to which she retired after her husband's death in 1552 until at least 1555.

passed since I was confined to this place, and now it is time that Your Excellency free me from here, for which I humbly entreat you; for in addition to the suffering I experience myself, I also regret the inconvenience and trouble experienced by these reverend mothers and by the entire convent on my behalf. Once again, therefore, I beg you to have compassion for me and for this poor convent, so that our lord God may grant you what you desire; and because I hope to have my wish granted, I will not ask you now for those things I so greatly need, and thus I kiss your hands again. From Bozzolo, 9 October, 1555.

Your most illustrious and excellent Lordship's humble servant, Lucretia Gonzaga

V. Lucrezia Gonzaga to Paulo Quaresima, 29 October 1555 (ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Particolari, Gonzaga)<sup>143</sup>

Magnifico amicho honorando,

Tanto ho da dir che cominciar non oso. Che diavolo di puocho amore sie il vostro star dui mesi et mai scrivermi; forse che non sapete le vostre lettere esermi carissime et forse che vi puotete di me duoler che già molti giorni non habia risposto a tute le vostre? Di gratia scrivetemi ciò che fate et quel che si fa dellí et quanto vi mancharà sugetto scrivetemi li vostri amori. So pur che vi deve occorer mile belle cose, tanto magiormente che ho inteso da un gentilomo che sete a buone mani et che havete chi vi tien al segno. Mi piace, adeso non vi lamentarete, ma languendo viverete lieto. Beato voi che prima sete fato dotore che innamorato. So che Bartol sarebbe andato a spaso; non crederò però mai che tanto vi siate dato in preda ad amore che vi habiate scordato di me che vi son tanto amicha. Credo che 'l non mi scrivere proceda da eser ocupato circha maioris. Qua non occorre cosa né bella né buona; a Ferrara ogni dí ve ne acascha. Avisatemene, che vi risponderò. Raccomandateme al signor Vespasiano Gualengo et avisatime s'el Ruberti sie dellí che li voglio scrivere. State sano, che Iddio vi concieda ciò che desiderate. Di Mantua alli 29 ottobre 1555.

Vostra amicissima Lucretia Gonzaga

Magnificent and honored friend,

I have so much to say to you that I dare not begin. What sort of devilish indifference is this, your going two months and never writing to me? Perhaps you do not know that your letters are most dear to me, and perhaps you are upset that many days have passed already without my responding to all of yours? Kindly write to me about what you are doing and what is going on there, and if you should lack for a subject, write to me about your love life. Indeed I am certain that a thousand nice things must happen to you, especially since I learned from a gentleman that you are in good hands and that you have someone to keep you in line. I am glad; now you will not complain, but in languor you will be content. Lucky you, to have earned

<sup>143</sup>The address on the outer part of this letter reads "To the Magnificent Messer Paulo Quaresima, honorable friend, in the contrada of Petegole [Gossips]."



your degree before falling in love. I know that Bartol would have lost himself to diversion, but I will not believe that you have given yourself up to love so completely that you have forgotten me, your dear friend. I believe that you do not write because you are occupied with weightier matters. Here nothing interesting nor good is happening; at Ferrara something happens every day. Write to me about it, for I will answer you. Give my regards to signor Vespasiano Gualengo and let me know if Ruberti is there, as I wish to write to him. Be well, may God grant you what you desire. Mantua, 29 October 1555.

Your dear friend, Lucretia Gonzaga

VI. Lucrezia Gonzaga to her sister, 27 August 1567 (see fig. 1)<sup>144</sup> (ASM, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 2578, fols. 370–71)

Illustriissima Signora Sorella et mia Signora osservandissima.

Vostra Signoria si può molto ben raccordare che parlando seco di quei rumori che andavano in volta per conto dell'Inquisitione io restavo maraviata et stupefata ch'io fosse stata nominata in cosa tale, essendo come in fatti sono tanto lontana da questi pensieri et da queste pratiche, né mi saprei imaginare in cent'anni chi potesse esser stato chi mi havese accusato perch'io non parlai mai de sugeto partinente a Inquisitione, se per sorte non havessi per abbondanza di parole, come si fa, deto qualche cosa; ma mancho di messer Camillo Olivo che d'altro homo di questo mondo haverei potuto dubitare che havesse fato tal ufficio, perché non trato con lui et non lo vego mai et so certo che mai di simil cosa gli parlai, et Vostra Signoria creda certo che s'io havesse hauto una minima sintila di suspicione di lui ch'io gli l'haverei deto come gli [h]o detto tute le altre cose che sono passate in torno a questo negocio. Et ho messer Camillo per tanto homo da bene oltra alli molti rispeti che concoreno in questo particolare che mi rendo secura ch'esso non haveria mai pensato di farmi offesa. Prego dunque Vostra Signoria farmi gratia di farli sapere ch'io non ho tal oppinione di lui et che lo tengo per amico. Di quelle altre signore non so che me ne debba dire perché non ho parlato loro di questo particolare, né so il suo pensiero. Come le vega non mancarò per servir a Vostra Signoria et far apiacer a messer Camilo di desenganarle se conoserò che habbiano tal oppinione contro di lui. Le rimando la lettera et gli basio le mani, pregando nostro Signor Dio la guardi sempre. Di Mantua alli 27 agosto 1567.

Di Vostra Signoria Illustriissima sorella et serva, Lucretia Gonzaga

Most illustrious Lady Sister and my honored Lady.

Your Ladyship may well remember that, in speaking of those rumors that were being circulated by the Inquisition, I was amazed and astonished to have been named in such a matter, being, as in fact I am, so far from these thoughts and from these practices that in a hundred years I would not be able to imagine who it could have been to have accused me, because I never spoke about any subject relating to the Inquisition, unless by chance, in talking too much, as happens, I may have said something. Nor would I suspect messer Camillo Olivo or any other man alive of

<sup>144</sup>Letter partially transcribed in Pagano, 24, n. 69.

having done such a thing, for I have no dealings with him and I never see him and I know for certain that I never spoke to him of such a thing, and Your Ladyship may be certain that if I had even the smallest spark of suspicion about him I would have told you, as I have told you every other detail regarding this business. And I consider messer Camillo such a good man aside from the many details related to this matter that I am sure that he would never have thought to harm me. Therefore I pray Your Ladyship to do me the favor of informing him that I do believe this of him, and that I consider him a friend. With regard to those other ladies, I don't know what to say about them since I have not spoken to them about this matter, nor do I know their thoughts. When I see them I will not fail to serve Your Ladyship and please Messer Camilo by setting them right if I should find that they have such an opinion about him. I am sending the letter back to you and I kiss your hands, praying our Lord God watch over you always. Mantua, 27 August 1567.

Your most illustrious Ladyship's sister and servant, Lucretia Gonzaga

VII. Lucretia Gonzaga to the Duchess of Mantua, 9 April 1567 (ASM, Archivio Gonzaga, 2578, fol. 370)

Serenissima Signora mia Patrona et Signora.

Infinito è stato il dolore ch'io ho sentito del caso della serenissima signora Principessa Margaritta, che sia in gloria, per la gran perdita che ha fatto il Mondo, et per l'affanno estremo ch'io so che Vostra Altezza deve sentire; nondimeno, poiché così è stata volontà di Nostro Signore Dio, mi confido che Vostra Altezza colla sua prudenza mittigarà la passione conformandosi col divino volere. Et io con questo humilmente le bacio le mani dell'essersi degnata di farm partecipe de suoi dispiaceri, et nella sua felice grazia mi raccomando quanto posso. Da Mantova alli ix di Aprile del MDlxvij.

Di Vostra Altezza humilissima serva, Lucretia Gonzaga

My Most Serene Lady and Patron,

The grief I felt upon hearing about the most serene lady princess Margaritta, may she be in glory, was infinite, both for the great loss to the World, and for the extreme pain that I know Your Highness must feel; nonetheless, since this was the will of our Lord God, I am confident that Your Highness, in your prudence, will mitigate your suffering by conforming to divine will. And with this, I humbly kiss your hands to thank you for deigning to share your troubles with me, and commend myself to your grace. Mantua, 9 April 1567.

Your Highness's humble servant, Lucretia Gonzaga

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