

Gender and Eloquence in Ercole de' Roberti's Portia and Brutus

by VIRGINIA COX

A commonplace of modern feminist scholarship holds that fifteenth-century Italian humanists regarded the figure of the articulate women with hostility and suspicion. This position is insufficiently nuanced: while it may have been true to some extent in republican contexts, it was emphatically not the case in the secular princely courts, where women's capacity for eloquence was frequently a subject of praise. Humanistic attitudes toward female eloquence are examined here with special reference to Ercole de' Roberti's representation of the classical heroine Portia in oratorical guise in his Portia and Brutus, painted at the court of Ferrara in the late 1480s or early '90s. The article contextualizes Roberti's painting with regard to its classical literary sources, to contemporary practices of female oratory, and to the cultural and social self-positioning of the work's probable patron, Duchess Eleonora d'Aragona.

Among the most intriguing and original secular visual representations of women that survive to us from the Italian Quattrocento are three panels by Ercole de' Roberti (d. 1496) depicting classical women worthies, painted in Ferrara at some point between 1486 and 1493. Most critics now concur in associating the paintings with the patronage interests of Eleonora d'Aragona (1450–93), Duchess of Ferrara from 1473 following her marriage to Ercole d'Este (1431–1505).¹ The subjects of two of the panels in Roberti's series are relatively clear: one, now at the Kimbell Museum in Fort

I would like to thank Joseph Manca and an anonymous *Renaissance Quarterly* reviewer for their insightful comments on this article, and Melissa Swain, Paola Ugolini, and Katharina Piechocki for their assistance in preparing it for publication. I also thank Nancy Edwards for allowing me to see her 2008 catalogue entry on Roberti's *Portia and Brutus* prior to publication. Except where published translations are cited, all translations are mine.

¹The authorship of the panels under discussion here has sometimes been disputed: see, for example, Molteni, 176–79, who considers them workshop products. However, Manca, 1992, 60, 134, 137–38, argues for Roberti's authorship of the series with the partial exception of the *Lucretia*; Syson, 1999b, xxxii, for Ercole's authorship of the series as a whole. Regarding their dating, the *terminus post quem* is offered by Roberti's arrival at the Ferrarese court in 1486, the *terminus ante quem* by the death of Eleonora d'Aragona in 1493. Syson, 1999b, xxxii, dates the panels to ca. 1486–90, while Manca, 2000a, 13, 20, n. 1; and Manca, 2003c, 86–88, place them later, in ca. 1490–93. The hypothesis of Eleonora's patronage is found in Manca, 1992, 135, and developed in Manca, 2000a and 2003c. The conjecture is

Worth (fig. 1), depicts Portia, the wife of Caesar's assassin Brutus, in the company of her husband, while the other, in Modena's Galleria Estense, shows Lucretia with her husband Collatinus and Lucius Junius Brutus (fig. 2). The subject of the third panel (fig. 3), in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, is more obscure, but critical consensus has settled on the wife of the Carthaginian commander Hasdrubal, who killed herself along with her children rather than submit to captivity under the Romans. The question of what precisely connects the panels' subjects other than the generic theme of female worth has been the subject of debate, although the virtues of fortitude and constancy have recently been plausibly proposed.² The theme of death before dishonor has also been suggested, although this applies more clearly to some of the three figures than others: while all three women's lives ended in suicide, only in the cases of Lucretia and Hasdrubal's wife does avoidance of dishonor seem the motive, while Portia's suicide is more usually attributed to her grief following Brutus's death.³ A further connection that has been noted between the three subjects is that all three heroines exemplify feminine moral courage within a political context: Portia acts as confidante to her husband during his plot against Caesar, while Lucretia inspires Collatinus and Brutus to overthrow the tyrannical rule of Tarquinius Superbus, and Hasdrubal's wife embodies a desperate political integrity in the face of Carthage's defeat. Setting aside the republican context of the first two *exempla*, this political contextualization of feminine virtue had a clear relevance to the works' probable patron, Eleonora, who was at this time assuming an ever more prominent public role in the affairs of Ferrara at the side of her spouse.⁴

A problem that has traditionally confronted interpreters of Roberti's *Famous Women* sequence, especially those concerned with the paintings' patronage context, is the discrepancy between the marital ethos shown in the familiar *exempla* of Portia and Lucretia, and that of the more arcane figure of Hasdrubal's wife. While Portia and Lucretia were both chaste

accepted as plausible by Wilkins Sullivan; Syson, 1999b; Franklin, 131–48; and Edwards, 2008a, 310, while Gold presents it as fact. Recent secondary literature on the paintings is cited in Franklin, 131, n. 52; Edwards, 2008a, 311. For a comprehensive listing of earlier literature, see the bibliographical entries in Manca, 1992, 133–39.

²Manca, 2000a.

³The death-before-dishonor thesis is set forth in Wilkins Sullivan, esp. 619–25. For critical discussion, see Manca, 2003b, 611, n. 7; Edwards, 2008a, 311, n. 12.

⁴On Eleonora's self-positioning and her political role in Ferrara, see Gundersheimer, 1980a; Tuohy, 15–17; Gold; Edelstein; Manca, 2003c; the last also examining her art patronage. The fullest biography of her remains Chiappini.



FIGURE 1. Ercole de' Roberti. *Portia and Brutus*, ca. 1486–93. Forth Worth, Kimbell Art Museum. Photo credit: Kimbell Art Museum/Art Resource NY.

wives to heroic husbands, and Portia in particular a much-cited paragon of marital devotion, the classical sources for the story of Hasdrubal's wife have a very different story to tell. In Livy, Appian, and Valerius Maximus, Hasdrubal's wife figures as a woman whose masculine fortitude stands as a reproach to the pusillanimity of her husband. She is represented as killing herself to avoid the shame of captivity and servitude, while Hasdrubal — “the most effeminate of men,” as his wife berates him in Appian — instead surrenders to the Romans and is paraded in triumph.⁵ As Margaret Franklin

⁵The fullest account of the classical sources for the Hasdrubal's wife *exemplum* is found in Gilbert, 185–86, 192–93; see also Edgeworth, 130–32.



FIGURE 2. Ercole de' Roberti. *Lucretia with Collatinus and Brutus*, ca. 1486–93. Modena, Galleria Estense. Photo credit: Archivio Fotografico SPSAE di Modena e Reggio Emilia. By permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

has recently noted, it is difficult to square this implied theme of husbandly inadequacy in the *Hasdrubal's Wife* panel with Eleonora d'Aragona's position as patron and with her customary persona of loyal wife.⁶ The problem is resolved, however, if we take the example of Hasdrubal's wife as reflecting the tradition not of Livy and Appian, but of Jerome, who cites her in the first book of his *Adversus Jovinianum* in a discussion of exemplary wives. Jerome radically revises Hasdrubal's wife's motive for her suicide,

⁶Franklin, 145. Gilbert, 192–96, who proposes the failings of husbands as the unifying theme of the entire sequence, raises the question of the works' patronage only fleetingly in conclusion.



FIGURE 3. Ercole de' Roberti. *Hasdrubal's Wife with Her Children*, ca. 1486–93. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art.

having her kill herself not in reproach of her husband, but rather, Lucretia-like, to escape the sexual dishonor she fears she may suffer at the hands of the Romans.⁷ The likelihood that Jerome is the source for the Roberti panel is increased by the appearance of Lucretia and Portia slightly later in the

⁷Jerome, 1844–55a, col. 273 (*Adversus Jovinianum*, 1.43). For discussion in connection with Chaucer's use of the *exemplum*, see Smith, 378, 383. Hasdrubal's wife is again mentioned in the context of marital exemplarity in Jerome, 1844–55b, col. 1051 (letter 123.8, to Ageruchia). I am grateful to Susan Haskins for calling Jerome's allusions to Hasdrubal's wife to my attention.

same list of *exempla*, as Jerome is the only known literary source in which these three heroines coincide in such close proximity.⁸ Identification of Jerome as the source for the paintings opens up the possibility that Eleonora herself may have made the initial selection of *exempla*, even if humanist advisers later contributed on matters of narrative detail. Certainly, we know her to have been an admirer of Jerome, as were many elite women in this period: her personal library, inventoried after her death in 1493, contained two works of his in vernacular translation, and she may have been responsible for commissioning Matteo da Ferrara's *volgarizzazione* of Jerome's *Epistles*, published in Ferrara in 1497.⁹

Of the three paintings in Roberti's sequence, those representing Portia and Lucretia have more in common with each other than *Hasdrubal's Wife* has with either. Aside from the Roman setting and the political context of tyrannicide, the episodes depicted in these two panels are connected by the motif of self-wounding: Portia, immediately before the incident portrayed, has wounded herself in the foot with a knife to test or to demonstrate her physical courage, while Lucretia, immediately after the episode depicted, fatally stabs herself to restore her honor, which has been besmirched by her rape. A further, genealogical connection between the two episodes is supplied by the involvement of the two Brutuses, whom classical writers such as Plutarch represent as related, with Portia's Marcus Junius supposedly a distant descendent of Lucretia's avenger Lucius Junius.¹⁰ In compositional terms, while the *contrapposto* of the main figures supplies a formal connection between the *Portia* and *Hasdrubal's Wife* panels, the resemblances between the *Portia* and *Lucretia* panels are also striking.¹¹ Both are relatively static in character, by contrast with the writhing dynamism of *Hasdrubal's Wife*, and both present their female protagonists flanked by male figures

⁸Jerome, 1844–55a, col. 275–76 (*Adversus Jovinianum*, 1.46).

⁹Bertoni, 231 (nos. 32 and 37). Jerome's books in Eleonora's library are listed, respectively, as "Sancto Hieronymo, de drito vivere" and "uno libro de Sancto Hieronymo." On Jerome's popularity among elite women in this period, see Rice, 96–97; Holman, 644; Cox, 2008, 17, 269, n. 94. For the possibility that Matteo da Ferrara's translation of the *Epistole* may have been commissioned by Eleonora, see Nuovo, 74, n. 36, who notes that one of the three variant dedications of Matteo's text is to Eleonora and Isabella d'Este. For further discussion of the republication history of the text, see Antonelli, 1830, 78.

¹⁰On the connection, see Plutarch, 1918, 126–27 (*Life of Brutus*, 1.1); for discussion in the context of the Roberti panels, see Wilkins Sullivan, 614–15.

¹¹The formal parallels between the *Portia* and *Hasdrubal's Wife* panels are noted in Syson, 1999b, xxxiii; and Gilbert, 191, 204, both of whom conjecturally reconstruct the original intended order of the three panels with two paintings flanking the more static *Lucretia*.

who compete for our attention: a symmetry underlined by the close resemblance in stance and affect between the two Brutuses, both portrayed with downturned, frowning mouths. The presence of companion figures of this kind represents a departure from the conventions of the *uomini famosi* tradition, which generally portrayed its heroes and heroines in statuesque isolation, abstracted from the narrative context in which their virtues were concretely demonstrated. Here, by contrast, narrative is foregrounded, as is these women's social position as the wives of significant political actors in Roman history, to whom they serve as faithful supporters and confidantes (Portia) or as moral stimuli to political *virtus* (Lucretia).

Besides those already mentioned, a further shared feature of Roberti's *Portia* and *Lucretia* deserves particular notice: in a departure from iconographic tradition, both portray their female protagonists engaging in speech. All three of Roberti's heroines are portrayed with their mouths open, Portia and Hasdrubal's wife quite significantly so.¹² This motif, however, demands to be interpreted differently in the *Hasdrubal's Wife* image than in the other two panels. In the case of Hasdrubal's wife, it seems most appropriate to read her open mouth as indicative of bewailing or lamenting, given her dramatic circumstances and the other visual clues to her distress, such as her violent motion and loosened hair.¹³ By contrast, the calmness of stance and expression of the other two Roman heroines suggests rational speech, as does the attentiveness of their male companions. This is very clearly the case in the *Portia* image, which shows the heroine in declamatory mode and gesticulating. Roberti's *Lucretia* is less patently speaking, but the symmetry between the two paintings encourages us to read the expression of Lucius Junius Brutus, like Marcus Brutus, as that of a listener, while consultation of Livy's narrative of the episode confirms that we are seeing Lucretia at the moment in which she concludes her poised valedictory speech before taking her knife to put an end to her shame.¹⁴

¹²On this point, see Franklin, 133, who notes the unwontedness of this in the period, especially in representations of female figures.

¹³As Syson, xxi, notes, the loose hair of Hasdrubal's wife is a *pentimento*: she was originally shown with her hair bound, like the other two heroines. Appian's account of the Hasdrubal's wife episode gives her a speech of reproach to her husband, but it seems unlikely that this is the account being followed here: in addition to the argument above in the text regarding the likelihood of Jerome as a source, see also Gilbert, 186, and Franklin, 145, on discrepancies between Roberti's interpretation and Appian's version. Hasdrubal's wife is imagined shrieking as she goes to her death in Chaucer, 260 (lines 3362–63).

¹⁴Livy, 1919, 202–03 (*Ab urbe condita*, 1.58.10–12). Lucretia's speech reads: "It is for you to determine what is due to him [Tarquinius]; for my own part, though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia."

The choice of these moments in the narratives of Portia and Lucretia is anything but conventional within the tradition of visual representations of these figures. While Lucretia's suicide was a common subject in fifteenth-century art, depictions of it predictably tended to focus on the actual moment of her death, rather than the moment preceding it. Roberti's representation is thus highly unorthodox in foregrounding the moment of Lucretia's communication of her ordeal.¹⁵ Portia is less frequently represented in art than Lucretia, but when she is, it is again her suicide (by eating burning coals) that is generally depicted. Roberti instead chooses a more recondite scene found in Valerius Maximus, and, with differences in emphasis, in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, in which Portia deliberately injures herself prior to Caesar's murder, either to prove her worth as a confidante to her husband (in Plutarch), or to test her physical courage in advance of the suicide she already envisages as necessary in the case that her husband's plans fail (in Valerius Maximus).¹⁶ While not completely unknown as a subject in art in this period, the episode was far from common; indeed, only one other independent painting of the scene is known from the period.¹⁷ The selection of two such rarely-depicted scenes, both privileging speech, is striking enough to be deserving of comment, especially when one of the narratives in question, that of Lucretia, offers such well-explored resources of action and graphic corporeal pathos. It seems reasonable on this basis to suggest that one of the thematic focuses of the series, along with women's capacity for moral virtues such as fortitude and constancy, is their capacity for persuasive speech.

A review of the literary sources of the two panels supports this hypothesis. Livy's description of Lucretia's speech before her death has

¹⁵Reviews of the pictorial tradition of representations of Lucretia in the context of the Roberti panels are found in Gilbert, 190–92; Franklin, 138–43. More generally on the Quattrocento tradition, see also Miziolek, 1994 and 1996; Buettner, 39; Baskins, 1994; Baskins, 1998, 129–59. The uniqueness of Roberti's depiction of the scene is noted by Gilbert, 191; Franklin, 139, with Franklin noting in particular Roberti's restoration of the verbal agency accorded to Lucretia in Livy but elided in most fifteenth-century representations (cf. Baskins, 1994). An early fifteenth-century *gesso cassone* discussed in Miziolek, 1994, esp. 33, 35, fig. 5, offers a precedent for Roberti's choice of the moment prior to Lucretia's suicide, but introduces an element of action by showing a man, perhaps Collatinus, reaching forward to stay Lucretia's hand.

¹⁶Plutarch, 1918, 152–55 (*Brutus*, 8.3–11); Valerius Maximus, 1:248–49 (3.2.15).

¹⁷On the tradition of visual representations of Portia prior to Roberti, see Gilbert, 189–90; Franklin, 136–37. The subject remained rare in the sixteenth century — see Rackham, 1:215 (no. 640) for an example — and attained currency only in the Seicento. A striking representation of the scene by Elisabetta Sirani (1638–65) is discussed in Bohn, 66–70; Phillippy, 51–60.

already been mentioned. Of particular interest to the *Portia* panel is Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, which seems Roberti's most likely source for the narrative, even if, presumably for reasons of decorum, Roberti displaces Portia's wound from her thigh (where Plutarch places it) to her foot.¹⁸ Plutarch's narrative differs from Valerius Maximus's — and from Boccaccio's in *De claris mulieribus* (ca. 1361–62), where he follows Valerius's account closely¹⁹ — in its emphasis on Portia as speaker, and in the dramatic character it gives to her speech. In Valerius's version of the anecdote, Portia injures herself in order to test her courage. She has nothing to prove to her husband, who has already admitted her to his confidence prior to the episode, and the short speech Valerius accords to her is relatively inert in narrative terms, serving solely to clarify the motives for her act.²⁰ In Plutarch, by contrast, Portia is excluded from her husband's political confidence at the time of the episode, and injures herself precisely to demonstrate her worthiness to be admitted to it. Her speech is highly dramatic and enacts a successful persuasion: her words, along with the visual rhetoric of her self-wounding, convince Brutus to accept her as a companion and equal. Her words, familiar to us from their reworking in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (2.1), deserve to be quoted in full: “Brutus, I am Cato's daughter, and I was given to you in marriage not just to share your bed and

¹⁸In suggesting Plutarch as the principal literary source for Roberti's panel, I differ from Wilkins Sullivan, 610–12, who privileges Valerius Maximus as a source for the whole sequence; from Gilbert, 188–89, who favors Valerius where the *Portia* is concerned; and from Franklin, 131–32, 135–37, who argues for Boccaccio as the principal source for both the *Lucretia* and *Portia*. All three scholars note the lack of correspondence between the location of Portia's wound in Plutarch and Roberti (Valerius and Boccaccio do not specify its location), while Gilbert argues for Valerius over Plutarch on the grounds of Plutarch's greater fifteenth-century currency. While this last point may be true in general, Plutarch's *Lives* were certainly accessible to Ferrarese humanists in the 1480s: besides manuscript sources associated with the Este such as Vat. Lat. 1877 (see Pade, 1:248), and Vat. Barb. Lat. 112 (see Resta, 47–51, and esp. 55–56), the Este library as inventoried in 1495 also contained a copy of a “Vita [*sic*] de plutarco astampa” (Bertoni, 252 [no. 512]). (The *Lives* had been available in print since 1470). The argument in Franklin, 137–38, that the wound's displacement to Portia's foot in the Roberti panel reflects the illustrative tradition of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* seems plausible, but this does not mean that Boccaccio should necessarily be seen as the source for the panel's narrative conception more generally. In any case, the wound proved fairly peripatetic in the early illustrative tradition, appearing on Portia's left arm in ms. New York Public Library, Spencer 33, f. 50^v, and on her chest in a *cassone* painting by Jacopo da Sellaio (fig. 5).

¹⁹See Boccaccio, 342–43 (chap. 82).

²⁰Valerius Maximus, 1:248–49 (3.2.15): “What I did was no accident; in the plight we are in it was the surest token of my love for you. I wanted to try out how coolly I could kill myself if your plan did not turn out as you hope.”

board like a concubine, but to be a true partner in your joys and sorrows. I have no reproach to make to you, but what proof can I give you of my love if you forbid me to share the kind of trouble that demands a loyal friend to confide in, and keep your suffering to yourself? I know that men think women's natures too weak to be entrusted with secrets, but surely a good upbringing and the company of honorable men can do much to strengthen us, and at least Portia can claim that she is the daughter of Cato and the wife of Brutus. I did not know before this how either of these blessings could help me, but now I have put myself to the test and find that I can conquer pain."²¹

As Joseph Manca has recently noted, Portia's speech in Plutarch has a special resonance in connection with Roberti's *Portia and Brutus*, given the close correspondences between Portia as she is represented here and the work's putative patron Eleonora d'Aragona.²² In Portia's speech we see a woman arguing for a partnership with her husband that transcends common notions of domestic companionship, and that extends to her assumption as confidante in the most momentous matters of state. She argues this case at the most immediate level through the visual rhetoric of her self-wounding, displayed as empirical evidence of her ability to transcend the supposed feminine weakness that excludes women from public affairs. Beyond this, Portia also advances a causal explanation for this anomalous virility in her filial and marital association with Cato and Brutus: in Shakespeare's version of the equation, "being so fathered and so husbanded," she cannot be other than "stronger than [her] sex."²³ The similarities with Eleonora's situation are clear. The notion of marriage as political partnership mooted in Portia's speech was certainly of the greatest relevance to Eleonora: she attained a position of considerable authority in Ferrara alongside her husband over the course of her twenty-year marriage, in the face of widespread prejudice regarding women's capacity to participate effectively in public affairs.²⁴ Also relevant to Eleonora is the question of the genealogical transmission of *virtus* from father to daughter. Like

²¹Plutarch, 1965, 234 (*Brutus*, 13.6–10). For the Greek text, see Plutarch, 1918, 152–55.

²²Manca, 2003c, 92; see also Franklin, 136.

²³Shakespeare, 1823 (*Julius Caesar* 2.1).

²⁴As an illustration of this prejudice, of particular interest in connection with the Portia episode under discussion, see the advice given to Eleonora soon after her marriage by the Neapolitan humanist Diomede Carafa (1406–87) that she should take great care to choose counselors capable of keeping secrets, since her husband will assume that any breaches of confidentiality proceed from her. Carafa, 117, explains that "people say that women are by nature incapable of secrecy and Roman history talks about this all the time."

Portia, Eleonora was the daughter of a famous father, the King of Naples, Ferrante I d'Aragona (1423–94), head of the only royal house in the Italian peninsula and one of the most powerful men in Italy in these years. This lineage was crucial to Eleonora's standing in Ferrara, especially in the early days of her marriage. As the daughter of a king, she was superior to her husband in birth, though subordinate to him in marriage, while the value of the diplomatic connections she brought with her, in addition to her considerable wealth, lent her a remarkable political capital at court. By the time that Roberti's *Portia and Brutus* was painted, Eleonora, like Portia, had had the opportunity to prove her fortitude empirically through her actions, especially in the course of Ferrara's desperate war with Venice in 1482–84, during which her husband was immobilized with sickness at one point. Nonetheless, Eleonora's royal descent remained an important factor in her prestige in Ferrara, and her Aragonese connections the source of considerable political leverage — at least until the very end of her life, when her husband began to be drawn into the anti-Aragonese political ambit of his powerful son-in-law Lodovico Sforza of Milan (1452–1508).²⁵

Besides clarifying the appositeness of image to patron, a reading of Roberti's panel in light of its probable Plutarchan source can be helpful in illuminating the visual language through which the artist expresses his subject's *virtus*. Roberti's *Portia* is exceptional within the conventions of fifteenth-century representations of women as an image of a woman engaged in declamatory speech. Feminine decorum generally mandated strict control of the limbs, which should properly rest still and close to the body. Emphatic gesticulation of the kind deployed by Roberti's *Portia* was generally encoded as masculine: in terms of Sharon Fermor's analysis of gendered movement based on visual representations, courtesy texts, and dance theory, Portia displays the masculine defining character of *gagliardia* — boldness, vigor — rather than the feminine *leggiadria*, or grace.²⁶ Elegant as

²⁵A good sense of this prestige may be had from the lengthy tribute to her ancestry in Mantuanus, a1^v–a2^r. It is revealing that writers of the period frequently refer to Eleonora as a queen, even though she did not technically merit the title: see, for example, the title of Mantuanus; Guarini 1995, 297: “excellens regina”; and, later, Ariosto, 285: “splendida regina” (13.68).

²⁶Fermor; see also Goffen, 746–51, who focuses particularly on the perceived virility of emphatic gesticulation with the arms; and Franklin, 133, for discussion of Roberti's *Portia* in connection with this tradition. Quintavalle and Quintavalle, 50, intriguingly suggest as a context for Roberti's *Famous Women* the theatrical productions of classical plays being pioneered in the court of Ferrara in the 1480s, implying that Portia's eloquent gestures might be related to contemporary acting practices. See also Manca, 1988; and Edwards, 2008a, 311, for speculation regarding possible theatrical inspiration in Roberti's Ferrarese works.

it looks to the modern eye, Portia's gesture would thus probably have registered to a contemporary observer as gender-transgressive. The virility of her depiction contrasts with the bodily decorum of Brutus, who is shown demurely listening to her speech with his hands clasped before him and his head deferentially inclined. Brutus stands a little behind Portia, who dominates the pictorial space: Brutus occupies only around a third of the width of the image, a disproportion carefully measured by the folds in the green backcloth that hangs behind the couple. Nor is his third of the image even intact, given that Portia's extended right hand intrudes into his space. Portia's physical dominance of the scene and the angle of her gesticulation — away from her husband and toward the viewer — clearly mark her speech as oratorical, despite its ostensibly domestic and conversational context. The device references the image's didactic function by conscripting the viewer as the audience for her implied words and the moral message they convey.

The extent to which Roberti figures Portia's delivery as oratorical is best seen by comparing his image with other contemporary representations of this episode. The only other independent panel painting to feature Portia's self-wounding scene is a work of disputed authorship in the Czartoryski Museum in Krakow (fig. 4) datable to around the same period as Roberti's own *Portia*.²⁷ It shows Portia, knife still in her foot, whispering the reason for her self-wounding in her husband's ear, while alarmed onlookers run to her aid. Broadly similar in its representation of the scene, though dispensing with third parties, is a lost cassone panel by Jacopo da Sellaio (ca. 1441–93), formerly in Berlin, that includes the scene of Portia's self-wounding in a series of three episodes associated with the assassination of Caesar (fig. 5).²⁸ Here we see Portia, wounded in the chest, decorously indicating her injury, and appraising her husband of her motives. She does not whisper as in the Krakow painting, but her tone still may be inferred from the positioning of the figures as conversational rather than declamatory. The only representation that hints at a more emphatic delivery of Portia's speech is a woodcut found in a number of early printed editions of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* from 1473, which shows the self-wounding episode paired with Portia's suicide, both events framing Brutus's assassination of Caesar

²⁷Schubring, no. 681 (following Berenson) attributes the work to Michele da Verona (ca. 1470–1536/44). Rózycka-Bryzek, 81–82 (no. 77), gives it to the “Emilian Master of 1487,” hypothetically identified in Longhi, 134–36; Everett Fahy has identified this figure as Pietro del Donzello: see Geronimus, 152.

²⁸For the identification of the episodes, see Filippini, 200–01.



FIGURE 4. *Portia and Brutus*, date unknown. Krakow, Czartoryski Museum. By permission of the Princes Czartoryski Foundation.

(fig. 6).²⁹ Here Portia sits while Brutus stands, and points with her right hand to her wound, while gesturing up toward him with her left hand. The posture foregrounds the act of speech more than the Krakow or Berlin paintings, and conveys the impression that Portia is speaking with a certain rhetorical force. The image also partially foreshadows the ambiguity of address that we see more fully realized in the Roberti panel: Portia turns to speak to her husband, but the orientation of her body and the direction of her gestures have the effect of secondarily implicating the viewer — or, here, the reader of the book — as an external audience to her speech. However, we are still at a considerable distance here from Roberti's eloquent portrayal of Portia as speaker, with her expansive, oratorical gesticulation, which is

²⁹Franklin, 137–38, notes the relevance of this woodcut to Roberti's *Portia*. Besides this woodcut, two depictions of the self-wounding episode are found in fifteenth-century manuscripts of the French translation of *De claris mulieribus*: see Branca, 3:51, 58 (ms. Lisbon Gulbenkian, L. A. 143 and ms. NYPL Spencer 33).

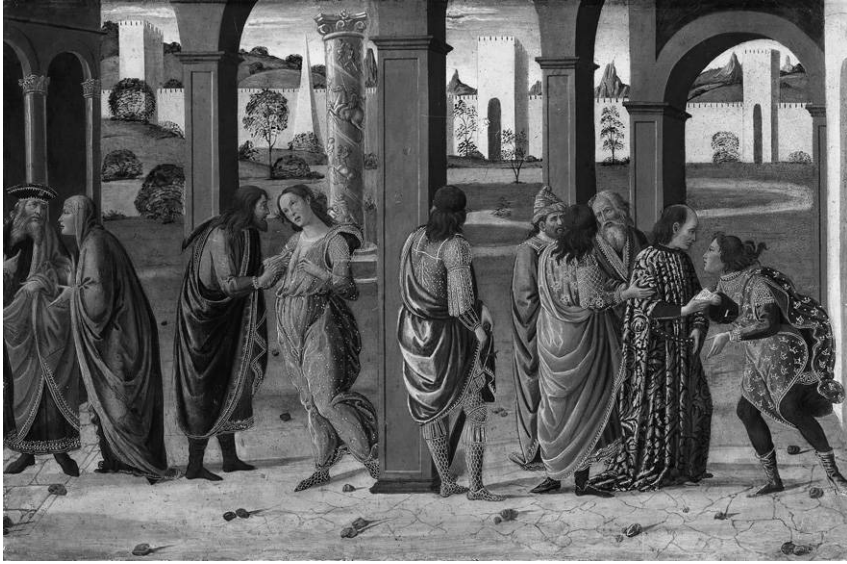


FIGURE 5. Jacopo da Sellaio. *Scenes Relating to the Assassination of Caesar*, ca. 1485. Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm [now Bode] Museum (lost). Photo credit: Art Resource NY.

perhaps emblematic of rhetorical competence, as the open palm was traditionally a symbol of the art.³⁰

Plutarch's text can help us read this extraordinary image by recalling Portia's status as Cato's daughter, a point that, as we have seen, is fundamental to her speech. Cato was famed as an orator as well as a statesman — to the extent that it is possible to separate the two roles in a Roman context — figuring as an orator, for example, in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, where he is shown defeating Caesar in a Senate debate.³¹ Portia's portrayal here as *oratrix* serves not only to illustrate her speech to Brutus in the episode narrated by Plutarch, but also, more obliquely, to reference the content of this speech and, specifically, its allusion to her descent from Cato. This

³⁰The notion of rhetoric as an open palm to dialectic's closed fist is attributed to the Stoic philosopher Zeno: for classical sources, see Von Arnim, 21–22 (1.75). The manner in which Portia is represented here corresponds to what Quintilianus, 5:129 (*Institutiones oratoriae* 11.52.84), presents as the default mode for oratorical delivery: “A moderate extension of the arm, with the shoulders relaxed and the fingers spreading out as the hand is advanced, is a very becoming gesture for continuous passages that run smoothly.”

³¹Sallust, 88–111 (50.4–53.1). See also, for praises of Cato's skills as a speaker, Plutarch 1919, 246–49 (*Cato* 5.2); and Cicero, 106–07 (*Brutus*, 118–19), where Cato is grudgingly acknowledged as a counter-example to the rule that Stoics do not make good orators.



FIGURE 6. *Scenes from the Life of Portia*. In Giovanni Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus*, 1473. London, British Library, IB 1993, fol. 108^v.

descent is visually encoded in her oratorical stance and implied eloquence, which serve, more generally, to evoke by synecdoche her sharing in Cato's political *virtus*. This reading would have been facilitated for humanistically educated viewers by the existence of a celebrated parallel in the father-daughter oratorical pairing of Quintus Hortensius Hortalus and his daughter Hortensia, the former a contemporary of Cicero's and his opponent during the corruption trial of Verres, the latter celebrated for a speech she delivered before the Second Triumvirate that defended Roman matrons from an imposition of taxes. Like Portia, Hortensia is accorded an honorary virility by virtue of her paternal descent, which — following a dynamic in Roman culture that has been discussed by Judith Hallett — was considered compensatory for her weakness as a woman.³² This is precisely the formula evoked by Portia in the speech Plutarch attributes to her, though with the rhetorically diplomatic addition of her husband. Hortensia's status as heir to her father's prowess is underlined by Valerius Maximus, who speaks of Hortensius "living again" in his daughter and "inspiring her words."³³ The gender-transgressive elements in Roberti's portrayal of Portia assume a precise significance within this discursive tradition: if Portia's corporeal *gagliardia* visually transcribes the masculine quality of her eloquence, this in

³²See Hallett.

³³Valerius Maximus, 2:212–13 (8.3.3): "revixit tum muliebri stirpe Q. Hortensius verbis filiae aspiravit." On the motif of the father-daughter transmission of learning in fifteenth-century humanistic culture, see Ross.

turn stands as testimonial to her genetic virility as Cato's daughter and his moral and intellectual heir.

Hortensia was a reasonably familiar figure in fifteenth-century humanistic culture, and would have been imaginatively available to Roberti and his advisers in 1480s Ferrara. Besides her mention in Valerius Maximus, in a chapter devoted to women who pleaded cases in public, she finds honorable mention in Quintilian, who writes of the text of her speech as still in circulation at the time of writing; and in Appian, who recreates her oration before the triumvirs in his *Civil Wars*.³⁴ As so often in such cases, Hortensia's postclassical fortunes may be traced to Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, which gives her a laudatory biography, praising her not least, interestingly enough, for her "forceful delivery" (*vigor pronuntiandi*), a quality Boccaccio notes as often lacking in learned men.³⁵ Subsequent to this, Hortensia surfaces frequently in fifteenth-century humanistic writings as a legitimizing precedent for modern eloquent women, along with such figures as Sappho, Cornelia, and Diotima.³⁶ Hortensia's speech before the triumvirs also inspired a direct humanistic imitation in the 1450s oration attributed to Nicolosa Sanuti of Bologna protesting a sumptuary law.³⁷ She is also referenced in two works dedicated to Eleonora d'Aragona in the 1470s and '80s by intellectuals at the court of Ferrara. The first is the *Del modo di regere e regnare* (ca. 1478–79) of Antonio Cornazzano of Piacenza (1429–ca. 1484), where we find Hortensia cited twice, in lists of classical figures displaying the leadership virtues of prudence and learning.³⁸ The second, especially interesting in this context, is the treatise *De laudibus*

³⁴Appian, 4:194–99 (*Civil Wars* 4.32–34); Quintilianus, 1:66–69 (*Institutio Oratio* 1.1.6). Appian was translated into Latin by Pier Candido Decembrio (1392–1477) for Alfonso I d'Aragona, and the *Civil Wars* was available in print from 1472. Decembrio had also prepared a vernacular version for Ercole d'Este before the latter's accession to the dukedom in 1471: Pade, 1:253.

³⁵Boccaccio, 348–49 (chap. 84).

³⁶For examples of male humanists citing Hortensia as a prototype for modern learned women, see Nogarola, 1886, 2:12 (translation in Nogarola, 2004, 108); Sabadino degli Arienti, 1888, 18; Poliziano, 188; Fedele, 1636, 144–45 (translation in Fedele, 2000, 65); D'Elia, 112; Castoldi, 37. For examples of women citing Hortensia, see Nogarola, 1886, 1:256 (translation in Nogarola, 2004, 99); Cereta, 1640, 191 (translation in Cereta, 1997, 78); see also Lowe, 310, for the interesting case of a female orator, the Venetian nun Angela Marcello, alluding to Hortensia in a speech.

³⁷For a study and an English translation of the Sanuti speech, see Kovesi Killerby, 1999; Kovesi Killerby, 2002, 124–32; the Latin text is in Frati, 251–62. Although it presents itself as composed by Sanuti, the evidence indicates that it was in fact composed in her name by a male humanist: see Lombardi.

³⁸Cornazzano, 19^f, 27^f. For discussion of the text, see Musso; Zancani, 64–67.

mulierum (ca. 1487) by the Ferrara-based humanist and notary Bartolomeo Goggio, a figure often cited as a likely candidate for Roberti's iconographical advisor for the paintings discussed here.³⁹ Goggio does not simply mention Hortensia in passing, unlike Cornazzano, but devotes an entire chapter to her in a segment of the work devoted to women who have excelled in letters and learning. Goggio's presentation of Hortensia's oratorical skills is unusually assertive in that he makes her not merely the equal of her father, but his superior: if Hortensius was, in his day, second as an orator only to Cicero, Hortensia was the equal of Cicero himself.⁴⁰

Besides the classical precedent of Hortensia, more proximate cases of female orators may also be considered in reconstructing the context of Roberti's oratorical representation of Portia. The most immediate, coinciding quite closely with the painting in terms of date, is that of the Venetian humanist and orator Cassandra Fedele (1465[?]-1558), who caused a sensation in 1487 by delivering an oration at the University of Padua on the occasion of the award of a degree to her relative Bertuccio Lamberti.⁴¹ Fedele's speech and her polished performance of it won her the applause of numerous humanists, and the text was published several times over the following years.⁴² It seems quite certain that the fame of Fedele's oration reached the court of Ferrara: a letter of 1488 written to Fedele in the name of Eleonora d'Aragona makes it clear that the duchess has heard of the young humanist's many qualities through report, and not merely inferred them from Cassandra's letters to her.⁴³ Aside from Fedele, a female orator certainly known to Eleonora was her sister-in-law Ippolita Sforza d'Aragona (1444-89), a woman noted for her humanistic learning and famed for

³⁹Goggio's role as advisor to Roberti in this sequence is hypothesized in Manca, 2000a; see also Manca, 2003c, 88, 90-92. For general discussion of Goggio's treatise, see Fahy; Gundersheimer, 1980b; Benson, 56-64; Kolsky, 2005, 175-90. On Goggio's relations with Ercole and Eleonora d'Este, see Bertoni, 163-64.

⁴⁰Goggio, 42^v-43^r (2.9). Interestingly, *ibid.*, 42^v, speaks of Hortensia outdoing her father "in eloquence and delivery" ("in facundia et in pronuntia"). Goggio's position here is consistent with the overall agenda of his work, which is to show women to be not merely the equals of men, but their superiors.

⁴¹For the Latin text of the oration, see Fedele, 1636, 193-201 (translation in Fedele, 2000, 155-59).

⁴²For details of the printed editions of Fedele's oration, see Fedele, 2000, 154; Pignatti, 567, who also lists humanistic tributes.

⁴³The Latin text of the letter is in Fedele, 1636, 160-61 (no. 105); for a translation, see Fedele, 2000, 29-30. Eleonora's source for supplementary information on Fedele is said to be a certain Laura, not otherwise identified. The letter was presumably composed by a secretary in Eleonora's name, given that she did not know Latin.

a youthful oration delivered in 1459 before Pope Pius II.⁴⁴ Given the contacts between their families, Eleonora may also have known by reputation Ippolita's cousin and rival in eloquence, Battista Sforza da Montefeltro (1446–72), who was similarly celebrated for an oration to Pius II that she delivered in 1461.⁴⁵ In addition to these contemporaries or near-contemporaries, Eleonora and her circle may well also have been aware of the oratorical feats of earlier noblewomen such as Battista da Montefeltro Malatesta (1384–1450) and Costanza Varano (1426–47), who had pioneered the modern tradition of female oratory in Italy in the 1430s and '40s. Aside from possible oral sources, we find the eloquence of these women celebrated in texts like Giannantonio Campano's 1472 funeral oration for their descendant Battista Sforza, while the Bolognese humanist and Este client Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti (1445–1510) includes an admiring account of the oratory of the two Battistas in his *Gynevera, de le clare donne* (ca. 1489–90).⁴⁶

It may well be that in creating his eloquent Portia, Roberti had this recent tradition of female public speaking in mind: certainly, the figure of the female orator, though still indubitably exotic, was far from unknown in this period. In addition, we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that Roberti's allusion to female eloquence in the figure of Portia was inspired by Eleonora herself. This may at first sound improbable, given that Eleonora is not credited with particular erudition in contemporary sources, and she does not appear to have known Latin, which would have limited her access to rhetorical texts.⁴⁷ We should be wary of concluding for this reason,

⁴⁴A translation of the oration, with a citation of the Latin text, is found in King and Rabil, 46–48. On Ippolita's education and cultural agency more generally, see Welch; Bryce.

⁴⁵Battista's husband Federico da Montefeltro (1422–82) was a key ally of Eleonora's father and appears to have been instrumental in negotiating her marriage to Ercole d'Este: see Clough, 1992, 130–31. Eleonora's cousin Camilla d'Aragona was married to Battista's brother Costanzo Sforza. Battista is cited as an example of female learning in a work addressed to Eleonora (Cornazzano, 27^f), where she is listed with Eleonora's two sisters-in-law, Ippolita Sforza and Bianca Maria d'Este (1440–1506). On Battista's erudition, see Filetico, 29–31 (Arbizioni's introduction); Clough, 1996, 40–41. For evidence of her speech to Pius, for which no text survives, see Mazzanti, 97–98; McManamon, 113–14.

⁴⁶The text of Campano's oration, which was printed in Cagli in 1476, as well as circulating in manuscript, is available in Campano: his praise for the eloquence of Battista's maternal ancestors is found on the second page of the oration in this edition. For Sabadino's praise for Battista da Montefeltro's eloquence, see Sabadino degli Arienti, 1888, 133–34; for his praises for Battista Sforza's eloquence, see *ibid.*, 294–95.

⁴⁷Eleonora's ignorance of Latin is noted in an oration by the Parmese humanist Giovanni Marco Cinico, composed at the time of her marriage: Corradini, 30, 197,

however, that she had no pretensions to eloquence: the example of Ceccarella Minutolo's *Lettere* of the 1470s — two addressed to Eleonora herself before her marriage — demonstrate very clearly the level of vernacular rhetorical competence possessed by some noblewomen within the Neapolitan cultural sphere.⁴⁸ Contemporary encomia of Eleonora emphasize her speech skills in their more general discussions of her contributions to government. The most emphatic tribute in this regard is found in the funeral oration written for her by the poet and humanist Baptista Mantuanus (1448–1516), who makes extended mention of Eleonora's eloquence in his discussion of her public virtues, describing her in lavish Ciceronian terms as capable of “possessing the souls of her listeners and holding the hearts of her listeners in her hands.”⁴⁹ Mantuanus acknowledges that Eleonora's eloquence was not attained through study, but rather through observation and practice; but he makes a merit of this, stating that she attained a degree of eloquence through these means that made her the equal of the most famous learned women of antiquity.⁵⁰ We find no such grandiose tribute to Eleonora's eloquence in her other funeral oration by Battista Guarini (ca. 1435–1503), but Guarini does praise in passing the duchess's capacity to respond to visiting ambassadors during her husband's absences with “eloquence, graciousness, and promptitude.”⁵¹ Outside the context of laudatory literature, we find evidence for Eleonora's familiarity with public speaking in a letter of hers to her husband of May 1493, reporting on a speech she delivered to the doge and signoria of Venice during a visit to that city accompanied by her niece Isabella d'Aragona (1470–1524), Duchess of Bari, who also spoke.⁵² While she is concerned primarily in the letter with the content of her speech, Eleonora remarks in passing on the “charming

n. 59. Rather oddly — in view of her relationship with the erudite Ippolita Sforza — Cinico claims that Eleonora refused to study Latin because she considered it “not fitting for a modest woman.”

⁴⁸Cox, 2008, 14–15. In the oration cited in the previous note, Giovanni Maria Cinico states that Eleonora had been unusually well educated, despite her ignorance of Latin.

⁴⁹Mantuanus, b1^r; also cited in Zambotti, 229, n. 9: “Et tanta fuit in omni sermone eius gravitas comitate condita ut auditorum animos possidere et corda hominum in manibus habere videretur”. Mantuanus's speech was delivered in Mantua, on the order of Eleonora's son-in-law Francesco Gonzaga, and may reflect input from her eldest daughter Isabella d'Este, Gonzaga's wife.

⁵⁰Mantuanus, b1^r.

⁵¹Guarini, 1493, (unpaginated fourth page). Guarini's terms are *facundia*, *mansuetudo*, and *celeritas*. All translations of Guarini, 1493 and 1995, are the author's.

⁵²Chiappini, 82–83.

mode and manner” of her niece’s delivery, a comment suggestive of her alertness to the performative dimensions of speech.⁵³

Besides this routine activity of formal public speaking, on one occasion Eleonora distinguished herself as an orator in more dramatic circumstances, in an episode that attained quite a degree of currency in the chronicles and biographies of the time. The event occurred in November 1482, during the worst crisis of the war with Venice, when the enemy was practically at the gates of the city and Ercole d’Este lay incapacitated with sickness, rumored dead. On the testimony of the chronicler Bernardino Zambotti (ca. 1460–after 1504), who appears to have been an eyewitness, Eleonora summoned to the ducal palace an ample cross section of the male population of the city — “gentlemen, magnates, citizens, and plebeians of all kinds”⁵⁴ — and spoke movingly to them in her husband’s name, reassuring them that aid would shortly be at hand for the stricken city from its allies, and enjoining them to their traditional loyalty to the Este.⁵⁵ Zambotti presents Eleonora’s “sweet” words, delivered with great pathos, as having moved her audience to tears and having secured the loyalty of the populace at this moment of crisis — although not before she had provided evidence to her skeptical audience that Ercole was not dead by displaying him on his sickbed to the assembled crowds.⁵⁶

In addition to Zambotti’s account, we find a second narrative of the episode in a Latin history of the war by the Venice-based Corsican humanist Pietro Cirneo (1447–ca. 1507), who reports Eleonora’s speech in a resonant and humanistically embellished form.⁵⁷ A similarly high-flown reworking of the episode is found in the biography of Eleonora by the Bergamasque humanist Giacomo Filippo Foresti (1434–ca. 1520) in his *De claris selectisque mulieribus* of 1497.⁵⁸ This account may reflect Ferrarese oral tradition, since Foresti appears to have been in Ferrara in 1492.⁵⁹ Besides these direct narratives, it is also possible that this episode of Eleonora’s salvation of her country through her eloquence may have inspired Giovanni

⁵³Ibid., 83: “cum tropo gentile maniera e modo.” Isabella was the daughter of Ippolita Sforza, whose rhetorical prowess is noted above at pp. 77–78.

⁵⁴Zambotti, 118: “zintilhomini, magnati, cittadini, e plebei de ogni sorte.”

⁵⁵On the political context of the episode, see Chiappini, 45–58, esp. 50–51.

⁵⁶Zambotti’s description of Eleonora’s pathetic delivery is on 118: “parole . . . dolce.” The nobility of Ferrara used the crisis to compel the Este to expel their hated minister Paolo Antonio Trotti: *ibid.*, 120; Chiappini, 51.

⁵⁷Cirneo, 1208.

⁵⁸Foresti, 1497, 162^v, describes Eleonora’s speech as a “brief but artful oration” the second adjective (*artificiosa*) implying formal rhetorical expertise.

⁵⁹Zaccaria, 544 n. 81.

Sabadino degli Arienti to attribute a similar feat to her mother, Isabella di Chiaramonte, Queen of Naples (1423–65), in the biography of her that he included in his *Gynevera*. In Sabadino's account, Isabella effectively salvages the regime of her husband Ferrante I during the 1459–62 baronial-Angevin uprising that followed his accession, when she uses the power of her eloquence to persuade her uncle Giovanni del Balzo Orsini (d. 1463), one of the rebel leaders, to change his allegiance to the king.⁶⁰ Sabadino emphasizes Isabella's salvific eloquence, recounting her speech in full, as Cirneo and Foresti do with Eleonora's, and comparing her intervention to that of Coriolanus's mother Veturia when she dissuaded her son from his proposed attack on Rome.⁶¹ We may be certain that Sabadino was writing with Eleonora in mind, as he sent her a copy of the biography in 1491.⁶²

In view of this evidence, it seems a hypothesis worth considering that Ercole de' Roberti's evocation of female eloquence in his *Portia and Brutus* may have been intended as a compliment to his patron, and perhaps a direct recollection of a heroic moment in her political life.⁶³ Whether or not this narrower hypothesis is accepted, however, a broader point seems clear: Roberti worked within a culture in which female oratory was a recognized phenomenon, and his choice to portray Portia in oratorical guise must be read in this context. As was noted above, a striking aspect of the painting is the *enargeia* with which it renders the physical act of speaking in the figure of Portia. Aside from her gesticulation and the poised *contrapposto* of her stance, her speech is vividly evoked by the detail of her open mouth, a motif reinforced by the contrast with Brutus's resolutely sealed lips to her right. As well as self-referentially alluding to the skill of the artist, by challenging the *paragone* topos of the painted human image as silent, the figure of Portia vividly represents the new and seductive neoclassical ideal of the eloquent

⁶⁰Sabadino degli Arienti, 1888, 255–57. The anecdote embellishes history, in that del Balzo died while still rebelling against the crown. Foresti, 1497, 151^v–152^v, deemphasizes the episode significantly in his Latin reworking of the biography, omitting Sabadino's verbatim re-creation of the speech.

⁶¹Sabadino degli Arienti, 1888, 255, 260–61.

⁶²Sabadino degli Arienti, 2001, 121 (letter 42). Sabadino was actively courting the Este as patrons at this time, and his *Gynevera* also contains a biography of Ercole d'Este's mother Ricciarda da Saluzzo (d. 1474). His postscript to the work includes Eleonora herself in a list of prominent living women he would have liked to include in his work had he not limited himself to the dead: see Sabadino degli Arienti, 1888, 401.

⁶³In this case, it is possible that we should read the *Hasdrubal's Wife* too as an allusion to this episode, given its motif of death before surrender. Cirneo, 1208, has Eleonora's speech stirring her male auditors to valor by her declaration that "even I, a woman, would a thousand times rather die by the sword than cede to servitude."

woman, which was currently attaining its literary apotheosis in the humanist response to Cassandra Fedele. Seen from this perspective, the image compares interestingly with previous fifteenth-century depictions of articulate women that tend to present them with a dialectical, rather than an oratorical, paradigm in mind. A well-known example is Masolino's depiction in San Clemente in Rome of Saint Catherine of Alexandria's dispute with the pagan sages, where she is shown in the manner of a scholastic philosopher, counting off a series of points on her fingers (fig. 7).⁶⁴ Catherine's gesture is consonant with the subject of the painting, but we find, more incongruously, the same dialectical hand-gesture in manuscript illuminations of Hortensia addressing the triumvirs, where a more oratorical delivery would logically be required (fig. 8).⁶⁵ Roberti's *Portia* is unusual, if not unique, for the period in presenting us with an image of a woman speaking according to the classical canons of oratorical performance, perhaps in a manner not dissimilar from Fedele herself, who was complimented on her "seemly movement of the body in delivery."⁶⁶ It is difficult to think of any precedent for this, other than possibly the rather distant one of Andrea da Castagno's gracefully gesticulating Cumaeen Sybil of ca. 1450, whose stance, with raised hand and upward-pointing finger, has been associated with Roman oratorical practice (fig. 9).⁶⁷

The positive evocation of female eloquence that we encounter in de' Roberti's *Portia and Brutus* has a particular claim on our attention in that it offers a challenge to the commonplace in recent scholarship that humanist attitudes to articulateness in women were characterized by hostility and suspicion. This view urgently demands to be reexamined, as it rests on a highly selective consideration of the evidence. The humanist texts most frequently cited on the question of the propriety of female public speaking

⁶⁴On the Masolino image and its patron, the humanist Cardinal Branda Castiglioni (1350–1443), see Joannides, 400–01, 404–05; Roberts, 101–13. On fifteenth-century images of women speaking authoritatively in religious contexts more generally, see Rusconi, 179, who briefly discusses the Masolino image. While the gesture Catherine deploys here — counting points on her fingers — has sometimes been related in secondary literature to Quintilian's teachings on the oratorical gesticulation associated with *divisio*, La Porta, 39–46, has convincingly demonstrated that it references the scholastic practice of *disputatio*.

⁶⁵For other examples (all from the French tradition of *De claris mulieribus*), see the illustration from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 12420 (ca. 1400), reproduced in Buettner, fig. 83; Branca, 3:37; also *ibid.*, 41, 44, 51, and 53.

⁶⁶See Fedele, 1636, 145 (letter from Lodovico da Schio): "aptus pronuntiationi corporis motus."

⁶⁷See especially Marchand, 6, 10, nn. 43–44; also, more generally on this gesture, La Porta, 69–76, 104–05.



FIGURE 7. Masolino da Panicale. *Saint Catherine Disputing with the Philosophers*, 1429–32. Rome, San Clemente. Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource NY.

are two: Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* of 1416 and Leonardo Bruni's *De studiis et litteris*, usually dated between 1422 and 1429. In a chapter specifically devoted to the question of speech, Barbaro insists on taciturnity as the only proper speech decorum for a respectable matron, and congratulates the ancient Romans on their wisdom in banning women from oratorical performance.⁶⁸ Barbaro makes a strong connection between a woman

⁶⁸The most accessible English version of Barbaro's treatise is in Barbaro, 1978; for the Latin, see Barbaro, 1612. For discussion of Barbaro's views on feminine decorum, see Allen, 720–22; Jordan, 45–47; Frick, 198. Barbaro's commendation of the Romans' practice of forbidding women to speak in public is found in Barbaro, 1612, d12^v (2.3).



FIGURE 8. *Hortensia Addressing the Triumvirs*. In Giovanni Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, early fifteenth century. London, British Library, MS Royal 16 G V, fol. 98.

engaging in public speaking and sexual impropriety: a connection memorably expressed in his much-quoted dictum that such verbal self-exposure in a woman may be equated with the public display of her flesh.⁶⁹ No such association between eloquence and sexual indecorum is found in Bruni's *De studiis et litteris*, but the female student of the humanities is nonetheless deterred from devoting herself to the study of rhetoric on the grounds that it will be of no practical use for her, given her lack of involvement in the civic life of the forum. Bruni singles out the art of oratorical delivery as a rhetorical doctrine whose irrelevance to women is laughably obvious, stating in a frequently cited passage that: “the art of delivery, which the Greeks call

⁶⁹Barbaro 1612, E1^r (2.3).



FIGURE 9. Andrea da Castagno. *Cumaean Sybil*, ca. 1450. Florence, Uffizi.

hypocrisis and we *pronuntiatio*... is so far from being the concern of a woman that if she should gesture energetically with her arms as she spoke and shout with violent emphasis, she would probably be thought mad and put under restraint.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Bruni, 104–05: “iam vero actio illa artificiosa, quam Graeci *hypocrisim*, nostri ‘pronuntiationem’ dixere... ita mulieri nequaquam laboranda, quae, si brachium iactabit loquens aut si clamorem vehementius attollet, vesana coercendaque videatur.” The passage and its fortunes in modern scholarship are discussed in detail in Cox, 2009.

Barbaro's and Bruni's pronouncements have often been presented as representative of Italian humanists' views on the propriety of public speaking and of the study of rhetoric in women. But this was by no means the case. Aside from Bruni, there is no evidence that any humanist sufficiently enlightened to condone a classical education for women believed that this education should not encompass rhetoric: indeed, there are grounds for believing that this was not something that Bruni was advocating in all seriousness himself.⁷¹ It is certainly true that a substantial moralizing literature existed that extolled silence as a virtue in women and censured loquacity, especially in public.⁷² This was not, however, without nuance: even a figure like Boccaccio, notoriously equivocal in his gender attitudes, was prepared to concede, in his life of Hortensia in *De claris mulieribus*, that "as much as silence in public was a praiseworthy quality in a woman, still, when the occasion required it, an elegant and seemly flow of language deserved to be extolled."⁷³

Boccaccio's formula "if the occasion demands it" implies, of course, that for a woman to speak in public was something acceptable only in exceptional circumstances, such as we see in the case of Hortensia and of Eleonora d'Aragona during the War of Ferrara. The two earliest recorded speeches by fifteenth-century women correspond to this exceptionalist model. The first, delivered in August 1433 by Battista da Montefeltro, was a plea to the Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) to assist in restoring her deposed husband to his hereditary lordship of Pesaro and in negotiating the release of her imprisoned son-in-law. The second, delivered in 1442 by Battista's granddaughter, Costanza Varano, was similarly dramatic in its circumstances and subject matter, calling on Bianca Maria Visconti (1425–68) — or, through her, her *condottiere* husband, Francesco Sforza (1401–66) — for help in restoring the deposed Varano to Camerino.⁷⁴

⁷¹Cox, 2009. Most modern scholars regard Bruni in *De studiis* as categorically banishing women from the study of rhetoric, though for more nuanced readings see Allen, 698–99; Stevenson, 154–55.

⁷²A recent comprehensive study of women's relation to language in the Italian Renaissance is Sanson; see esp. 27–76 for prescriptive literature counseling taciturnity for women. A valuable shorter discussion, not limited to Italy, is Jones, 15–28. An interesting revisionist study of the gendering of silence, focused on English contexts, is Luckyj.

⁷³Boccaccio, 348: "quantum sub matronali stola in publicum taciturnitas laudenda videatur, tantum, oportunitate exigente, ornatu suo decora sit extollenda loquacitas."

⁷⁴English texts of the orations of Battista da Montefeltro and Costanza Varano, with citations of the Latin originals, are given in King and Rabil, 35–44. For discussion, see Allen, 704–09, which contains some errors of detail regarding the speeches' historical context; also, more briefly but more accurately, Clough, 1996, 33, 45–47; Patrignani, 840–41, 886–89, 898.

From the 1450s, however, a routinization of female oratory was beginning, which presumably reflected a growing acceptance of women's erudition and its display. In rhetorical terms, this is marked by a shift from the deliberative to the demonstrative *genus dicendi*, the former defined by classical theorists as functional in character and typically political in its subject matter, the latter more self-consciously artistic and moral in its focus, and reserved for ceremonial occasions. An early example of a demonstrative speech by an Italian woman is the oration in praise of Saint Jerome delivered in 1453 by Isotta Nogarola (1418–65) on the invitation of the incoming Bishop of Verona, Ermolao Barbaro (1410–71).⁷⁵ A later case is found in Cassandra Fedele, who, after her famous oration at the University of Padua in 1487, was invited by the rhetorician and philologist Giorgio Valla (1447–ca. 1500), presumably in his capacity as professor of rhetoric at the School of San Marco, to give a second oration before the doge and senate of Venice.⁷⁶ These two cases of prominent humanists soliciting speeches from women should in themselves be sufficient to illustrate that male intellectuals of the period did not universally regard public speaking in women with opprobrium. In fact, far from inevitably condemning public eloquence as inimical to feminine decorum, humanists often show themselves inclined actively to promote female oratory, presenting it, Hortensia in mind, as a sign of modern humanistic culture's approximation to classical ideals.⁷⁷

It is important to underline this, not least because the narrative of humanism's progressive acceptance — and, indeed, celebration and mystification — of the eloquent woman is indicative of a broader ideological shift crucial to an understanding of women's place in Italian elite culture at this time. As is well known, the Aristotelian understanding of gender identity, dominant in the scholastic culture of this period, proposed a sharp dichotomy between the social roles of the two sexes and the sets of virtues thought proper to them. Aristotle regarded these differences as essential, in

⁷⁵For the text of the speech, see Nogarola, 1886, 2:276–89; for a translation, see Nogarola, 2004, 167–74. On its context and Barbaro's role in commissioning it, see Nogarola, 1886, 1:lxvi–xviii; Nogarola, 2004, 161–63; Rice, 95–97. Ironically, Ermolao Barbaro was a nephew of that same Francesco who, forty years earlier, had inveighed against public speaking in women with such fervor.

⁷⁶For the text of the oration, see Fedele, 1636, 201–07; Fedele, 2000, 159–62. Valla's involvement is mentioned in the opening words of the speech.

⁷⁷For this kind of rhetoric, see Guiniforte Barzizza's 1442 letter in praise of Costanza Varano in Barzizza and Barzizza, 2:136; see also the opening of the admiring letter by Lodovico da Schio printed in early editions of Cassandra Fedele's 1487 Paduan speech (Fedele, 1636, 144–45; translation in Fedele, 2000, 65). On the humanist commonplace that associated female learning more generally with cultural progress, see Cox, 2008, 28–31.

that they derived from the supposed biological differences between the sexes.⁷⁸ This strictly dichotomized model of gender roles, which had evolved within the ancient Greek *polis*, mapped fairly seamlessly onto the social practices of the medieval Italian city-republics.⁷⁹ It was, however, patently inadequate as a model for the increasingly powerful and culturally assertive princely courts of fifteenth-century Italy, in which women of the ruling dynasties were frequently called on to perform masculine leadership roles. The question of eloquence is a case in point: where Aristotle had regarded this as a masculine virtue whose feminine equivalent was silence, this was a dichotomy that made sense only within a model of gender identity in which civic space was regarded as the proper domain of men and women were confined to the domestic sphere. Within the context of the princely courts, the model of womanhood as chaste, silent, and obedient was clearly not sufficient, especially where the key figure of the dynastic consort was concerned. While chastity was nonnegotiable, the requirements of silence and obedience were quite urgently in need of reframing, as was, more generally, the requirement that the decent woman be self-effacing and chary of notice, a tortoise ever ready to retreat into her shell.⁸⁰

Nowhere in the late Quattrocento was this process of gender redefinition taking place more energetically and self-consciously than in the Ferrara of Eleonora d'Aragona, where the intellectuals of the court had before them a woman who represented a living confutation of Aristotelian gender norms. Not only did Eleonora deputize for her husband during his absences from Ferrara — as was relatively common in the case of dynastic consorts — but she also appears to have taken an unusually prominent administrative role even when the duke was at home.⁸¹ She held audiences for her subjects, hearing complaints and supplications, and oversaw the

⁷⁸A classic summary of Aristotelian thinking on sex and gender and its influence on early modern culture is Maclean; see also, particularly with regard to gender in medieval scholastic thought, Allen, 65–179.

⁷⁹It is worth noting in this regard the republican cultural formation of both Francesco Barbaro and Leonardo Bruni. Republican social attitudes also profoundly inform the neo-Aristotelian discussion of gender roles in the third book of Leon Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia* (1433–34), also often cited in modern critical literature as representative of humanist views on women.

⁸⁰On the distinctiveness of the court as a cultural environment for women, see Swain, 175, 191–94; Hughes, esp. 30–31, 41–42; Herlihy, 41, 289; Clough, 1996; Kolsky, 1998; Manca, 2003c, esp. 92–93; Cox, 2008, esp. 19–23, 26–28, 34–35, 42–44. For the notion of woman as tortoise, see Matthews Grieco, 221–29.

⁸¹Ugo Caleffini's chronicle allows this development to be dated to August 1481: Caleffini, 1:262 and n. 1. Eleonora was by this time already experienced in government, having been given charge of the city during Ercole's long absences in 1478–79: *ibid.*,

finances of the vast ducal household. During Ercole's absences she embodied the authority of his regime for both the populace and visiting dignitaries.⁸² Such a reality could not be comfortably squared with a gender ideology that conceived of women as predetermined by nature as subordinate, and possessed only of the qualities of body and soul that fitted them for a lifetime of domesticity and submission. A more capacious feminine identity was required, one capable of embracing masculine leadership virtues such as justice, fortitude, eloquence, and prudence.

We see this Ferrarese project of gender revisionism most impressively at work in Bartolomeo Goggio's *De laudibus mulierum*, notable as the first Italian *querelle* text to engage with the task of refuting scholastic philosophical and theological arguments for female inferiority, rather than limiting itself to assembling *exempla* from classical history of women who had "exceeded their sex."⁸³ A second, less radical *querelle* text that may be more conjecturally connected with Eleonora's patronage is Giacomo Filippo Foresti's *De claris selectisque mulieribus*, the most substantial compendium of ancient and modern famous women produced in Italy up to this time.⁸⁴ In addition to these specialized works on women, two political advice books addressed to Eleonora, Antonio Cornazzano's *Del modo di regere e di regnare* and Diomede Carafa's *I doveri del principe* (ca. 1473–77), may both be seen as engaging more implicitly with gender issues, as the first humanistic writings on princely government to be framed with a female ruler in mind.⁸⁵ Cornazzano, in particular, shows himself consistently alert to the gender dimension of this exercise, carefully mingling

218–19, 224–33. On dynastic consorts' role in government in this period generally, see Clough, 1996, esp. 44–47.

⁸²A detailed sense of the extent of Eleonora's governmental responsibilities may be had from Chiappini. For a balanced assessment of the extent and limits of her power, see Kolsky, 2005, 111–13.

⁸³For secondary literature, see above, n. 39.

⁸⁴For discussion, see Zaccaria; Collina, 112–13; Kolsky, 2005, 117–37, who perhaps overstates Foresti's gender conservatism. *De claris selectisque mulieribus* was published in Ferrara in 1497 with a dedication to Eleonora's sister, Beatrice d'Aragona, Queen of Hungary (1457–1508). Foresti appears, however, to have been working on the text in Ferrara in 1492, and to have been preparing it for publication already in 1493, a dating that would not exclude a patronage interest on Eleonora's part: see Zaccaria, 541–45.

⁸⁵For secondary literature on Cornazzano, see n. 38 above. For Carafa, see Carafa, 97–209, which contains both the original vernacular text and the Latin translation of the work that Eleonora commissioned from Battista Guarini, the *De regentis et boni principis officis*. The vernacular title conventionally given to Carafa's treatise is a nineteenth-century addition; the original is untitled.

male and female *exempla* in his illustration of the virtues of the prince.⁸⁶ Besides these four works, all of which have received some attention in recent years, a full consideration of the discourse on gender associated with Eleonora also needs to embrace lesser-known encomiastic writings, such as the two important funeral orations composed for her by Battista Guarini and Baptista Mantuanus, both of which appeared in print at the time.⁸⁷ A final significant posthumous work in the encomiastic vein is Foresti's biography, written shortly after Eleonora's death in 1493.⁸⁸

It is within this rich discursive context that we must locate Ercole de' Roberti's *Portia and Brutus*, which depicts the new ideal of female and wifely virtue that the above texts collectively craft. This ideal is at once both challenging and reassuring: challenging in its emphasis on women's capacity for political virility, yet reassuring in its positing of such prowess as compatible with chastity and marital devotion. Perhaps the text that most perfectly illustrates this rhetorical strategy is Guarini's: composed, perhaps significantly, by a Ferrarese-born intellectual who had been close to Eleonora in life.⁸⁹ Guarini starts the most substantial part of his oration, his disquisition on Eleonora's "virtues of mind," by announcing that "although she possessed every quality that might be expected in an excellent matron," he will concentrate exclusively on those virtues that she manifested in her governmental activities.⁹⁰ He then analyzes these leadership virtues, beginning with the all-important quality of prudence, and proceeding through temperance, affability (*facilitas*), humanity, liberality, and piety.

⁸⁶Musso.

⁸⁷Guarini, 1493; Mantuanus. A modern edition of Guarini's oration is available in Guarini, 1995, 287–98. Of the early printed editions, Guarini's may be dated to the month of Eleonora's death, October 1493, as he sent a copy to Isabella d'Este on 2 November of that year: see Guarini, 1995, 287. A third oration, by the Piedmontese diplomat and humanist Benvenuto da San Giorgio, Count of Biandrate (1450–1527), was delivered in Ferrara in December 1493 and printed, in or after 1494, with an oration of San Giorgio's to the Emperor Maximilian: see Marini, 2:326. I have been unable to trace a copy of this text.

⁸⁸Foresti, 1497, 161^r–163^r. The text is datable from its opening lines to the last months of 1493.

⁸⁹On their relationship, see Bertoni, 147–48, 150–51; Carafa, 106. Guarini was the youngest son of the legendary humanist and educator Guarino da Verona (1374–1460), and succeeded to his father's chair in rhetoric at Ferrara after his death, also acting as tutor to Isabella d'Este and (from 1491) as secretary to the young Alfonso d'Este. For a biography, citing earlier secondary literature, see Pistilli.

⁹⁰Guarini, 1995, 290: "Sed quamvis nullam earum virtutum quae ad excellentem matronam pertinent ei defuisse putem, volo tamen in hac temporis angustia eas dumtaxat commemorandas proponere, quibus in regno gubernando populisque pertractandis usam fuisse curiose aliquando attenteque observavi."

Eleonora is presented here in terms that are strikingly uninflected by gender; military prowess aside, Guarini's template for the description is clearly the quintessentially masculine one of the ideal prince. His treatment of the virtue of temperance is indicative in this regard: while Eleonora's impeccable chastity is inevitably lauded, it is not given particular salience. Rather, in a notable departure from the emphases of conventional treatments of female virtue, Guarini gives only as much weight to sexual continence in his treatment of Eleonora's *temperantia* as he does to more gender-neutral sub-virtues such as frugality and abstemiousness.⁹¹

Equally unconventional is Guarini's section on Eleonora's "bodily gifts" (*corporis dotes*), which passes with diplomatic swiftness over the subject of beauty to stress instead the deceased duchess's remarkable bodily strength and the stamina that allowed her to work long hours in government without any need for sustenance or rest. Guarini's comment on this point is telling in view of the Aristotelian tradition that grounded male political excellence in men's superior physical strength: Eleonora's physical robustness was such that "she seemed to have been framed for rule by nature's very hands."⁹² Eleonora is explicitly portrayed here as a leader of men, possessed of all the moral and physical capabilities that leadership demands. The same insistence on women's capacity for rule is found in Cornazzano's *Del modo di regere e di regnare*, in a passage that praises the prudence of Francesco Sforza and Ercole d'Este in allowing their consorts to share in their government. Cornazzano's language is explicit: he speaks of Sforza "dividing the worthy office of rule with his wife."⁹³ Scholarship has not sufficiently recognized this notion of spousal coregency, which might be used, for example, to interpret the pendant portraits of ruling couples that are a feature of late Quattrocento court art.⁹⁴ The ideal of the heroic ruling

⁹¹Ibid., 291–92. Mantuanus, b2^{r-v}, is more conventional in this regard.

⁹²Ibid., 290: "ita ut ad regendum naturae ipsius manibus formata esse videretur." Guarini goes on to note that such people may properly be termed heroic ("heroicae personae"), crediting their princely physique to the wisdom of divine providence, which has customized them for their destiny of rule.

⁹³Cornazzano, 20^r: "con la Illustre Donna / parti del Regimento el degno officio." For the passage on Ercole d'Este and Eleonora d'Aragona, see *ibid.*, 20^v. Ibid. — like Guarini, 1995, 291 — stresses the advantage of a wife capable of deputizing, freeing the male ruler to pursue his military career as a *condottiere*, characterized as a "greater and more difficult pursuit."

⁹⁴The most famous example is Piero della Francesca's double portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza in the Uffizi, probably datable to ca. 1472, on which see Warnke; Woods-Marsden, 95–99, 101–114. Others are Ercole de' Roberti's portraits of Giovanni Bentivoglio and Ginevra Sforza (ca. 1474–77) in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, on which see Manca, 2003a; Edwards, 2008b; and the portraits of Francesco

couple also appears in literature, most notably in the *Orlando innamorato* (1483 and 1494) of the Ferrarese courtier-poet Matteo Maria Boiardo (1434–94), where the fictional founding couple of the Este dynasty, Bradamante and Ruggiero, are represented, not as demure princess and warrior on the Virgilian model of Lavinia and Aeneas, but, rather, as two warriors, one female, one male.

Although this ideal of the ruling couple is attained by assimilating the female partner to the dominant model of virility, this does not mean that gender difference is entirely collapsed. The novelty of Guarini's masculinized portrayal of Eleonora is tempered by his emphasis on her devotion to her husband, whom she is said to have "loved as a brother, revered as a father, and venerated as her lord."⁹⁵ Guarini cites this conjugal *pietas* as the original motivation for Eleonora's unusually close involvement in matters of state: "When she observed that her noble consort, dear to her above all things. . . was burdened with many arduous and difficult tasks, having regard to his health, on which she knew the well-being of his subjects to rely, she diligently and cautiously took upon herself the charge of the treasury and the other revenues of state."⁹⁶ Eleonora's involvement in the government of Ferrara is here presented as a natural extension of a wife's proper solicitude for her husband's health. This is a well-calculated move on Guarini's part. In the politically active Eleonora, he is aware of presenting his readers with a potentially challenging reality: indeed, one that he acknowledges "may seem incredible to many, and exceeding the capacities of the female sex."⁹⁷ In this context, his emphasis on the duchess as an exemplary wife performs an important rhetorical function, drawing what

Sforza and Bianca Maria Visconti sometimes attributed to Bonifazio Bembo in the Brera Gallery, Milan, which perhaps reflect a lost prototype of the 1450s: see Edwards, 2008b, 259. Paired medal portraits of Ercole d'Este and Eleonora d'Aragona, probably produced at the time of Eleonora's first extended period of rule for her husband in 1477–78, are discussed in Syson, 1999a, 228–29; for another medal featuring the couple, see also Corradini, 30, 37, fig. 6.

⁹⁵Guarini, 1995, 291: "quem amabat ut fratrem, colebat ut patrem, verebatur ut dominum." On Eleonora's conjugal devotion, see also Mantuanus, b2^f, who invokes Portia as a prototype.

⁹⁶Guarini, 1995, 291: "cum intelligeret inclitum coniugem ante omnia sibi carissimum. . . arduis plerumque ac difficilibus negociis occupari, ut eius valitudini consuleret a qua subditorum salutem pendere cognoscebat, ita diligenter et caute, cum aliorum vectigalium, tum fisci curam suscipiebat."

⁹⁷Ibid.: "Scio haec multis incredibilia videri posse, maioraque quam muliebris sexus capiat." Guarini goes on to appeal to the direct experience of Eleonora's capacities by many of his listeners, including the widowed Ercole d'Este, whom the oration frequently singles out.

might otherwise have been perceived as a monstrous regiment (to use John Knox's phrase) into a seemlier and more conventional frame.

It is illuminating to juxtapose the visual rhetoric of Roberti's *Famous Women* with the verbal rhetoric of Guarini's oration — especially so in the case of the *Portia and Brutus*, in many regards the ideological key to the sequence. In Portia and her companion women worthies in Roberti's sequence, we see figured precisely the type of the uxorial virago as we see constructed by Guarini in his oration: possessed of masculine capabilities of mind and body, yet content with her feminine role as loyal wife. Portia's striking and unwonted portrayal as *oratrix* perfectly encapsulates this gender tension, expressing her Catonian virility within a narrative context that frames this virility as an expression of conjugal concern. This was not the only way in which Eleonora chose to have herself represented (if we can take the figure of Portia as a moral self-portrait): a miniature, perhaps by Cosmè Tura, in the Morgan Library that adorns the title page of the presentation copy of Cornazzano's *Del modo di regere e di regnare* shows her alone in profile in regal guise, grasping a scepter that is being handed down to her directly by God (fig. 10).⁹⁸ Roberti's *Portia and Brutus* speaks a more discreet language, one closer to the rhetoric of Eleonora's courtly encomiasts, placing her not as a ruler herself but as the subordinate partner in a ruling couple that draws its strength from its pooling of talent. While this may seem less radical as a statement than the Tura portrait, it is nevertheless far from conventional. We are far from the Aristotelian view of the sexes as oppositely abled by nature to fit man to power and woman to subjection. Rather, in the fifteenth-century model of the heroic ruling couple, the relation between the pair is not contrastive, but specular, with both partners manifesting equally, or near equally, a divine fitness for rule.

This vision of the virile, yet socially acceptable, woman originated within the highest social circles to accommodate the anomalous social reality of the politically empowered Quattrocento dynastic wife. The distance of this model of womanhood from traditionally sanctioned models served as signifier of social distinction: dynastic women could be other to conventional models of femininity because they were other, more generally, to nonnoble humankind. That this model originated within these elevated circles, however, does not mean that it was destined to stop there. Of course,

⁹⁸See Manca, 2000b, 146–47 (no. 29); Manca, 2003c, 81–83, which contextualizes the image with regard to Eleonora's public role. For a skeptical discussion of the Tura attribution, see Syson, 1999a, 228. A woodcut in Foresti, 1497, 161^v, and reproduced in Franklin, 148 (fig. 4.8), similarly shows Eleonora wielding a scepter, with the city of Ferrara in the background.



FIGURE 10. Cosmè Tura [?]. *Eleonora d'Aragona*, ca. 1478–79. Title page of Antonio Cornazzano, *Del modo di regere e di regnare*. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 731.

women outside the ranks of the ruling dynasties could not aspire to govern a country in the manner of Eleonora d'Aragona. However, where eloquence — the most accessible masculine sphere of endeavor for woman — is concerned, the practice of female oratory, originating among the dynastic families of the Montefeltro, Varano, and Sforza, had by the late fifteenth century migrated down to the relatively modest social level of the Venetian

cittadina Cassandra Fedele.⁹⁹ This process continued in the century that followed, accelerating as the vernacular displaced Latin as the dominant literary language in Italy. By the mid-sixteenth century, the public display of eloquence in women — mainly in the form of vernacular poetry — was considered not simply acceptable, but even praiseworthy in wide segments of the Italian elite, down to the families of the minor urban nobility and professional men.¹⁰⁰ This, ultimately, is the historical importance of the processes of courtly cultural negotiation, which we see embodied with such elegance in the vocal yet virtuous figure of Roberti's *Portia*. The Quattrocento courts established the principle that public eloquence in a woman could, *pace* Francesco Barbaro, be compatible with “honesty.” The remarkable flowering of women's writing we see in the following century in Italy would be incomprehensible without this ethical base.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

⁹⁹Cox, 2008, 5, 34.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, esp. 84–85, 99.

Bibliography

- Allen, Sister Prudence, R.S.M. *The Early Humanist Revolution, 1250–1500*. Vol. 2, *The Concept of Woman*. Grand Rapids, 2002.
- Antonelli, Giuseppe. *Ricerche bibliografiche sulle edizioni ferraresi del secolo XV*. Ferrara, 1830.
- Appian. *Roman History*. Trans. Horace White. 4 vols. Cambridge, MA, 1913.
- Ariosto, Lodovico. *Orlando furioso*. Ed. Cesare Segre. Milan, 1976.
- Barbaro, Francesco. *De re uxoria, libri duo*. Strasburg, 1612.
- . “On Wifely Duties.” In *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, 179–228. Philadelphia, 1978.
- Barzizza, Gasparino, and Guiniforte Barzizza. *Opera*. 2 vols. Ed. Giuseppe Alessandro Furietti. Rome, 1723.
- Baskins, Cristelle. “Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting.” In *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, ed. Richard C. Trexler, 187–206. Binghamton, 1994.
- . *Cassone Painting: Humanism and Gender in Early Modern Italy*. Cambridge, 1998.
- Benson, Pamela J. *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*. Philadelphia, 1992.
- Bertoni, Giulio. *La biblioteca estense e la coltura ferrarese ai tempi del duca Ercole I (1471–1505)*. Turin, 1903.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Famous Women*. Ed. Virginia Brown. Cambridge, MA, 2001.
- Bohn, Babette. “The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani.” *Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 52–79.
- Branca, Vittore, ed. *Boccaccio visualizzato: narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*. 3 vols. Turin, 1999.
- Bruni, Leonardo. “De studiis et litteris.” In *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, 92–125. Cambridge, MA, 2002.
- Bryce, Judith C. “‘Fa finire uno bello studio et dice volere studiare’: Ippolita Sforza and her Books.” In *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 64, no. 1 (2002): 55–69.
- Buettner, Brigitte. *Boccaccio’s Des cleres et nobles femmes: Systems of Signification in an Illuminated Manuscript*. Seattle, 1996.
- Caleffini, Ugo. *Diario ferrarese, 1471–1494*. Ed. Giuseppe Pardi. 2 vols. Ferrara, 1938–40.
- Campano, Giannantonio. *Opera omnia*. Farnborough, 1969.
- Carafa, Diomede. *Memoriali*. Ed. Franca Petrucci Nardelli, with Antonio Lupis and Giuseppe Galasso. Rome, 1988.
- Castoldi, Massimo, ed. *Rime per Laura Brezzone Schioppo (dal Codice Marciano it. Cl. IX 163)*. Bologna, 1994.
- Cereta, Laura. *Epistolae*. Ed. Giacomo Filippo Tomasini. Padua, 1640.
- . *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*. Ed. and trans. Diana Robin. Chicago, 1997.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Nun’s Priests Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 253–61. 3rd ed., Boston, 1987.
- Chiappini, Luciano. *Eleonora d’Aragona, prima Duchessa di Ferrara*. Rovigo, 1956.
- Cicero. *Brutus. Orator*. Trans. G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell. Cambridge, MA, 1998.
- Cirneo, Pietro. *De bello ferrariensi*. Vol. 21, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed.

- Lodovico Muratori, cols. 1189–1218. Milan, 1723.
- Clough, Cecil H. “Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival.” *Renaissance Studies* 6, no. 2 (1992): 113–72.
- . “Daughters and Wives of the Montefeltro: Outstanding Bluestockings of the Quattrocento.” *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 1 (1996): 31–55.
- Collina, Beatrice. “L’esemplarità delle donne illustri fra Umanesimo e Controriforma.” In *Donna, disciplina, creanza Cristi dal XV al XVII secolo: studi e testi a stampa*, ed. Gabriella Zari, 103–119. Rome, 1996.
- Cornazzano, Antonio. *Del modo di regere e del regnare*. MS, Morgan Library, M.731, ca. 1478–79.
- Corradini, Elena. “Medallic Portraits of the Este: *Effigies ad vivum expressae*.” In *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, 22–38. London, 1998.
- Cox, Virginia. *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*. Baltimore, 2008.
- . “Leonardo Bruni on Women and Rhetoric: *De studiis et litteris* Revisited.” *Rhetorica* 27, no. 1 (2009): 47–75.
- D’Elia, Anthony F. *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. Cambridge, MA, 2004.
- Edelstein, Bruce L. “Nobildonne napoletane e committenza: Eleonora d’Aragona ed Eleonora di Toledo a confronto.” *Quaderni storici* 35, no. 2 (2000): 295–329.
- Edgeworth, R. J. “The Death of Dido.” *The Classical Journal* 72, no. 2 (1976–77): 129–33.
- Edwards, Nancy. “Erocole de’ Roberti, *Portia and Brutus*.” In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer, 309–11. New York, 2008a.
- . “Erocole de’ Roberti, *Portrait of Giovanni II Bentivoglio. Portrait of Ginevra Sforza Bentivoglio*.” In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer, 259–60. New York, 2008b.
- Fahy, Conor. “Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women.” *Italian Studies* 11 (1956): 32–36.
- Fedele, Cassandra. *Epistolae et orations*. Ed. Giacomo Filippo Tomasini. Padua, 1636.
- . *Letters and Orations*. Ed. and trans. Diana Robin. Chicago, 2000.
- Fermor, Sharon. “Movement and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Italian Painting.” In *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, 129–45. Cambridge, 1993.
- Filetico, Martino. *Iocundissimae disputationes*. Ed. Guido Arbizzoni. Modena, 1992.
- Filippini, Cecilia. “Plutarco istoriato: le Vite parallele nella miniatura italiana del Quattrocento e la morte di Cesare nei cassoni fiorentini.” In *Biografia dipinta: Plutarco e l’arte del Rinascimento 1400–1550*, ed. Roberto Guerrini, with Cecilia Filippini and Marilena Caciorgna, 155–208. La Spezia, 2002.
- Foresti, Jacopo Filippo. *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus*. Ferrara, 1497.
- Franklin, Margaret. *Boccaccio’s Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society*. Aldershot, 2006.
- Frati, Lodovico. *La vita privata in Bologna dal secolo XIII al XVII*. 2nd ed., Bologna, 1928.
- Frick, Carole Collier. “Francesco Barbaro’s *De re uxoria*: A Silent Dialogue for a Young Medici Bride.” In *Printed Voices: the Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée, 193–205. Toronto, 2004.
- Geronimus, Dennis. *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange*. New Haven, 2006.
- Gilbert, Creighton. “Lucretia, Portia, Hasdrubal’s Wife, and Their Hus-

- bands." *Annali dell'Università di Ferrara (Sezione Lettere)*, n.s., 3 (2002), 183–204.
- Goffen, Rona. "Lotto's Lucretia." *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1999): 742–81.
- Goggio, Bartolomeo. *De laudibus mulierum*. MS, British Library, Additional Manuscripts 17415, ca. 1487.
- Gold, Suzanne. "Imprisoned or Empowered: The Private Spaces of Eleonora d'Este; Ercole de' Roberti's Painted Narratives in Ferrara's Castel Vecchio." *Oculus: Journal for the History of Art* 2, no. 1 (1999): 12–25.
- Guarini, Battista. *Baptistae Guarini funebris oratio in Excellentissimam Reginam Eleonoram Aragonam incliti ducis Herculis Estensis coniugem*. Ferrara, 1493.
- . *Opuscula*. Ed. Luigi Piacente. Bari, 1995.
- Gundersheimer, Werner L. "Women, Learning, and Power: Eleonora of Aragon and the Court of Ferrara." In *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme, 43–65. New York, 1980a.
- . "Bartolommeo Goggio: A Feminist in Renaissance Ferrara." *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1980b): 175–200.
- Hallett, Judith. "Women as Same and Other in Classical Roman Elite." *Helios* 16 (1989): 59–78.
- Herlihy, David. *Women, Family, and Society in Medieval Europe*. Providence, 1995.
- Holman, Beth L. "Exemplum and Imitatio: Countess Matilda and Lucrezia Pico della Mirandola at Polirone." *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (1999): 637–64.
- Hughes, Diane Owen. "Invisible Madonnas? The Italian Historiographical Tradition and the Women of Medieval Italy." In *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard, 25–57. Philadelphia, 1987.
- Jerome. *Adversus Iovinianum, Libri Duo*. In *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Vol. 23, cols. 205–338. Paris, 1844–55a.
- . *Epistolae*. In *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Vol. 22, cols. 235–1182. Paris, 1844–55b.
- Joannides, Paul. *Masaccio and Masolino*. London, 1993.
- Jones, Ann Rosalind. *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620*. Bloomington, 1990.
- Jordan, Constance. *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models*. Ithaca, 1990.
- King, Margaret L., and Albert Rabil, Jr., eds. *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works By and About the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*. Binghamton, 1983.
- Kolsky, Stephen. "Bending the Rules: Marriage in Renaissance Collections of Biographies of Famous Women." In *Marriage in Italy, 1300–1650*, ed. Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe, 227–48. Cambridge, 1998.
- . *The Ghost of Boccaccio: Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy*. Brepols, 2005.
- Kovesi Killerby, Catherine. "'Heralds of a Well-Instructed Mind': Nicolosa Sanuti's Defence of Women and Their Clothes." *Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 3 (1999): 255–82.
- . *Sumptuary Law in Italy, 1200–1500*. Oxford, 2002.
- La Porta, Veronica. *Il gesto nell'arte: L'eloquenza silenziosa delle immagini*. Rome, 2006.
- Livy. *History of Rome, Books 1–2*. Trans. B. O. Foster. Cambridge, MA, 1919.
- Lombardi, Giuseppe. "Traduzione, imitazione, plagio (Nicolosa Sanuti, Albrecht von Eyb, Niclas von Wyle)." *Semestrale di Studi (e Testi) italiani* 1 (1998): 103–38.
- Longhi, Roberto. *Officina ferrarese 1934, seguita dagli ampliamenti 1940 e dai*

- nuovi ampliamenti, 1940–55*. Florence, 1956.
- Lowe, K. J. P. *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*. Cambridge, 2003.
- Luckyj, Christina. "A Moving Rhetorick": *Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*. Manchester, 2002.
- Maclean, Ian. *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*. Cambridge, 1980.
- Manca, Joseph. "Renaissance Theater and Hebraic Ritual in Ercole de Roberti's *Gathering of Manna*." *Artibus et Historiae* 9, no. 17 (1988): 137–47.
- . *The Art of Ercole de' Roberti*. Cambridge, 1992.
- . "Constantia et forteza: Eleonora d'Aragona's Famous Matrons." *Notes in the History of Art* 19, no. 2 (2000a), 13–20.
- . *Cosmè Tura: The Life and Art of a Painter in Estense Ferrara*. Oxford, 2000b.
- . "Ercole de' Roberti, *Giovanni II Bentivoglio* (ca. 1474–77). *Ginevra Bentivoglio* (ca. 1474–77)." In *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and David Alan Brown, 602–07. Washington, 2003a.
- . "Ercole de' Roberti, *The Wife of Hasdrubal and Her Children* (c. 1490–93)." In *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and David Alan Brown, 607–12. Washington, 2003b.
- . "Isabella's Mother: Aspects of the Art Patronage of Eleonora d'Aragona, Duchess of Ferrara." *Aurora: Journal of the History of Art* 4 (2003c): 79–94.
- Mantuanus, Baptista [Giovanni Battista Spagnoli]. *Fratri Baptiste Mantuani Carmelite Theologi e professoris oratio habita in exequiis Illus. Domine Leonore Ducisse Ferrarie*. Cremona, [1493?].
- Marchand, Eckart. "Exemplary Gestures and 'Authentic' Physiognomies." *Apollo* 159, no. 4 (2004): 3–11.
- Marini, Gaetano Luigi. *Degli archiatri pontificj. . . nel quale sono i supplimenti e le correzioni all'opera del Mandosio*. 2 vols. Rome, 1784.
- Matthews Grieco, Sara F. *Ange ou diablesse: La representation de la femme au XVI^e siecle*. Paris, 1991.
- Mazzanti, Marinella Bonvini. *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: Una "principessa" del Rinascimento*. Urbino, 1993.
- McManamon, John, S.J. *Funeral Oratory and the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism*. Chapel Hill, 1989.
- Miziolek, Jerzy. "The Story of Lucretia on an Early-Renaissance Cassone at the National Museum in Warsaw." *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 35 (1994): 31–52.
- . *Soggetti classici sui cassoni fiorentini alla vigilia del Rinascimento*. Warsaw, 1996.
- Molteni, Monica. *Ercole de' Roberti*. Ferrara, 1995.
- Musso, Annalisa. "Del modo di regere e di regnare di Antonio Cornazzano: Una Institutio principis al femminile." *Schifanoia* 19 (1999): 67–79.
- Nogarola, Isotta. *Opera quae supersunt omnia; accedunt Angelae et Zenevrae Nogarolae epistolae et carmina*. Ed. Eugenius Abel. 2 vols. Vienna, 1886.
- . *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*. Ed. and trans. Margaret L. King and Diana Robin. Chicago, 2004.
- Nuovo, Angela. *Il commercio librario a Ferrara tra XV e XVI secolo: La bottega di Domenico Sivieri*. Florence, 1998.
- Pade, Marianne. *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. 3 vols. Copenhagen, 2007.
- Patrignani, Giovanna. "Le donne del ramo di Pesaro." In *Le donne di Casa Malatesti*, ed. Anna Falcioni, 2:787–920. Rimini, 2005.
- Phillippy, Patricia. *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture*. Baltimore, 2006.

- Pignatti, Franco. "Fedele, Cassandra." In *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 45 (1995): 566–68.
- Pistilli, Gino. "Guarini, Battista." In *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 60 (2003): 339–45.
- Plutarch. *Lives: Dion and Brutus. Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus*. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge, MA, 1918.
- . *Lives: Sertorius and Eumenes. Phocion and Cato*. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge, MA, 1919.
- . *Makers of Rome*. Trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert. London, 1965.
- Poliziano, Angelo. *Lettere*. Ed. and trans. Shane Butler. Cambridge, MA, 2006.
- Quintavalle, Arturo, and Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle. *Arte in Emilia, 1960–61*. Parma, 1960.
- Quintilianus, Marcus Fabius. *The Orator's Education*. Ed. Donald A. Russell. 5 vols. Cambridge, MA, 2001.
- Rackham, Bernard. *Catalogue of Italian Maiolica*. 2 vols. London, 1940.
- Resta, Gianvito. *Le epitomi di Plutarco nel Quattrocento*. Padua, 1962.
- Rice, Eugene F. *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*. Baltimore, 1985.
- Roberts, Perri Lee. *Masolino da Panicale*. Oxford, 1993.
- Ross, Sarah Gwyneth. "Her Father's Daughter: Cassandra Fedele, Woman Humanist of the Venetian Republic." In *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe, 204–22. Helsinki, 2007.
- Rózycka-Bryzek, Anna, ed. *La peinture italienne des XIV^e et XV^e siècles: Exposition des musées et des collections polonaises, avec concours de la Galerie nationale de Prague et du Musée de l'art à Bucarest*. Krakow, 1961.
- Rusconi, Roberto. "Women's Sermons at the End of the Middle Ages: Texts from the Blessed and Images of the Saints." In *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, 173–95. Berkeley, 1998.
- Sabadino degli Arienti, Giovanni. *Gynevera de le clare donne*. Ed. Corrado Ricchi and A. Bacchi della Lega. Bologna, 1888.
- . *The Letters of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti (1481–1510)*. Ed. Carolyn James. Florence, 2001.
- Sallust. *Sallust*. Trans.. J. C. Wolfe. Cambridge, MA, 1921.
- Sanson, Helena. *Donne, precettistica e lingua nell'Italia del Cinquecento: Un contributo alla storia del pensiero linguistico*. Florence, 2007.
- Schubring, Paul. *Cassoni: Truben und Trubebilder der italienische Fruhe Renaissance*. 2 vols. 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1923.
- Shakespeare. *Complete Works*. Ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen. New York, 2007.
- Smith, Warren S. "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the Franklin's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 374–90.
- Stevenson, Jane. *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford, 2005.
- Swain, Elizabeth Ward. "'My Excellent and Most Singular Lord': Marriage in a Noble Family of Fifteenth-Century Italy." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 2 (1986): 171–95.
- Syson, Luke. "Medals and Other Portraits Attributed to Cosmè Tura." *The Burlington Magazine* 141, no. 1153 (1999a): 226–229.
- . "The Wife of Hasdrubal and her Children, c. 1486–90. Lucretia, Brutus and Collatinus, c. 1486–90. Portia and Brutus, c. 1486–90." In *Erocole de' Roberti: The Renaissance in Ferrara*, ed. Denise Allen and Luke Syson, xxxii–xxxv. Supplement to *The Burlington Magazine* 141, no. 1153 (1999b).

- Tuohy, Thomas. *Herculean Ferrara: Ercole d'Este (1471–1505) and the Invention of a Ducal Capital*. Cambridge, 1996.
- Valerius Maximus. *Memorable Doings and Sayings*. Ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA, 2000.
- Von Arnim, Hans Friedrich August. *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*. Stuttgart, 1964.
- Warnke, Martin. "Individuality as Argument: Piero della Francesca's Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino." In *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, 81–90. London, 1998.
- Welch, Evelyn S. "Between Milan and Naples: Ippolita Maria Sforza, Duchess of Calabria." In *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects*, ed. David Abulafia, 123–36. Aldershot, 1995.
- Wilkins Sullivan, Ruth. "Three Ferrarese Panels on the Theme of 'Death Rather than Dishonour' and the Neapolitan Connection." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 57, no. 4 (1994): 610–25.
- Woods-Marsden, Joanne. "Piero della Francesca's Ruler Portraits." In *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. Jeryldene M. Wood, 91–114. Cambridge, 2002.
- Zaccaria, Vittorio. "La fortuna del *De mulieribus claris* del Boccaccio nel secolo XV: Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, Iacopo Filippo Foresti e le loro biografie femminili (1490–97)." In *Il Boccaccio nelle culture e letterature nazionali*, ed. Francesco Mazzoni, 519–45. Florence, 1978.
- Zambotti, Bernardino. *Diario ferrarese dall'anno 1476 sino al 1504*. Ed. Giuseppe Pardi. Vol. 24, pt. 7, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. Giosue Carducci, Vittorio Fiorini, and Pietro Fedele. 2nd ed., Bologna, 1935.
- Zancani, Diego. "Writing for Women Rulers in Quattrocento Italy: Antonio Cornazzano." In *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza, 57–74. Oxford, 2000.