CHAPTER 11

IN LAURA'S SHADOW: CASTING FEMALE HUMANISTS AS PETRARCHAN BELOVEDS IN QUATTROCENTO LETTERS

Aileen A. Feng

Love, indeed, longs for a beloved [Amor enim relationem avet][1]

—Lauro Quirini to Isotta Nogarola

I have found, I have found what I wanted, what I have always been seeking, what I was asking for from Eros, what I was even dreaming of . . . [Εὕρηχ᾽ εὕρηχ᾽ ἣν θέλον, ἣν ἐξήτεον αἰεί,/ἣν ᾔτουν τὸν Ἔρωθ᾽ ἣν καὶ ὀνειροπόλουν· . . .][2]

—Angelo Poliziano to Alessandra Scala

The relation between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses is neither a direct relation of identity, a one-to-one correspondence, nor a relation of simple implication. Like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set-up.[3]

—Teresa de Lauretis

In a letter written to her uncle, Ludovico di Leno, on July 16, 1485, Laura Cereta (1469–1499) provided a peculiar reason for having undertaken humanistic studies. She wrote, "I took on all this work myself so that the name of Laura, so wondrously celebrated by Petrarch, might be preserved in a second and quite new immortality—in me" [Ego potius omnen hanc insumpsi operam mihi, ut Laurae nomen, miro Petrarcae preconio cantatum, novior altera in me custodiat aeternitas].[4] The female humanist claims to have undertaken humanistic studies so that the name Laura, already immortalized by Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) during the previous century, might be renewed in her. Cereta's attempt to recuperate the name that had come to symbolize on the one hand, unrequited

love, and on the other, feminine virtue, was a surprising excuse for entering upon the classically male field of study. Her attempt to break from the portrait she had inherited forced a confrontation between the Petrarchan vernacular lyric tradition of the Trecento and the emerging neo-Latin humanist movement of the Quattrocento—a relationship that will be examined in this chapter.

Although Cereta does not state explicitly the reasons behind her aversion to being identified with Petrarch's beloved, the negative consequences of such an identification are easily surmised. The Trecento figure of the medieval beloved finds full expression in Petrarch's Laura, who, although multifaceted and complex, can be portrayed reductively in three words: silent, chaste, and unattainable.[5] The last two qualities, perhaps, need no explanation. The *amor purus* [pure love] of courtly love inherited from Andrea Capellanus's *De Amore* and the poetry of Dante's *dolce stil novo* [new sweet style] linked the chastity of the beloved inherently to her inaccessibility and infused her with a salvific function.[6] Yet, to say that the medieval beloved is silent is possibly misleading and, therefore, needs to be qualified. Although Laura speaks in a few places—in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,* and the *Bucolicum carmen*—her words are quasi-prophetic and necessarily mediated by the male poet. Indeed, the sign placed upon a dormant Laura in *RVF* 190—"Let no one touch me" [Nessun mi tocchi]—recalls Christ's words to Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch me" [Noli me tangere], at the Resurrection.[7] Although Laura is made to speak, she serves a mediating function, acting as a mouthpiece for a higher message.[8]

These three characteristics form the shadow under which Cereta and the Quattrocento female humanists found themselves. Trained as humanists, women such as Isotta Nogarola (1418–66), Cassandra Fedele (1465–1558), Alessandra Scala (1475–1506), and Cereta exchanged letters with the most learned men of their age, earning praise for their erudition, publishing letterbooks, and often giving public orations.[9] At first sight these women appear to have emerged from the tradition of silence they inherited, but, as a closer examination of their epistolary exchanges with some of the most prominent men of the century shows, the matter is more complex. Just as women were excluded from Cicero's political writings, so too did they risk being excluded from the dominant discourse of his neo-Latin humanist imitators.[10]

Born under the shadow of Petrarch's Laura, the female humanist may have gained a voice through her writing, but she found herself objectified by her male interlocutors, much as the silent, chaste beloved of the Petrarchan lyric. When Lauro Quirini (1420–75) writes "love, indeed, longs for a beloved" [amor enim relationem avet] to Nogarola,[11] he was

honoring her erudition in a Latin encomium, but he couches his praise in terms that Petrarch used to address his fictional beloved, and that later generations of Petrarchan poets would use to address their beloveds. Indeed, this language is intensely reminiscent of the language used by Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) in the Greek epigram to Alessandra Scala cited at the beginning of this chapter: "I have found, I have found what I wanted, what I have always been seeking, what I was asking for from Eros, what I was even dreaming of." Poliziano believes he has found his beloved in the female humanist, yet his portrayal of her is at odds with the praise he bestows upon her for her mastery of Greek. Margaret King has long argued that educated women during the Renaissance were viewed as members of a "third sex," using Cassandra Fedele as an example: "She, too, had overcome her sex, had created a man within her womanliness and had become a creature of ambiguous identity, belonging to a third and unknown sex beyond the order of nature. The learned women of the Renaissance, in the eyes of their male contemporaries and friends, ceased, in becoming learned, to be women."[12] Contrary to King's assessment, it is precisely because they became learned, and thus more "masculine," that the male humanists treated them discursively as more "feminine" in an attempt to uphold what they believed to be the "natural law" emerging from the Bible and its various interpreters as well as from the writings of Aristotle. That is, Aristotle's view of women as naturally defective versions of men influenced clerical and scholastic thought via the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. The general patristic interpretation informing the literati of this period points to a dual aspect of personhood: (1) personhood as understood through the universal category *homo*, and (2) personhood as restricted by categories of sex, *vir* and *femina*. Thus, the emphasis on chastity (a female virtue) and the use of Petrarchan courtly love rhetoric attempt to resignify the female humanist as "woman": she is reminded of her place in the social and "natural" hierarchy. In the letters from her male humanist colleague, the learned woman of the Quattrocento thus becomes the embodiment of Laura.[13]

This chapter explores the odd frequency with which Petrarchan courtly love rhetoric appears in the Latin epistles written by male humanists to their female counterparts: Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, and Laura Cereta. I shall argue that the amatory rhetoric is specifically Petrarchan, rooted in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and the paradigms of desire established between the poet-lover and his beloved Laura. Indeed, it is through Petrarch's poetry that we encounter the most explicit working-out of the metaphysical relationship between male poet-lover and female beloved.[14] Scholarship has long recognized the use of commonplaces in Renaissance texts written *about* women but has not generally done so in texts written

to them.[15] The imitation of Petrarchan poetics in the humanist epistle has ethical and political valences that warrant investigation, especially given the widespread circulation of Petrarch's poetry within and beyond Italy: the discursive consequences of Petrarchism point to an attempt to subvert the threat of women's taking an active public role and thereby disrupting the social hierarchy. At the moment in which Petrarchan language and imagery expand beyond the private space of the lyric, Petrarchism becomes a discourse of power and mastery, forcing a reconsideration of Petrarch's influence on neo-Latin humanism and how we have conceived of the intersections between ethics and politics. Virginia Cox has stated,

> Whatever her initial novelty and threat value, by the late-fifteenth century, the "learned lady" was a familiar and sanctioned enough figure to have been co-opted as a kind of "national treasure," routinely boasted of by compatriots as an honor to her city and her kin. True, these women were adopted more in the role of mascots than fully integrated members to the professional humanistic community; women's existential "otherness" in the period was such that things could have hardly been any other way. Allowing for this, however, the writing woman did have a place by 1500 in Italian literary culture, even if that place was more of the nature of a pedestal or niche than a genuine "seat at the table."[16]

I agree with Cox about the pedestal-dwelling function of women's writing; however, I seek to discern male writing's use of the paradigms of power found in lyric poetry to generate the "existential 'otherness'" responsible for the marginalization-by-reification that Cox and I both identify. In this sense, one is reminded of a question the feminist theorist Teresa De Lauretis has posed in a rather different context but that nonetheless resembles our own: "How did Medusa feel seeing herself in Perseus' mirror just before being slain?"[17] This chapter explores the humanist text as if it were Minerva's shield, a symbol of prudence and wisdom, and poses the same question about the fifteenth-century female humanists: how did they respond when looking at their reflection in the Latin humanist text?

Hidden Portraits

Isotta Nogarola was one of the most prominent and controversial female humanists to emerge from the early Quattrocento. Born into a wealthy family, Isotta decided not to marry in order to devote herself to humanistic studies, becoming one of the first female professional humanists.[18] As a result, her letterbook is a most voluminous example of female erudition and documents Isotta's intellectual maturation from

the beginning of her studies to the end of her life.[19] Although she gained notoriety and praise for her erudition in sacred studies during her lifetime, she also became in 1439 the object of an anonymous invective, which included charges of adultery, promiscuity, and incest—the strongest imaginable attack on her chastity.[20] The same contradictions that Ann Rosalind Jones has described with respect to sixteenth-century female lyricists can be applied to the first generation of female humanists in the preceding century: "A first contradiction that these women [female poets] confronted was a mixed message about writing itself. Ideological pressures worked against their entry into the public world of print: female silence was equated with chastity, female eloquence with promiscuity."[21] What further complicates the case of the female humanists was their use of Latin, the classical language of authority and politics. For example, Isotta's public debate with Ludovico Foscarini (1409–1480) in 1451, later published as the "Dialogue on the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve," was one of the first occasions in which a woman participated in a public debate.[22] Thus, the educated woman's encroachment into the public sphere could also be interpreted as a move into politics. Although the invective against Isotta is an extreme example, it shows the difficulty with which learned women were accepted by Quattrocento society; they were both admired and viewed as a threat needing to be suppressed.

This ambiguous viewpoint is mirrored in the contamination by Petrarchan imagery of a Latin encomium written to Isotta Nogarola by the renowned humanist Lauro Quirini. Quirini, a student and classmate of Isotta's brother Leonardo at the University of Padova, sent Isotta a letter between 1448 and 1452 praising her accomplishments in sacred studies and urging her to pursue the study of Greek. Having never met the young female scholar, Quirini opens the letter in a peculiarly affectionate, albeit laudatory, fashion: "Some sort of almost boorish shyness, remarkable Isotta, greatest glory of women of our age, has restrained me to this day from writing to you, whom, although silently, I have certainly cherished most affectionately" [Pudor nescio quis paene subrusticus Isota insignis feminarum nostri temporis maxima gloria ad hanc usque diem me tenuit, ne tibi antea scriberem, quam tacito quidem, sed certe plurimo amore colebam].[23] Such rhetoric is exemplary of the *topos* of modesty frequently employed by male and female humanists alike: his bashfulness [*pudor*] prevented him from writing to the greatest glory of the women of his age, even though he has silently cherished [colebam] her with much love. The strong language of the final phrase is, however, suspect and, juxtaposed with the ending of the letter, calls the true purpose of the correspondence into question.

After having thoroughly explained what Isotta has to gain from Hellenist studies, Quirini ends the letter by stating, "I promise you, therefore, with Attic faith—in the event you would not believe me without this vow—by wind and earth I swear to you that I preserve your sweet memory within the secret places of my heart" [Itaque tibi spondeo fide Athica, quod si iniurato non credis, per ventum et humum tibi iuro me tuam dulcem memoriam inter arcana pectoris servare].[24] The pledge to preserve her memory within the secret places of his heart [memoriam inter arcana pectoris] recalls Petrarch's *RVF 96*: "I am so vanquished by waiting and by the long war of my sighs, that I hate what I hoped for and my desires and every noose with which my heart is bound. But that lovely smiling face, which I carry painted in my breast and see wherever I look, forces me, and I am driven back just the same into the first cruel tortures" [Io son de l'aspettar omai sì vinto,/e de la lunga guerra de' sospiri,/ch'i' aggio in odio la speme e i desiri,/et ogni laccio onde 'l mio cor è avinto. // Ma 'l bel viso leggiadro che depinto/porto nel petto, e veggio ove ch'io miri,/mi sforza; onde ne' primi empii martìri pur son contra mia voglia respinto].[25] In a manner characteristic of Petrarch, the poet-lover here portrays himself as battle-torn and without hope. Although he has been conquered in the "war of … sighs" [guerra de' sospiri] of the first quatrain, and despite his disdain for the hope and desire he feels, there is a driving force described in the second quatrain that throws him back into torment, albeit against his will: the "lovely smiling face" [bel viso leggiadro] that he carries in his heart. Within Petrarchan poetics, this face—the face of Laura—not only keeps him in the battle of love but, most importantly, also inspires and drives the poetic process. Thanks to the portrait, the absent beloved is eternal in his heart, and by extension, eternal in the landscape not only through the paronomastic play on *laura-lauro* (Laura-laurel tree/crown) that is prevalent throughout the collection, but also through the poet-lover's projection of the portrait, as he states, "everywhere I look" [ove ch'io miri]. This image establishes the metaphysical relationship between Petrarch and his beloved Laura by making her ever-present, as an image and as inspiration, yet completely unattainable.[26] Laura is necessarily unattainable so that Petrarch's salvation is not put definitively in jeopardy, yet she is his soul mate. This kind of relationship is mirrored throughout the lyric tradition, which is characterized predominantly by the notion of unrequited love.[27]

Although reminiscent of Petrarchan poetics, Quirini's use of "memoriam" is perplexing on several levels. First, there is no indication that he had ever *seen* Isotta. The faculty of sight was generally considered a necessary precursor to the *innamoramento* [falling in love], as is exemplified by an important Petrarchan source, Giacomo da Lentini: "Love is

a desire that comes from the heart/through an abundance of great pleasure;/the eyes first generate love/and the heart gives it [love] nourishment" [Amor è un[o] desio che ven da core/per abondanza di gran piacimento;/e li occhi in prima genera[n] l'amore/e lo core li dà nutricamento].[28] In addition, and more importantly, the evocation of this lyric commonplace undermines the stated purpose of the letter, which is to praise her intellect. This notion begins a series of encapsulating evocations that transform Isotta into the beloved of the Petrarchan lyric. Quirini goes on to explain that, despite the delay in his writing to her, he has been moved to write by his conscience and his affection for her, an affection that he will have for her as long as she wishes. He justifies this devotion through what seems to be a dictum of love: "Love, indeed, longs for a beloved" [Amor enim relationem avet].[29] The use of the verb *aveo* depicts, not so much the act of seeking, but the act of longing and desiring. The term "relationem"—from *relatio* (literally a carrying back or bringing back), used in philosophical and grammatical discourse—could be translated literally as "relation." Although an abstraction, the desire of love to find a relation(ship) necessitates an object that, in the context of the letter, is Isotta. When this notion of a relationship is coupled with the use of a strong affective verb such as *aveo*, we are confronted with a statement reminiscent of the poet-lover's claim that love desires a beloved.

The move—from an encomium, to suggestions of future studies in Greek letters, to proclamations of love—is surprising, yet it points to the tension found in Petrarch's appropriation of the Apollo-Daphne myth in his lyric. That is, through a paronomastic play on his first name, Lauro Quirini mirrors the simultaneous Petrarchan pursuit of letters and the beloved: "Therefore, you should love *Lauro* [the laurel], among many other reasons, particularly for this, that it is always green, for which reason the pagans consecrated it to Apollo, your god of wisdom" [Laurum ergo tum plurimis aliis causis amare debes, tum vel praecipue quod simper virescit, ob id enim Apolloni tuo deo sapientiae consecrabat gentilitas].[30] Among the many (unspoken) reasons for which Isotta should love *Laurum,* Quirini emphasizes the fact that the laurel tree is evergreen [simper virescit], for which reason it was consecrated to Apollo, god of wisdom, as he states, but also god of poetry, which he fails to mention. His assertion that she should love *Laurum,* therefore, serves a double purpose: he praises and encourages her by telling her to love the laurel tree, signifying study and fame, while simultaneously telling her to love him, Lauro. The use of the double entendre echoes the Petrarchan paronomastic play on Laura's name that enables the poet to love both fame and the beloved simultaneously within his poetics.

Although the analogy seems to grant Isotta the power of subjectivity—if Lauro is Laura, then Isotta is Petrarch, the pursuer of the beloved and of fame—Lauro continues to speak from the position of privilege. Only he is able to switch between subjectivity and objectivity. By grounding the language in a narrative of desire, Lauro inscribes himself as the beloved who eggs on the pursuer. In other words, he embodies the male poetic fantasy of the beloved reciprocating love and desire. This reinforces the metaphysical relationship between Quirini and Isotta already described in the beginning of the letter when he confesses to carrying her "memoria" in his heart. Her role as a figure of the beloved is made definitive in the closing of the letter when he writes, "Farewell, and I entreat you, love me" [Vale et me, ut cupio, ama].[31] The original intent of the letter, to encourage her toward Hellenistic studies, is virtually forgotten. Quirini grounds his praise in a language of desire, thereby undermining his purported praise of Nogarola's intellectual accomplishments. The praise arises ultimately from the female humanist's ability to *inspire love* in the male humanists, as did the lyrical beloved's. She is not treated as an intellectual equal worthy of encomia, but rather as an object of affection.

Literary allusions and Petrarchan *topoi* abound in letters sent to other female humanists in praise of their intellect. Many examples of the eroticization of the learned woman as a nymph and goddess, as well as of the infiltration of the tension between sacred and profane love into humanistic discourse, could easily be adduced to support the paradigm established here. In each case, the female humanist's intellectual accomplishments are met with reductive praise grounded in desire, pointing to the figuration of the learned woman as a medieval beloved, an object of desire rather than an intellectual equal. The Latin humanist epistle reflects the highest level of learning, the medium through which the humanist displays his/her mastery of the classics and Latin composition. Yet, what is reflected to the female humanist is not what is expected: not the image of an educated woman equal to her male humanist colleague, but rather an object of desire without a voice—a poetic beloved. The most explicit evidence of this transformation occurs in the *literary* metamorphosis of the beloved, specifically in Angelo Poliziano's letters to Cassandra Fedele and the Greek epigrams he sent to the young female humanist Alessandra Scala.

Metamorphosis of Female Humanists into Petrarchan Beloveds

In a letter to Cassandra Fedele, Angelo Poliziano excuses his silence and delay in writing her by saying that when he first met her he was struck dumb, like Aeneas when he saw his mother Venus emerge from

the woods dressed as a mortal woman.[32] He was so dumbstruck that apparently he could not even read Cassandra's letters. As a result, he took them to Alessandra Scala and asked her to read them aloud to him, and to an audience of his humanist peers: Alessandra's father, Bartolomeo Scala (1430–97), Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), and Pico della Mirandola (1463–94). By having Alessandra, herself a young humanist, perform the letters, as if she were reciting a part in a play, Poliziano claims he was able to recreate Cassandra's combination of learning and beauty:

> I came to the home of Alessandra Scala, and personally gave her and her father your letters to be read; which [letters] she [Alessandra] recited distinctly, skillfully, rhythmically, sweetly, with the result that, reciting your words, she represented you with all her features, as they say. The letters having been read through, she asked me to thank you, having professed that she owed much to you, who would do so much for her. Her own father praised her style in no uncertain terms; Marsilio [Ficino] did the same, as did Pico [della Mirandola].
>
> [Alexandram Scalam domi conveni, coramque ipsius parente legendas ei tuas litteras dedi; quas illa ita distincte, scienter, modulate, suaviter pronuntiavit, ut ipsam te tua verba recitantem, liniamentis (quod dicitur) omnibus expresserit. Pellectis rogavit agerem gratias, debere tibi plurimum professa, quae tanti se faceres. Pater ipse stilum non mediocriter laudavit; idem Marsilius fecit, idem Picus, quamquam unus abs te nescio quomodo in illa litteratorum hominum tibi amicorum mentione praeteritus.][33]

Poliziano emphasizes the spectacle of the event and gives no indication of the *content* of the letters Cassandra Fedele sent to him. Rather than engage Cassandra in a meaningful dialogue, he instead describes Alessandra's recitation and pronunciation with a string of adverbs praising her acting ability—distinctly (with precision), skillfully, rhythmically, sweetly. Alessandra's performance was so well executed that Poliziano claims she was able to impersonate Cassandra with all her physical features [liniamentis … omnibus]. In her reading of this passage, Jardine has noted that "this effects the metamorphosis of the individual talented woman into a *genus* of representatives of female worth."[34] Indeed, Alessandra's acting out of Cassandra's letters implies a universal connection between educated women: one can easily be substituted for another. That Cassandra's words are *embodied* by another woman also asserts a necessary relation between women and the body, which distracts and detracts from the intellect. By sending a description of the spectacle to Cassandra, Poliziano attempts to include her as a spectator with Pico della Mirandola, Ficino, and the others. In this sense, De Lauretis's work on feminism, semiotics, and cinema has much to offer this study, in particular the question she poses about

the female film viewer: "How can the female spectator be entertained as subject of the very moment that places her as its object, that makes her the figure of its own closure?"[35] Was the purpose of Poliziano's response to entertain Cassandra Fedele, or was it to show her that her worth lay in the spectacle of her learning, rather than in her actual intellect? Given the emphasis on the actress Alessandra's physical features and the performativity of pronunciation, it is clear that the audience was awestruck and impressed by her beauty and her voice, rather than by the content of what she was reciting. Cassandra's voice was silenced by Alessandra's performance, and the women's identities were conflated into one.

In fact, the balance of the letter to Fedele focuses on the past and present accomplishments of her stand-in, the young Florentine Alessandra Scala. I hesitate to say accomplishments because, as is typical of the letters Poliziano sent to Cassandra, the emphasis is placed on the *effect* Alessandra's accomplishments had on *Poliziano*. Poliziano devotes only one phrase to praising Alessandra's erudition: "She is immersed day and night in studies of both languages" [Dies ea noctesque in studiis utriusque linguae versetur].[36] This is a distinguished form of praise since Alessandra was one of very few women learned in Greek at that time. [37] This compliment, however, is overshadowed by the remainder of the letter, which discusses yet another spectacle: her performance as Electra in the Sophoclean play of the same name. Poliziano states that "this virgin herself took on [the role of] Electra the virgin, in which she applied so much of [her] temperament or rather art or even love, so that she turned the eyes and souls of all on her alone. There was an Attic grace in her words, genuine and inborn, her posture open and efficacious everywhere, serving her proof, running through various emotions, so that much of truth and faith of long standing fables came to be in it" [ipsa Electrae virginis virgo suscepit, in qua tantum vel ingenii vel artis vel gratiae adhibuit, ut omnium in se oculos atque animas una converteret. Erat in verbis lepos ille atticus prorsum genuinus et natives, gestus ubique ita promptus et efficax ita argumento serviens, ita per affectus varios decurrens, ut multa inde veritas et fides fictae diu fabulae accederet].[38] The language Poliziano used initially to describe his state of awe upon meeting Cassandra is mimicked here in his description of the audience's response to Alessandra's interpretation of Electra—a detail that could not have escaped Cassandra's attention. All eyes and souls were turned to her whose posture [gestus] was so convincing that it made the fiction believable. It is at this moment that the figure of Electra contaminates the figure of Alessandra, for, Poliziano claims, "Electra is not remembered so that Alessandra be obscured" [Nec tamen Electrae sic meminit ut Alexandrae sit oblita].[39] The parallel structure of the two theatrical episodes—Alessandra first acting as Fedele, and

then as Electra—strips the female humanists of their identity through *contaminatio.* In other words, Alessandra can just as easily *imitate* Cassandra as she can Electra; both Cassandra and Electra are figured as parts in a play, and Alessandra's accomplishments in Greek are reduced to her ability to recite and "play the part."

That this new Alessandra-Electra figure becomes Poliziano's beloved is most explicit in the Greek epigrams he addresses to her after the performance. The first epigram in question, *Ep. Gr.* 28*,* repeats several details from the letter:

> When Alexandra played the part of Sophocles' Electra—one unmarried girl playing the part of another—we were all astonished at how easily she spoke the Attic tongue without stumbling, though being Italian by birth, and at how she projected an imitative and authentic voice, and at how carefully she followed the customs of the stage, and at how she kept the character [of Electra] pure. Fixing her eyes upon the ground, she failed neither in effort nor in motion; nor did she disgrace herself by projecting a voice heavy with tears, but with wet eyes she stirred up the audience. We were all struck dumb: and jealousy stung me when I saw the brother in her arms.
>
> [Ἠλέκτρην ὑπέκριν᾽ ὁπότ᾽ ἄζυξ ἄζυγα κούρην/κούρη Ἀλεξάνδρη τήν γε Σοφοκλείην,/θαμβέομεν πάντες πῶς εὐμαρὲς Ἀτθίδα γλῶτταν / ἤπυεν ἀπταίστως Αὐσονὶς οὖσα γένος,/πῶς δέ γε μιμηλὴν προίει καὶ ἐτήτυμον αὐδήν,/τἀκριβὲς ἐντέχνου τήρεε πῶς θυμέλης, / πῶς ἦθος δ᾽ ἐφύλαττεν ἀκήρατον· ὄμματα γαίῃ/πήξασ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὁρμῆς ἤμβροτεν, οὐ βάσεως·/οὐδ᾽ ἀσχημόνεεν φωνὴν βαρύδακρυν ἱεῖσα, / βλέμματι μυδαλέῳ σὺν δ᾽ ἔχεεν θεατάς./πάντες ἄρ᾽ ἐξεπλάγημεν· ἐμὲ ζῆλος δ᾽ ὑπένυξεν/ὡς τὸν ὅμαιμον ἐῆς εἶδον ἐν ἀγκαλίσιν.][40]

The spirit of the epigram is true to the description within the letter. However, the final verses of the epigram detail the metamorphosis of the learned woman into his beloved: "jealousy stung me when I saw the brother in her arms." Poliziano's purported jealousy over Alessandra's embracing the male actor on stage is unexpected, to say the least. For one thing, in the final scene of Sophocles' *Electra*, the tragic female heroine embraces her brother after they have committed matricide. They are united by filial revenge, and not sexual desire.[41] Yet Poliziano's reading of the visual scene denotes the same kind of poetic fantasy present in Petrarch's *RVF* 78 where the poet expresses jealousy of Pygmalion and his female statue:

> When Simon received the high idea which, for my sake, put his hand to his stylus, if he had given to his noble work voice and intellect along with form // he would have lightened my breast of many sighs that make what

> others prize most vile tome. For in appearance she seems humble, and her expression promises peace; // then, when I come to speak to her, she seems to listen most kindly: if she could only reply to my words! // Pygmalion, how glad you should be of your statue, since you received a thousand times what I yearn to have just once!
>
> [Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto/ch'a mio nome gli pose in man lo stile,/s'avesse dato a l'opera gentile/colla figura voce ed intellecto, // di sospir' molti mi sgombrava il petto,/che ciò ch'altri à piú caro, a me fan vile:/però che 'n vista ella si mostra humile/promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto. // Ma poi ch'i' vengo a ragionar co llei,/benignamente assai par che m'ascolte,/se risponder savesse a' detti miei. // Pigmalïon, quanto lodar ti dêi/de l'imagine tua, se mille volte/n'avesti quel ch'i' sol una vorrei.][42]

RVF 77 and 78 concern a (now lost) portrait of Laura allegedly painted by Simone Martini (1284–1344) that was so life-like that the poet attempted to speak to it. Petrarch's jealousy of Pygmalion concerns the ability to *embrace* the female statue—a creation of art, much like Simone Martini's painting—not converse with it. [43] In Poliziano's case, it is the apparent reciprocation of desire that brings about jealousy: he sees another man in *her* arms. As was the case with Lauro Quirini and Isotta Nogarola, Poliziano projects himself into the scene as the object of Alessandra's affection, revealing his privileged status through the oscillation between subjectivity and objectivity. Alessandra as Electra is displayed as an object of Poliziano's desire, as one who fulfills the fantasy of reciprocation by embracing another man. Such a lyrical evocation deemphasizes her performance by turning the reader's attention to Poliziano's feelings of desire and jealousy. At this textual moment Alessandra becomes his silent, chaste, and desired beloved, just like Petrarch's portrait of Laura and Pygmalion's statue.[44]

Poliziano sent a total of six Greek epigrams to Alessandra, all depicting unrequited love and desire.[45] The mere existence of such epigrams is enough to show Poliziano's conflicted feelings toward Alessandra as both the incarnation of a beloved and an accomplished intellectual and colleague. But, when one examines closely the epigrams and Alessandra's response to him, it becomes clear that he intentionally called upon imagery and various *topoi* from the lyric tradition to metamorphose her explicitly into his beloved, and that she, in turn, explicitly refused such a characterization. This conflict emerges from the poetic *tenzone* between the two, beginning with Poliziano's *Ep. Gr.* 30. The epigram is enclosed in lyrical evocations of unrequited love, and although Poliziano makes reference to Alessandra's erudition, as we shall see, her status as a learned woman is overshadowed by her

inscription as a beloved. He begins by inscribing her as his beloved, in the verses that introduce this chapter:

> I have found, I have found what I wanted, what I have always been seeking, what I was asking for from Eros, what I was even dreaming of: a maiden whose beauty is pure, and whose form is not derived from artifice, but from a simple nature; a maiden pluming herself upon both tongues, excellent both in dances and on the lyre; concerning whom there is a contest between Prudence and the Graces, who drag her in different directions, this way and that. I have found her, but this is not helpful: for only with difficulty is it possible for one in a blazing frenzy to see her once in a year.
>
> [Εὕρηχ᾽ εὕρηχ᾽ ἣν θέλον, ἣν ἐζήτεον αἰεί,/ἣν ᾔτουν τὸν Ἔρωθ᾽ ἣν καὶ ὀνειροπόλουν·/παρθενικὴν ἧς κάλλος ἀκήρατον, ἧς ὅ γε κόσμος/οὐκ εἴη τέχνης, ἀλλ᾽ ἀφελοῦς φύσεως·/παρθενικὴν γλώττῃσιν ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοτέρῃσι κομῶσαν,/ἕξοχον ἔν τε χοροῖς, ἔξοχον ἔν τε λύρῃ·/ἧς πέρι Σωφροσύνῃ τ᾽ εἴη Χαρίτεσσί θ᾽ ἅμιλλα,/τῇ καὶ τῇ ταύτην ἀντιμεθελκομέναις./εὕρηκ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὄφελος· καὶ γὰρ μόλις εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν/οἰστροῦντι φλογερῶς ἔστιν ἅπαξ ἰδέειν.][46]

Poliziano's message cannot be overstated: he has found in Alessandra the maiden he has always wanted, for whom he has searched, from whom he has requested love, and about whom he has always dreamed; in other words, he has found his soul mate. The profession echoes Petrarch's *RVF* 15, "I turn back at each step" [Io mi rivolgo in dietro a ciascun passo] where the poet asks rhetorically, "At times in the midst of my sad laments a doubt assails me: How can these members live far from their spirit?" [Talor m'assale in mezzo a' tristi pianti/un dubbio: come posson queste membra/da lo spirito lor viver lontane?][47] The Neo-Platonic notion of two souls belonging to one body makes the relationship between poet and beloved undeniable. Poliziano's depiction of Alessandra's beauty, as created by Nature rather than art, also recalls the Petrarchan lyric, particularly *RVF* 248, where the poet urges others to come and admire Laura'a beauty and virtue before her death and claims her unique beauty to be an invention of Nature: "Whoever wishes to see all that Nature and Heaven can do among us, let him come gaze on her" [Chi vuol veder quantunque pò Natura/e 'l Ciel tra noi, venga a mirar costei].[48] Because the beauty of the beloved is unique, it could have been created only by Nature, not by artifice. Poliziano reinforces the notion that he has always been searching for Alessandra by including this minor, yet telling, detail concerning her beauty.

What distinguishes her from the typical lyrical beloved in the epigram, however, is the detail that establishes her specifically as a female

humanist: she is "a maiden pluming herself upon both tongues" [παρθενικὴν γλώττῃσιν ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοτέρῃσι κομῶσαν]. She commands both languages, Latin and Ancient Greek—a compliment we have encountered before. We know from Poliziano's letters to Cassandra Fedele and his *Ep.Gr.* 28 that Alessandra performed her role as Electra in Sophocles' play in excellent Greek. In addition, the only extant manuscript we have of hers is the Greek epigram she wrote to Poliziano in response to the one currently under discussion, which I shall examine shortly. But Poliziano's praise of her impressive erudition is undermined by the end of the epigram where Poliziano describes their relationship as one of unrequited love: "I have found her, but this is not helpful: for only with difficulty is it possible for one in a blazing frenzy to see her once in a year" [εὕρηκ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ὄφελος· καὶ γὰρ μόλις εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν/ οἰστροῦντι φλογερῶς ἔστιν ἅπαξ ἰδέειν]. In one sweeping move, Poliziano explicitly defines Alessandra as his beloved. By enclosing the epigram in lyrical evocations, Poliziano detracts from the praise he bestows upon her command of Latin and Greek. This is further compounded by his consistent references to her as *maiden* [*παρθενικήν*] throughout his epigrams, a diminutive euphemism that emphasizes her youth and chastity despite the praise he bestows upon her humanist accomplishments. Poliziano's use of the term *maiden* not only denies Alessandra the dignity of womanhood, it steeps her in sexual desire.

Poliziano's epigram met with a harsh reaction from Alessandra who replied to him in another Greek epigram, using exactly the same Neo-Platonic rhetoric he had used:

> Nothing was better than praise from a wise man, and the praise from you—what glory it brought me! Many are the soothsayers, but few are the prophets. Did you find [something]? You did not find [anything], nor did you have a dream. For the divine poet said, "God leads [one] to the similar"; but nothing is less similar to Alexandra than you. Since you, at least, like the Danube, from darkness until midday, and again until sunrise, pour out steep streams. And in the greatest number of tongues your glory plies the air: in Greek, in Latin, in Hebrew and in your own tongue. The stars, nature, numbers, poems, law tablets and doctors call you Heracles, dragging you in different directions. But my pursuits are those of a maiden, very much games, just like flowers and dew, if you should judge them as Bokchoris [would]. Therefore, let me not make a sound before an elephant: you, like Pallas, look down upon a cat.
>
> [Οὐδὲν ἆρ᾽ ἦν αἴνοιο παῤ ἔμφρονος ἀνδρὸς ἄμεινον,/κἀκ σέθεν αἶνος ἔμοιγ᾽ οἷον ἄειρε κλέος./πολλοὶ θριοβόλοι, παῦροι δέ τε μάντιές εἰσιν./εὗρες ἄρ᾽; οὐχ εὗρες γ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ὄναρ ἠντίασας./φῆ γὰρ ὁ θεῖος ἀοιδός "ἄγει θεὸς ὡς τὸν ὁμοῖον"·/ οὐδὲν Ἀλεξάνδρῃ σοῦ δ

ἀνομοιότερον./ὡς σύ γ᾽ ὁποῖα Δανούβιος ἐκ ζόφου ἐς μέσον ἦμαρ / καὖθις ἐπ᾽ ἀντολίην αἰπὰ ῥέεθρα χέεις./φωναῖς δ᾽ ἐν πλείσταις σόν τοι κλέος ἠέρ᾽ ἐλαστρεῖ,/Ἑλλάδι, Ῥωμαικῇ, Ἑβραικῇ, ἰδίῃ/ἄστρα, φύσις, ἀριθμοί, ποιήματα κύβρις, ἰατροὶ/Ἡρακλῆν καλέουσ᾽ ἀντιμεθελκόμενα./τὰμὰ δὲ παρθενικῆς σπουδάσματα παίγνιά τ᾽ αἰνῶς,/Βόκχορις εἰ κρίναις, ἄνθεα καὶ δρόσος ὥς./τοιγὰρ μήτ᾽ ἐλέφαντος ἐναντία βόμβον ἀείρω/αἴλουρον Παλλὰς καὶ σύ γ᾽ ὑπερφρονέεις.][49]

Alessandra challenges Poliziano's application of Neo-Platonism to their situation when she asks, "Many are the soothsayers, but few are the prophets. Did you find [something]? You did not find [anything], nor did you have a dream. For the divine poet said, 'God leads [one] to the similar'; but nothing is less similar to Alexandra than you." She is not his soul mate because their souls are dissimilar. In addition, she exposes his use of Neo-Platonic rhetoric as empty and malleable by invoking her name, which Poliziano never does in the epigram he wrote to her. She reclaims her identity through this rhetorical move: she is neither Cassandra Fedele, nor Electra, nor Poliziano's maiden [*παρθενικήν*] and intimates that the epigram he wrote could have been sent to anyone. Furthermore, in the process of undoing Poliziano's characterization of her as his beloved, Alessandra redefines herself as a learned woman by calling on the authority of the "divine poet" [θεῖος ἀοιδός]. Although the "divine poet" usually refers to Homer in the Hellenist tradition, Alessandra seems to echo Plato's notion of soul mates in the *Symposium,* upon which Poliziano relied in his declaration that he had found "her" whom he always desired. In the space of a single epigram, Alessandra breaks from the mold and refuses to become Poliziano's beloved. Although Poliziano continued to compose and send her his Greek epigrams, there is no indication that she ever responded to him, as implied in *Ep. Gr.* 48 where he writes, "If it is neither possible to look at you, nor to hear you, will I not receive a written reply?" [Ἂν μηδ᾽ εἰσαθρεῖν, ἂν μηδ᾽ ἔξεστιν ἀκούειν,/ἦρ οὐδὲ γραπτῆς τεύξομ᾽ ἀποκρίσεως].[50] One could perhaps say that Poliziano did indeed get what he had hoped for, but not in the way he would have liked. In the end, ironically, Alessandra did appropriate one essential characteristic of her Petrarchan female predecessors: silence.

Given that female humanist letterbooks were published and received public attention, the way in which these learned women are figured in the correspondence of their male colleagues is too reminiscent of the Petrarchan lyric tradition to ignore. Furthermore, the paradigm of power concealed by Petrarchan rhetoric has had far-reaching consequences for the history of women. The Quattrocento was, in part, characterized by

the numerous treatises concerning the dignity of man and "his" place in the cosmos. Charles Trinkaus has noted a strong theological foundation to humanism, one that reversed the normal emphasis on the baseness of humanity by concentrating on the incarnation.[51] What is painfully lacking in his assessment, and in the treatises on the dignity of man, is any mention of the role women play in this cosmic scene. Is the only woman worth being remembered by history the Virgin Mary, whose actions are inimitable by women and whose identity revolves around her maternity? There is a marked difference between the treatises on the dignity of man and that of woman. The dignity of man is examined through philosophical and/or theological terms and revolves around his inherent ability to reason, around man's *inherent* dignity.[52] The dignity and worth of woman are based on commendable qualities symbolized by famous women of the past —Lucretia, the chaste Roman matron, Cornelia, and the Virgin Mary. Thus, the dignity of woman resides in her ability to *imitate* the morally virtuous women of the past who are considered anomalies; it does not, as in the case of man, result from an inherent goodness.[53] The history of educated women confronts directly and is at odds with the long history of the *representation* of women in literature. Learned women of the Quattrocento—praised for their beauty and chastity, eroticized into divine creatures, longed for by men, and objectified in male-authored literature—were placed on the same pedestal as Laura had been in the previous century. And just like Laura, the educated woman was figured as an obstacle to knowledge: by invoking Petrarch's Laura the male humanist attempted to teach his female colleague her role in the humanist sphere. What this chapter has argued, and what has previously been overlooked by scholarship, is that Petrarch's poetry was a principle vehicle for teaching and reinforcing woman's place—or rather, non-place—in fifteenth-century Italy.

Prudence Allen has argued that references to female humanists in male humanist letters prove that "the Florentine Academy was open to the participation of women and that some of its members actually took an interest in women's participation."[54] Yet, the male humanists rarely engaged their female colleagues on an intellectual level, and the female humanists did not respond using the Petrarchan rhetoric with which they were addressed. Thus, this practice might initially seem reminiscent of the medieval genre of the *tenzone*, practiced by the poets of the Duecento as well as by Dante and his friends, but it lacks any kind of intellectual exchange. By reinscribing the female humanists as beloveds, male humanists excluded them from the dominant discourse and denied them the power of authoring their own history. Not until the female Petrarchists of the sixteenth century do we encounter women who adopted and adapted

Petrarchan rhetoric in an attempt to carve out a space for the female lyric, following a model set out and practiced by men, from Bembo on.[55] Petrarchism, as it permeates the Latin humanist epistle, enacts a fictionalized power dynamic as a way of subverting the female presence in active or, rather, visible civic roles. We must analyze the contamination of these letters to the female humanists by Petrarchan courtly love rhetoric in a manner similar to that suggested by Robin Lakoff through her "hierarchies of grammaticality" wherein "the acceptability of a sentence is determined through the combination of many factors: not only the phonology, the syntax, and the semantics, but also the social context in which the utterance is expressed, and the assumptions about the world made by all the participants in the discourse."[56] By employing Petrarchan rhetoric in his correspondence with a female humanist, the male humanist recalled clearly established paradigms of desire that deny a woman a voice and active participation in the civic sphere.[57] In the Latin humanist epistle she is put back in her place, so to speak, after having transgressed through her studies and participation in the humanist world the societal boundaries set for women. This place, woman's place, is the place of literature where she was always already an object.

The circumscription of female intellectuals as beloveds in humanist correspondence suggests that the female intellectuals examined here were not held to the same standards as their male colleagues. Joan Kelly claimed that "the Florentine humanists in particular appropriated only the classical side of their predecessors' thought, the side that served public concerns. They rejected the dominance of love in human life, along with the inwardness and seclusion of the religious, the scholar, the lovesick poet."[58] This chapter calls this long-held assertion into question by highlighting instances of cross-contamination between the Petrarchan lyric and neo-Latin humanism, and by exposing the role of this literature in the political history of women.[59] It suggests that we need to reevaluate the way in which scholars have envisioned and defined Petrarch's influence on fifteenth-century humanism and ethics up until now, and the way in which we have historically understood the trajectory of neo-Latin humanism as separate from the development of the vernacular poetic movement that pervaded the sixteenth century: the genre and language changed, the issues did not. In the context of this chapter, Kelly's question, "Did women have a Renaissance?" is more relevant than ever: how did the male humanists' discursive attempt to contain their female counterparts within the role of Petrarchan beloved affect the female intellectual's arrival in the humanist sphere of letters? Laura Cereta both answers and further complicates this line of inquiry in a letter to Bibolo Semproni dated January 13, 1488 where she both attacks the

male assumption of female inferiority and places equal blame for women's lack of schooling on women themselves.[60] To a long list of learned women of antiquity, she adds her fellow Quattrocento female humanists, gesturing at a shared fate of silence in what she calls a "republic of women" [muliebris respublica]: "and accompanying them [the learned women of the past] Nicolosa of Bologna, Isotta of Verona, and Cassandra of Venice will pass away under a shimmering light of silence" [cum quibus Nicolosa Bononiensis, Isotaque Veronae & Cassandra Veneta sub silentii corusca luce transibunt].[61] The subtle oxymoron "shimmering light of silence" highlights the tension surrounding the figure of the Quattrocento female intellectual: she gains a voice through her writing and yet she is silenced by discursive containment as a Petrarchan beloved.

Notes

I would like to acknowledge and thank the following readers for their criticisms and comments on early versions of this chapter: Fabian Alfie, Albert R. Ascoli, Steven Botterill, Tim Hampton, William J. Kennedy, Barbara Spackman, and Jane Tylus. I am grateful for their wisdom, and the chapter is immeasurably better for their insight. All errors contained within are my own. There are currently no published English translations of Poliziano's Greek epigrams, and I would like to thank my Hellenist colleague, John Bauschatz, who, in a spirit of collegiality and interdisciplinarity, translated the original Greek into English for this chapter.

1. Isotta Nogarola, *Isotae Nogarolae Veronensis Opera quae Supersunt omnia* LIII, ed. Eugenius Abel, 2 vols. (Vienna: Gerold et socios, 1886), 2:21, l. 3–4; idem, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, ed. Margaret King and Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 112. All citations from the letterbook of Isotta Nogarola are taken from Abel's edition, which is the only critical edition available, and will be noted as Abel plus letter number, followed by the volume and page numbers. Line numbers will be given as necessary. I have chosen to reproduce the text as given by its editor, without further editing on my part. Therefore, errors in othography, semantics, and syntax are retained. All translations of Nogarola's letterbook are from the *Complete Writings* and will be referred to by page.
2. Angelo Poliziano, *Angeli Politiani liber epigrammatum Graecorum*, ed. Filippomaria Pontani (Rome: Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 2002), 30, 138. This work will be referred to hereafter as Poliziano, *Ep. Gr.* All translations of this work, as noted above, are by John Bauschatz.
3. Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5–6.
4. Laura Cereta, *Epistolae. iam primum e m[anu]s[criptis] in lucem productae a Iacobo Philippo Tomasino, qui eius vitam et notas addidit*, ed. Iacobo Philippo Tomasino (Padua: Sardi, 1640), 19–21; idem, *Collected Letters of*

a Renaissance Feminist, ed. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 49). All citations from Cereta's epistolary collection are taken from Tomasino's edition. A digital reproduction can be found at <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/desbillons/cereta.html>. I have chosen to reproduce the text as given by its editor, without further editing on my part. Therefore, errors in orthography, semantics, and syntax are retained. All translations of Cereta's collection are from *Collected Letters* and will be referred to by page.

5. For discussions of the figure of Laura in Petrarch's poetics see Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Laura, and the Triumphs* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974) and "Petrarch's Laura: The Convolutions of a Humanistic Mind," in *The Role of Woman in the Middle Ages,* ed. Rosmarie T. Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 65–89; Isabella Bertoletti, "Petrarch's Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta: Mourning Laura," *Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 23:2 (2002): 25–43; Gaetano Cipolla, "Petrarch's Laura and the Great Mother Archetype," *Gradiva: A Journal of Contemporary Theory and Practice* 1 (1978): 299–315; Robert Durling, "Giovene donna sotto un verde lauro," *MLN* 86:1 (Winter 1971): 1–20; John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 5 (1975): 34–40; Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Laurels* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); and Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8:2 (Winter 1981): 265–279.
6. I am not using the term "courtly love" in the traditional sense of the word, as defined by Gaston Paris in reference to the adulterous love between Guinevere and Lancelot in the prose *Lancelot*. Rather, I am referring to the importation of this term in discussions of the kind of unrequited love depicted in the poetry of the Due- and Trecento Italian tradition, specifically as it is fully developed in Petrarch's poetry. Although the same tropes occur in the Italian tradition as in the tradition discussed by Paris, it is Capellanus's notion of *amor purus,* rather than adulterous love, to which I refer when I use the term.
7. *Canzoniere [Rerum vulgarium fragmenta]*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1996), 190, l. 9; *Petrarch's Lyric Poems. The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 336. All citations of Petrarch's lyric will be from this edition. I will refer to poems as *RVF* plus poem number, followed by the line number. All translations are from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, which will be referred to as *Lyric Poems*.
8. As Gordon Braden has noted, "Most of the poems in which she [Laura] actually speaks come after her death, in dreams or visions: what few exchanges we have before that are ambiguous" ("Love and Fame: The Petrarchan Career," in *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis [Psychiatry and the Humanities],* ed. William Kerrigan, vol. 9 [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], 134). Dante's Beatrice

also provides a fine example of the beloved as a prophetic speaker in a text. For example, in *Paradiso II* when Dante fixes his gaze upon Beatrice rather than on the Heaven of the Moon, the haughty beloved warns, "'Direct your mind to God in gratefulness,' she said,/'He has brought us to the first star'" ["Drizza la mente a Dio grata', mi disse,/'che n'ha congiunti con la prima stella"] (29–30). The words spoken by Beatrice mirror Augustine's warning against worshiping the creature instead of the creator, and the episode provides another example of the moral dilemma facing Dante-pilgrim concerning sacred and profane love. This is further reinforced by the apparent change in the figure of Beatrice from the *Vita nova* to the *Commedia:* she is silent in the earlier text, and only in death (in the *Commedia*) does she become talkative.

9. For sociohistorical accounts of women in the Renaissance see Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–50; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a recent examination of Cereta's critique of marriage from the fraught position of spouse and humanist, see Amyrose McCue Gill, "Fraught Relations in the Letters of Laura Cereta: Marriage, Friendship, and Humanist Epistolarity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 1098–1129. For educational practices in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance see Eugenio Garin, *L'educazione in Europa, 1400–1600; problemi e programmi* (Bari: Laterza, 1966); Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983–1993); Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Paul Grendler, *Schooling in the Renaissance. Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). For the rise of the female intellectual through an "intellectual family" model, see Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism. Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
10. In her examination of the Stoics' treatment of women in their writing, Elizabeth Asmis has noted that, "Antipatur, Musonius, and Hierodes take into account the opportunities available to women, whereas Panaetius, Cicero, and Seneca tend to shut women out" ("The Stoics on Women," in *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy,* ed. Julie Ward [New York: Routledge, 1996], 88).
11. Abel LIII, 2:21, l. 3–4; *Complete Writings*, 112.
12. King, 76.
13. For the Renaissance notion, deriving from Aristotle, of women as defective males, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1980); Thomas G. Benedeck, "Belief about Human Sexual Function in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,* ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1978), 97–119; and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For more on the terms against which Renaissance feminists revolted, see Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

14. For Ovid as a source for desire in Petrarch, see Carla Freccero, "Ovidian Subjectivities in Early Modern Lyric: Identification and Desire in Petrarch and Louise Labé," in *Ovid and the Renaissance Body,* ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic and Valerie Traub (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 21–37; and Philip Hardie, "Ovid into Laura: Absent Presences in the Metamorphoses and Petrarch's Rime Sparse," in *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on Ovid's Metamorphoses and Its Reception,* ed. Philip Hardie, Alessandro Barchiesi, and Stephen Hinds (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), 254–270.
15. Most noteworthy is Maclean, who has argued that André Tiraqueau's treatise on marriage law (*De legibus connubialibus*) and Castiglione's third book of the *Cortegiano* "demonstrate the use of authority and the currency of commonplaces; both reproduce synthetic views of woman which concord with the intellectual outlook of their day" (5).
16. *Women's Writing in Italy*, 1400–1650 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 8.
17. De Lauretis, 109.
18. Nogarola was one of the few educated women to continue with her studies past what was considered the marriageable age. Her sister Ginevra, who received the same education as Isotta, never resumed her studies after her marriage. For biographical information, see Margaret King and Diane Robin's introduction to Nogarola's *Complete Writings*.
19. For a list of all classical and biblical sources cited by Nogarola in her letterbook, see her *Complete Writings,* 205–209.
20. The attack provoked outrage amongst male humanists who quickly came to her defense, perhaps because, as Grafton and Jardine have noted, "The charge that she is *unchaste* challenges the view that as a woman she can be a prominent humanist and remain a right living person ('the woman of fluent tongue is never chaste')" (40; see especially chapter 2, "Women Humanists: Education for What?", 29–57). For a transcription of the *vituperatio* and the literati's response to it see A. Segarizzi, "Niccolo Barbo patrizio veneziano del sec. XV e le accuse contro Isotta Nogarola," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 43 (1904): 39–54.
21. *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 1.
22. For Isotta's relationship to Foscarini see Percy Gothein, "L'Amicizia fra Lodovico Foscarini e l'Umanista Isotta Nogarola," *La Rinascita VI* (1943):

394–413. For opposing views on who won the debate, see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 2: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1550* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 945–955, as well as King and Robin in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, 138–145.

23. Abel LIII, 2:9–22; *Complete Writings*, 107. The date of the letter is disputed. Abel places it in either 1445–1448 or 1451–1452.
24. Abel LIII, 2:20, l. 15–18; *Complete Writings*, 112.
25. *RVF* 96, l. 1–8; *Lyric Poems*, 199.
26. My use of the term "metaphysical" to describe the relationship between Petrarch and Laura is in a general transcendental sense—that is, the relationship transcends the physical and is non-corporeal—rather than in reference to philosophical notions of being. Petrarch does not philosophize the poet-beloved relationship as does, say, Dante, and later Bembo.
27. Although the poetry of Dante and the *dolce stil novo* would be evidence enough, perhaps the strongest affirmation of this metaphysical relationship comes from the *poeti giocosi* who rebelled against the lyric tradition by attacking the notion of the unattainable status of the beloved.
28. Antologia della poesia italiana, vol. 1: *Duecento-Trecento*, ed. Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 49; my translation. Da Lentini's famous sonnet is part of a three-sonnet *tenzone* with Jacopo Mostacci and Pier della Vigna concerning the nature of love. The emphasis on sight in both Da Lentini and Petrarch echoes Andreas Capellanus, who states that blind men cannot fall in love: "Blindness is a bar to love, because a blind man cannot see anything upon which his mind can reflect immoderately, and so love cannot arise in him, as I have already fully shown" (*The Art of Courtly Love* 1:5, trans. John Jay Parry [New York: Columbia University Press, 1960], 33). There are, however, several literary examples in which a man falls in love with a woman through reputation (that is, having heard about her, but never seen her), as, for example, in the case of the Roman matron Lucretia. See also Boccaccio, *Decameron* 7:8, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 2:849–860, for an example of a man falling in love with a woman based on her reputation, rather than on seeing her.
29. Abel LIII, 2:21, l. 3–4; *Complete Writings,* 112.
30. Abel LIII, 2:21, l. 5–8; *Complete Writings,* 112.
31. Abel LIII, 2:22, l. 7; *Complete Writings*, 113.
32. Cassandra Fedele, *Epistolae & orationes posthumae* CIV, ed. Iac. Philippus Tomasinus (Padua: Francesco Bolzetta, 1636), 160–161. All citations from Fedele's letterbook are taken from this edition. A digital reproduction is available at <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/desbillons/fedele.html>. All references to Fedele's letterbook will be cited as Tom plus epistle number and page numbers. I have chosen to reproduce the text as given by its editor, without further editing on my part. Therefore, errors in othography, semantics, and syntax are retained. This particular epistle is incomplete in Tomasinus's edition. The full letter, with the ending to be discussed shortly, is reproduced in G. Pesenti, "Lettere inedite

del Poliziano," *Athenaeum* 3 (1915): 284–304. All translations of Fedele's Latin letters are from Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), unless otherwise noted. For biographical information on Fedele, see Robin's introduction to *Letters and Orations*.

33. Pesenti, 300; my translation.
34. Jardine, "'O decus Italiae virgo', or the Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance," *The Historical Journal* 28:4 (1985): 809.
35. De Lauretis, 141.
36. Pesenti, 300; my translation.
37. Although neither Nogarola nor Fedele knew Ancient Greek, as is well documented in their letterbooks, Cereta was trained in Hellenist studies by the friar Gasparino Borro (Russell Rinaldina, ed., *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature* [Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997], 140).
38. Pesenti, 300; my translation.
39. Pesenti, 300; my translation.
40. Poliziano, *Ep. Gr.* 28, 129; trans. John Bauschatz.
41. In addition, Pontani notes that, in the performance witnessed by Poliziano, the role of Electra's brother Oreste was played by Alessandra's actual brother Giuliano (Poliziano, *Ep. Gr.*, 134–135, unnumbered note to verse 12).
42. *RVF* 78; *Lyric Poems*, 178.
43. Giuseppe Mazzotta has read this series of sonnets as a collapsing of the analogies made between the failure of Polycletus in *RVF* 77 and the success of Simone Martini in *RVF* 78, and the failure of Petrarch and the success of Pygmalion in *RVF* 78, in order to suggest, first, the "otherworldly uniqueness of Laura's beauty and, second, the anguish of the forever unrequited lover. It also suggests, more generally, Petrarch's disjunctive consciousness dramatized over the two sonnets" (*The Worlds of Petrarch* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993], 29). Mazzotta's discussion centers on his reading of vision as an aesthetic construction (27–31). For Petrarch's relationship to Martini see John Rowlands, "Simone Martini and Petrarch: A Virgilian Episode," *Apollo* 81 (1965): 264–269. For the portrait-beloved relationship see also Lisa Rabin, "Speaking to Silent Ladies: Images of Beauty and Politics in Poetic Portraits of Women from Petrarch to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" *MLN* 112:2 (March 1997): 147–165. For the role of Pygmalion in Petrarch's poetics see Thérèse Migraine-George, "Spectacular Desires: Orpheus and Pygmalion as Aesthetic Paradigms in Petrarch's Rime Sparse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 36:3 (1999): 226–246.
44. Susan Schibanoff has made an interesting case for the relationship between the female humanists of the Quattrocento and Botticelli's *Magnificat*—the first visual representation of a woman (the Virgin Mary) writing. Shibanoff claims that the depiction of the Madonna as a woman writer, whose hand is guided by baby Jesus to write Scripture, is a visual representation of the "rhetoric of impossibility." That is, the painting implies that

a woman cannot write without divine intervention ("Botticelli's *Madonna del Magnificat:* Constructing the Woman Writer in Early Humanist Italy," *PMLA* 109 [1994]: 190–206).

45. Interestingly, in some scholarship available on Alessandra Scala, she is depicted as Poliziano's actual beloved and object of desire. See G. Pesenti, "Alessandra Scala: una figurina della rinascenza fiorentina," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 85 (1925): 241–267. In his edition of Poliziano's Greek epigrams, Pontani likewise refers to her as Poliziano's "great love of his final years" [grande amore degli ultimi anni] because she was "beautiful and learned" [bella e dotta] (*Ep. Gr.*, 130).
46. Poliziano, *Ep. Gr.* 30, 138; trans. Bauschatz.
47. *RVF* 15, l. 1, 9–11; *Lyric Poems*, 50.
48. *RVF* 248, l. 1–2; *Lyric Poems*, 410.
49. Alessandra's response is found in Poliziano, *Ep. Gr.*, 30b, 141; trans. Bauschatz.
50. *Ep. Gr.* 48, 200; trans. Bauschatz.
51. *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See especially vol. 1, chapter 1.
52. See especially Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin: Nino Aragno, 2004) and Gianozzo Manetti, *De dignitate et excellentia hominis,* ed. E. R. Leonard (Padua: Antenore, 1975).
53. See especially Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, ed. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
54. Allen, 940.
55. The emergence and acceptance of female poets was not, of course, devoid of tension. Albert Ascoli has noted that the exaltation of Vittoria Colonna in the proem of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*—her elevation to the status of "an example for other women writers to imitate" and her own name—"participates in the process of deflecting women's achievements and writings back in the direction of the patriarchal world of husbands and fathers" ("Body Politic in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*," in *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. Craig A. Berry and Heather Hayton [Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005], 49–85 [66; 68]). For female Petrarchism see especially Virginia Cox, "Attraverso lo specchio: le Petrarchiste del Cinquecento e l'eredità di Laura," in *Petrarca. Canoni, esemplarità,* ed. Valeria Finucci (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006), 117–149; Ann Rosalind Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 135–153, and *The Currency of Eros*; William Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), especially chapter 4; and Mary Moore, *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).
56. *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 47–48.

57. The Petrarchism in the Latin epistolary exchanges in Italy represents the precise danger against which Christine de Pizan argued in the *Débat sur le Roman de la Rose* (1401–1403). For Christine de Pizan and female authority see Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority. Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
58. Kelly, 38. Although the conclusions drawn by Kelly in her close examination of eleventh- and twelfth-century France and fourteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, and their respective forms of courtly love, are insightful and profund, she seems to dismiss the fifteenth century and does not give it much critical attention.
59. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, we should also question the use of Petrarchan rhetoric in Galeazzo Capella's *Della eccellenza delle donne* (1525), the first vernacular treatise on the dignity of women, which sparked a literary tradition of encomia in praise of women's intelligence. By writing in the vernacular, Capella was able to reach a much larger audience than the neo-Latin humanists.
60. It is generally believed that the addressee of the letter is fictitious. Diana Robin has noted that the comical name provides Laura with a "vehicle for her polemic" (in Cereta, *Collected Letters,* 74, n. 35).
61. Tom. 65, 187–195; *Collected Letters,* 78.