The Androgyne and the Phoenix

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Marguerite de Navarre
and Gaspara Stampa:

Gendering Early Modern Debates on Love

Johanna Vernqvist

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Abstract

This study explores Marguerite de Navarre's and Gaspara Stampa's literary strategies through a close examination of their appropriation of Neoplatonic ideals of love and gender. Against a backdrop of the cultural and literary canon of the sixteenth century, and through a theoretical framework building on Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, it demonstrates how Marguerite de Navarre and Gaspara Stampa destabilize power relations within the discourses of love and gender, thus gendering early modern debates on love.

The debates on love concern various ways of understanding classical and early modern treatises on love and are often presented in the genre of the dialogue, such as in the works of Plato, Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo and Tullia d'Aragona. The philosophical ideas presented within these works were vividly discussed in early modern cultural circles and gatherings, such as the Venetian salons and at the French and Italian courts, which strengthens the dialogical character of the debates.

More precisely, this study examines how these ideas were interpreted and redefined in Marguerite de Navarre's collection of novellas, the *Heptaméron* (1559), and Gaspara Stampa's poems, *Rime* (1554), – especially when it comes to their use of the mythical figures of the androgyne and the phoenix. Although we are dealing with two rather different writers, one being a queen and the other a *virtuosa*, a singer and performer of lyrical poetry, the main argument is that their literary works correspond in terms of the literary strategies they employ in order to give women a voice within a male-dominated culture. Thus, through these strategies, Marguerite de Navarre and Gaspara Stampa subvert norms within prevailing discourses of gender and love.

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Jean Clouet, portrait of a young Marguerite de Navarre, 1520–1540. Museum number: 1908,0714.46.

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Bernard de Ventadour depicted in *Chansonnier provençal* [*Chansonnier K*]

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Paul Mattei, *Salmacis et Hermaphrodite*, engraved by Antoine L. Romanet, eighteenth century. Wiki Commons. Public Domain

Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi di Amore*, Frontispiece and "Dialogo Primo" 1, 3r Venice: Giglio, 1558. Finspongssamlingen, Norrköping's Stadsbibliotek. Photo by author by kind permission of Norrköping's Stadsbibliotek

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Barthélemy Aneau, *Picta Poesis*, 1552. Glasgow University Emblem Website
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Jambicque in her disguise, in *Contes et nouvelles de Marguerite de Valois*, Amsterdam, G. Gallet, 1698. By kind permission of photographer Stéphane Lojkine. Source: Bibliothèque municipale centrale de Versailles
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Dante’s *Divine Comedy* illustrated by Gustave Doré, 1876. Finspongssamlingen. Norrköping’s Stadsbibliotek. Photo by author by kind permission of Norrköping’s Stadsbibliotek

Moretto de Brescia, Tullia d’Aragona as Salome, c. 1537, Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

Tizian Vecellio, Sperone Speroni, 1544, Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

“Così m’imprese al core”, in *Rime di Madonna Gaspara Stampa*, 1554. archive.org. Public Domain

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Introduction

[C]hé non solamente i poeti, ma i filosofi ancora gli danno tanti nomi [d'amore] [...] ne parlano sotto tante favole e velamenti e misteri, che io, per me, non crederei indovinar mai qual fosse il vero o qual voleste intender voi.

(Poets and philosophers have attributed so many different names to love, [...] and they write about love under so many allegories, in so many fables and different guises, that I'd never be capable of guessing the truth of the matter or, indeed, what you take the truth to be.)

Tullia d'Aragona

E così vita, e morte, e gioie, e pene,
E temenza, e fidanza, e guerra, e pace,
Per le tue mani Amor d'un luogo viene.

(So life and death, and joys and pain,
and fear and trust, and war and peace
come from a single place: Love's hands.)

Gaspara Stampa

Sa Majesté que à faire tous les jours miracles, comme d'affoiblir les fortz, fortisfier les foibles, donner intelligence aux ignorans, oster les sens aux plus sçavans, favoriser aux passions et destruire raison; et en telles mutations prent plaisir l'amoureuse divinité.

(His majesty Love delights in constantly working miracles – strengthening the weak, weakening the strong, making the ignorant wise, depriving the most learned of their wisdom, encouraging the passions and destroying reason. Turning things upside down is what the god of Love enjoys.)

Marguerite de Navarre

In these citations from three early modern women writers, love is described as a ceaseless source for discussion and as a power that constantly turns things upside down and even overtakes reason. Indeed, love has been one of the most

repeated topics and concerns of human history, philosophy and literature, from the earliest poetry by Sappho to modern novels such as André Aciman's *Chiamami col tuo nome* or Alain de Botton's *The Course of Love*. Questions like: What is ideal love? Perfect love? What is the relation between love and power? And, even more broadly, how do gender, sexuality and love correspond? have been repeated since the birth of literature. There are, as Tullia d'Aragona's (1510-1566) states, no universal conclusions to these questions, but answers have always been diverse and dependent on their social and historical context.

In this study, I seek to explore how the early modern discourses of love are appropriated by the two women writers Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) and Gaspara Stampa (c. 1523-1554). I argue that they both take advantage of the destabilizing force that the discourses entail in order to rethink and criticize understandings of love and gender within the male-dominated culture of their time. Hence, the literary discussions on love's complexities were generally and for a very long time presented as a male discourse. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is illustrative of this one-sided notion; thus, Woolf's agenda was to question the invisibility of women writers in the shelf meters of books on literary history available in the 1920s. Today, thanks to many dedicated and determined scholars, we do read and know quite a lot about women writers of the early modern period. However, Woolf's thoughts on gender and writing as androgynous are still relevant to consider, not the least in this study of the philosophical and literary discussions on love during the sixteenth century and particularly since I take a specific interest in Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's employment of the mythical figures of the androgyne and the phoenix in their respective works the *Heptaméron* (1559) and *Rime* (1554).

The idea of a perfect love where lovers are seen as two halves united as one is today an established figure represented in everyday speech, in commercials, in music, in literature and more. What is not so often reflected, however, is the source of this romantic idea of a true match for everyone; namely, the speech by Aristophanes in Plato's philosophical dialogue the *Symposium*. The mythical

¹ In the following, I will primarily refer to Marguerite de Navarre by her first name as is customary concerning members of royal families. Gaspara Stampa, coming from an upper-middle class family, will be referred to by both first- name and surname.

figure of the phoenix can to a certain extent be related to the androgyne. Thus, both connect to Neoplatonic ideas on love as represented in philosophical literature with an extensive background running from Plato to the sixteenth-century dialogues on love. The phoenix is seen as either sex-less or as being both male and female and, significantly, it is often employed as a symbol for love's resurrection and lovers' union in perfect love. Furthermore, the phoenix, like the androgyne, is constantly reappearing in cultural expressions, not least literary. Almost everyone is familiar with its ability to be reborn out of its own ashes and even the youngest readers of today know of it from J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series.

The androgyne and the phoenix are crucial from several perspectives in my readings and arguments based upon Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's literary works. The women writers' appropriations of these figures are subversive, as they contain underlying critiques of understandings and regulations of both love and gender. The androgyne and the phoenix are employed by both writers, but in Gaspara Stampa's lyrical poetry the phoenix is more prominent, while the androgyne is more common in Marguerite's work. The two writers, as I will argue, employ these figures as part of their literary strategies in order to make room for female voices and female agency within a male-dominated culture.

Furthermore, when reading these works against the backdrop of the early modern debates on love and women, it becomes clear that both the *Heptaméron* and *Rime* need to be viewed as responses to misogynist aspects prevalent in the contemporary literary and philosophical context. Thus, on a broader note, these readings have encouraged me to contextualize the primary material and view it as part of an ongoing dialogue within early modern literature presenting and debating concepts such as woman, man, female, male, love and sexuality, in relation to the various power relations they all entail among each other. The most dominant genre among these sources is perhaps the love dialogue – a genre that, I argue, had great influence on both Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's visions of love.

Speaking about love, gender and sexuality is a complicated matter, however, not least when we want to discuss these terms and their meaning during a different time from our own. Looking into the past is nevertheless one of the most fruitful ways to expand the understanding of our views, definitions and thoughts on these issues at the present time. I approach the theme of love in early modern literature with the assumption that the definitions and categories that constitute our understanding of the fundamental aspects of the human being, such as love and gender, are changeable over time. Furthermore, these categories are defined through norms and regulations within a certain context. During the lifetimes of Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, dialogues and treatises on love, *trattati d'amore*, became extremely popular. Ideas and concepts of love with their roots in Plato, were vividly discussed among the cultural elite both within the salons and courts and in their virtual representations preserved for us in literature. A related aspect of this discussion was the literary quarrel or debate initiated by Christine de Pizan's (1364-c.1430) reaction against the second part of *Le Roman de la Rose* (de Lorris c.1240 & de Meun c. 1280), which developed into the *querelle des femmes* and also later the *querelle des amyes*. The quarrel about women disputed the constitution of women and the value of women, and writers presented texts that argue either for or against women's intellectual capacities, their educational rights, their ability to understand philosophy and also to understand love. In the *querelle des amyes*, the questions discussed were about the nature of love and the definitions of a good or a perfect lover, which also relates directly to gender regulations.

The courtly poet and protégé of Marguerite, Antoine Héroët (1492-1568) published his *La Parfaicte Amye* in 1542. The following year brought the response text *L'Amye de Court* by Bertrand de La Broderie (c. 1507-c.1547), which initiated the *querelles des amyes*. The love dialogues by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Leone Ebreo (1464-1530), Sperone Speroni (1500-1588) and Tullia d'Aragona (1510-1556), to name only a few, can be seen in the same light: as an ongoing dialogue in which the writers disputed each other's arguments on love's constitution. These discourses and contexts are important for the present study and I view both the *Heptaméron* and *Rime* as contributions to these debates in terms of the

themes and questions they discuss, the intertextual references and parallels they contain, and also their literary genres.

During the early modern period, the development of genres where love was main theme purportedly departs from the troubadour lyrics of *amour courtois* explored in southern France. This twelfth-century literature addressed women in a cultural situation in which patriarchal hegemonic structures frequently denied worth to women. This discourse seems to have caused a reaction among male poets “affirming not only the value of the female principal but its supreme value, as something to be exalted, obeyed, and worshipped.”² However, these expressions formed by men were placing women in the position of objects to be adored. Nevertheless, this position of being highly valued, even worshipped, placed women in a role which they appropriated and used strategically as writers, often in order to destabilize misogynist views.³ The twelfth-century countess, Beatrice de Dia, who composed lyrical poetry as a troubairitz that expressed thoughts on courtly love from a female point of view criticizing the male lover, is an early example. These proto-feminists’ approaches in literature on love was often shown to problematize and criticize the imposed gender roles prevailing in their time of writing and developed over the centuries into debates on love.

Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa both contributed to these debates on love and gender and explored the themes from a number of perspectives. Marguerite, who has a large œuvre, wrote religious poetry in *Chansons Spirituelles*, theatre, allegorical poems such as *La Coche*, and the collection of novellas published posthumously as the *Heptaméron*. Gaspara Stampa investigated the theme in her love lyric, consisting of over 300 poems written within the Petrarchan tradition, collected and published shortly after her death as *Rime di Madonna Gaspara Stampa*.

² Frank J. Warnke, *Three Women Poets. Renaissance and Baroque. Louise Labé, Gaspara Stampa, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press and London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987), 12.

³ Carin Franzén, “The Division of Love and Feminine Desire: Christine de Pizan and Marguerite de Navarre”, in *Pangs of Love and Longing. Configurations of Desire in Premodern Literature*, ed. Anders Cullhed, Carin Franzén, Anders Hallengren & Mats Malm (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa produced their works in a century when the number of proto-feminist women writing within different genres of literature was increasing.⁴ One explanation for this, often mentioned among scholars, is that Neoplatonic influences provided women with possibilities to explore sublimated forms of love in their literary works without risking their good reputation. Neoplatonic inspiration through themes and metaphors could, in other words, be used strategically by women writers to explore ideas of love and gender.⁵ This study specifically enhances Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's ways of re-defining ideals on love represented and discussed in their cultural circles, in order to express their own visions. I want to show how, through an exploration and redefinition of common metaphors, such as the androgyne and the phoenix, they create their own poetics that allow them to narrate possibilities for transgression of, or resistance to, normative views. Thus, I argue that their literary works open up space for new visions different from the traditional configurations of love and gender as presented in literature, philosophy and their social and cultural contexts.

I approach the material from perspectives inspired by contemporary queer and feminist theories, mainly informed by Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, in order to better assess how Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa discuss love and gender positions, themes that were also vividly debated in their social and cultural circles. Within these circles, in salons and at court, as Julie Campbell explains, "men and women carried out verbally the philosophical debates generated by Neoplatonic thought. They discussed the ideals of love, virtue, and honor much as do Castiglione's courtiers and ladies in *The Book of the Courtier*".⁶ The literary circles were thus important spaces in which women could participate in discussions, performance, and the production of art such as poetry or other writings.

⁴ See for example Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵ Sears Jayne also comments on the reader interest from women in concern to Neoplatonic treatises in the "Introduction" to Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 19.

⁶ Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe: A Cross-Cultural Approach* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 7.

Campbell refers to Lorraine Code while arguing for the circles as rhetorical spaces, or in other words, as specific discourses. Code names these spaces “textured locations” in which “it matters who is speaking and where and why, and where such mattering bears directly upon the possibility of knowledge claims [and] moral pronouncements”.⁷ Like Campbell, I argue that these ideas on rhetorical space are applicable when we discuss the cultural gatherings of the early modern period. Thus, within these spaces,

women and men could interact in ways circumscribed by cultural manners and mores and influenced by philosophical ideals, yet, at the same time, critique and transgress those very boundaries, thanks to the scope for play inherent in such spaces.⁸

In other words, the cultural circles function as spaces inside, but at the same time outside or between, regular civic life and regulations.

These spaces are mirrored or represented to various extents in the fictive spaces for debate created by Marguerite in her *Heptaméron*, by Gaspara Stampa in her *Rime*, and certainly also in the many dialogues on love that inform the readings within this study. The various relations to people among the cultural elite and to their literary texts are thus crucial for my analysis of these two women writers.

Purpose and Aims

In this study, I investigate how Marguerite de Navarre and Gaspara Stampa subvert normative boundaries of love and gender in their writings. The possibilities and opportunities that literary forms enable in terms of thinking beyond the gender norms and regulations existing in the social context of the writers’ time will be thoroughly discussed. I claim that these two writers discuss

⁷ Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge, 1995), ix-x. Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 11.

⁸ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 11.

and transgress the existing configurations of love and gender through the ways in which they employ the mythical figures of the androgyne and the phoenix. Furthermore, they use these figures to present visions of love and gender that reveal the boundaries of their configurations as represented within literary and philosophical writings. Thus, I contextualize my readings within the broader discussions on love and gender of their time, such as the dialogues by Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo, Sperone Speroni and Tullia d'Aragona, as well as with other literary texts such as the poetry of Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) and Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547).

Furthermore, the interchange of ideas, culture and literature between Italy and France during the early modern period will be considered. The networks surrounding Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa call for further discussion and the present study also aims to shed light on these connections. The correspondence between Marguerite and the Italian poet Vittoria Colonna is well known, as well as the friendship of Colonna and Michelangelo Buonarroti. Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565), a famous cultural figure, connects Gaspara Stampa, Michelangelo, and Tullia d'Aragona. Gaspara Stampa also composed poems addressed to the members of Marguerite's royal family of France, King Henry IV (1519-1559) and Caterina de' Medici (1519-1559).⁹ Moreover, the broader discussions on love certainly invite Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa to the same literary and philosophical sources which places them, and a number of other writers, in intertextual relation. With this study, I wish to clarify their shared knowledge and interest in the discussions on love and gender.

One assumption in my study is that terms which constitute our understanding of the fundamental aspects of the human being, such as gender, love and sexuality, are defined through norms and regulations within a certain context. Or, as Judith Butler puts it: "If I am always constituted by norms that are out of my making, then I have to understand the ways that constitution takes place".¹⁰ Nevertheless, Butler also claims that this constitution is never fully

⁹ Number 221 and 222 in Gaspara Stampa, *The Complete Poems. The 1554 Edition of the "Rime", a Bilingual Edition*, ed. Troy Tower & Jane Tylus, trans. Jane Tylus (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2010). In the following, all references to Gaspara Stampa's poems will be to this edition and will be referred to by the number of each poem.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 15.

determined by these norms, in correspondence “with the psychoanalytic understanding that sexuality is never fully captured by any regulation”. This does not mean, however, that sexuality is free, but instead that it “emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints”.¹¹ Butler’s claim draws on Foucault’s description of sexuality as a “dense transfer point”, where a number of power relations meet; men and women, parents and children, teachers and students, priests and laity, administration and a population. From this perspective, sexuality is “endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies”.¹² Foucault is highlighting these strategies as a way of controlling human behavior, but one can also see them as possibilities for countering or negotiating regulations within the discourse. I believe that this possibility to improvise and to use the intertwined discourses of sexuality, love and gender in strategic and subversive ways is even greater within the world of texts, literature and fiction, where imagined possibilities can be more freely articulated than in other areas, as Butler also states:

Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.¹³

When we consider cultural expressions such as literature to be embodied fantasies, then the poems, the novellas or the dialogues of the early modern writers hold the possibility to “point elsewhere”. This does not mean that the imaginary is the opposite of reality. Rather, it can be what does not *fit* reality at a certain historical point, and as such defines the borders of the present reality. It makes it possible to change the discourse, to transgress, or at least stretch, the ideas and norms which constitute what is accepted as feminine or masculine,

¹¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 15.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction. Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books Edition. Random House, Inc., 1990; 1976), 103.

¹³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 29.

permitted or illicit sexual acts and love expressions in a certain place at a certain time. As John O'Brien formulates it:

The medium of writing, of the story, is the site of possibility, and not just of record, of memory and memorialization. It acts not simply as an archive, but more dynamically as a storehouse replete with narrative choices and potential, ranging from phantasm to the subtle subversion of existing codes.¹⁴

In this study, I will show that the relations to reality, for example in Gaspara Stampa's choice to address existing persons within her cultural network, can be viewed as literary strategies aiming to point to a *possible truth* within her poetry. She claims and creates space for a certain poetic voice and vision of love from a woman's perspective, revealing boundaries as well as subverting existing codes. Furthermore, the strategic use of Neoplatonism in *Rime* concerns how the poet uses certain metaphors like the phoenix, which is also employed by Petrarch, Marguerite, Michelangelo and many other poets. I propose that Gaspara Stampa makes use of these figures and metaphors of divine, sublimated love in order to reveal an earthly form of love that is equally as beautiful, good, noble and eternal as the divine.

Marguerite's collection of 72 novellas, which follows Boccaccio's Italian model with its frame story and discussions of each story among the storytellers, the so-called *devisants*, provide a polyphony of voices and opinions on love. Due to the frame of this study, I have had to choose among the numerous narratives within this fascinating work. The negotiation of love and gender through appropriations of Neoplatonic ideas are represented throughout the collection, but the strategic use of the androgyne is especially visible in novellas 19, 43 and 70, as well as in the discussions of these stories among the *devisants*.

Thus, the main purpose of this study is to discuss Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's aesthetic strategies in a male-dominated culture, and specifically to show how their use of the figures of the androgyne and the phoenix destabilize

¹⁴ John O'Brien, "Fictions of the Eyewitness," in *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the Nouvelle in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. Gary Ferguson and David LaGuardia (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 137-38.

hegemonic views of love and gender. In their work, they create spaces that allow women voice and agency.

I intend to consider a number of intertexts that are either named, alluded to or implied in Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's literary visions of love and gender. Their contributions to the literary and philosophical debate on love are considered in a broader early modern context of literature and philosophy. Textual, but also real-life, connections to central figures of the cultural elite in France and Italy inform our understanding of Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's ideas of love and gender. Thus, through a close examination of the two writers' appropriation of mainly Neoplatonic ideals on love, it will be possible to establish how they make use of their cultural and literary knowledge to destabilize power relations within the discourse of love and gender.

Outline of the Study

After a description of the theoretical and methodological perspectives that frame this study, there follows a presentation of Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's biographies, along with an overview and discussion of the primary material I have studied. Before the analytical chapters, I present a rather lengthy background called "Theories on Love", in order to give a historical overview of the genres in which love has been the primary theme, starting with the troubadours and ending in a discussion of several of the dialogues on love. The new poetic style introduced by Dante, *il dolce stil nuovo*, and the Petrarchan tradition were major influences on the early modern love lyric and ideas of love. Together with the philosophical dialogues and treatises written during the sixteenth century, they constitute the discourse of love, which Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa appropriate and contribute to.

The analyses are divided into two main chapters: "Marguerite de Navarre's Vision of Love" and "Gaspara Stampa's Vision of Love". Marguerite's novellas are primarily discussed in chronological order as they are presented in the *Heptaméron*, starting with an interpretation of the discussion between the

devisants after novella 8, in which the androgyne figure is introduced. The idea of two halves in search of each other, presented by the character Dagoucín in this discussion, is at the center of the analysis of novella 19. In this story, Marguerite explores the idea of reciprocity and enhances the importance of female voice and agency in the lovers' ascension to a spiritual union. In novellas 43 and 70, the female characters transgress prevailing gender norms to such an extent that they move beyond the concept of "woman". These androgynous characters destabilize hegemonic power relations and demonstrate the fluidity of gender and its performative constitution.

In contrast, the chapter on Gaspara Stampa is thematically structured, so that poems employing similar topics or metaphors are grouped and discussed together. Nevertheless, I begin with an interpretation of a poem close to the beginning of the collection as it was set in the 1554 edition, poem 17 "Io non v'invidio punto Angeli santi", which introduces the poet's idea of an earthly noble love comparable to divine love. This concept of love, explored from a female subject position, is then traced through the collection from various perspectives. For example, in the phoenix poems, 206 and 207, I explore the poet's illustration of love as constantly reborn. In other poems, such as "Così m'impresse al core", the Neoplatonic idea of the perfect union in the figure of the androgyne is appropriated. While, in this particular poem, Gaspara Stampa parallels Ficino, I primarily argue for intertextual connections with Tullia d'Aragona and her philosophical dialogue on love's infinity. Also, the strategic use of cultural figures, such as Sperone Speroni, further establishes her collection of poems in the debates on love – debates that both Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite are gendering through their literary strategies.

Theoretical Framework

The force and meaning of an utterance are not exclusively determined by prior contexts or “positions”; an utterance may gain its force precisely by virtue of the break with context that it performs. Such breaks with prior context or, indeed, with ordinary usage, are crucial to the political operation of the performative. *Language takes on a non-ordinary meaning in order precisely to contest what has become sediment in and as the ordinary.*¹⁵

Since the late twentieth century, there has been a great interest in gender studies within the humanistic fields. The progression from different feminist approaches and women’s studies to a broader and more complex gender perspective has resulted in research discussing gender history, the deconstruction of gender, performance, the history of sexuality, of human body configurations and discourses of love. An essential part of my analysis of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* and Gaspara Stampa’s *Rime* is the assessment and exploration of the discourses that determined gender and the configurations of desire during the Renaissance. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are prominent among theorists in this field, but I build on many contemporary scholars when applying these perspectives to early modern research. In the citation above, Butler explains the possibility of a re-definition of established ideas that lies within language use – a possibility that I consider embodied in the literary works discussed in this study. In order to understand the two writers’ poetics and ideas on gender and love, but also, in a broader context, early modern women’s aesthetic strategies in a male-dominated culture, I find that readings inspired by discourse analysis are particularly fruitful. It is crucial to examine and understand the power relations we find within constructions of gender, love and sexuality, both within the literary works in question and in the different discourses that frame them.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York & London. Routledge, 1997), 145. My emphasis.

Reading with Michel Foucault

Foucault explains that, for too long, studies of sex and sexuality have taken institutions of power as their starting points, showing for example how laws prohibit certain sexual acts. Foucault argues that we cannot take the sovereignty of the state, the laws or any other unity of domination as given at the outset of our studies on sexuality, sex and gender. Instead, we need to consider how these institutions, or discourses, rely on power relations, a perspective he presents in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault explains that “power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization”. Furthermore, within these spheres, power relations should be considered as ongoing processes consisting of confrontations and a battle that “transforms, strengthens, or reverses them”.¹⁶ Institutions of power are the last step in the analysis of a “multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced”.¹⁷ Foucault calls this the “*rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses*” and argues that the variants and effects of the multiple discursive elements depend on “who is speaking, his position of power [and], the institutional context in which he happens to be situated”.¹⁸ Thus, Foucault is primarily interested in power-knowledge relations between humans and stresses repeatedly that it is the *relations* between power and knowledge that are central.

In other words, the social effects that a certain discourse always brings are emphasized through the connection of power and knowledge. A discourse is always dependent on or constituted by power relations and can thus never be studied without an acknowledgement of these relations. The priority for Foucault was therefore always the question of how power or force is manifested: what happens within the power relations and through which tools power is manifested. For example, our understanding of the body is a construction made through different power relations, and without these

¹⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality* Vol 1, 92-93.

¹⁷ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

relations 'the body' does not exist – it simply becomes a mass of chemical substances. Furthermore, the body is central to our creation as subjects, thus features such as sex, age, appearance, physical status etc. are important for how we are regarded by others as well as how we regard ourselves. When norms for these attributes are formed, through power relations, regulations and perhaps laws determining the behavior connected to these norms can follow.

The first volume of *The History of Sexuality* contains some of Foucault's most explicit formulations about power or force relations. In every power relation, a different kind of resistance or rejection is possible due to its character as relational. In order to reveal how resistance can function, one way is to study the discourse; thus, it is within a discourse that power is repeated, produced and transferred. However, just as a discourse can enhance power, it can also undermine it. The same discourse, used in another way, it can function as a strategic tool with the purpose of changing the character of existing power relations. In other words, every power relation is unstable, always challenged and capable of being subverted.

Courtly love literature and Petrarchism are both discourses within which these power relations manifest, in which the speaking subject was traditionally a man in devotion of a silent woman, an angel-like being who serves a lyrical purpose. When women like Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite write, they can never act 'outside' of discourse, but through a destabilization of the power relations within it.

Foucault further argues that secrecy and silence are shelters for power, "anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance".¹⁹ This claim is highly relevant in the analysis of Marguerite's *Heptaméron*, where secrecy, masking and veiling of different sorts are repeated throughout the text, and function both as attempts to make use of the tolerance for transgressions and also to reveal what is actually tolerated. In Gaspara Stampa's poetry, we do not find the same representation of secrecy. However, she writes within a discourse, as mentioned above, in which the poet speaker and subject are constructed as normatively male, and

¹⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, 101.

women function as silent objects.

It is often pointed out that women poets break with this tradition through different strategies in order to claim their voice and space. As I will argue in this study, Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite have unique voices among these women, creating new ideals of love and new spaces to express them, by gendering the literary debate on love.

Reading with Judith Butler

When Judith Butler wrote *Gender Trouble* in 1990, it was in clear criticism of contemporary feminist theories. Primarily, Butler opposed the prevailing idea of binary categories of sex as natural and static concepts. She instead argued for openness, for nondeterministic perspectives, claiming that even if we are to understand sex as a stable duality of male or female, it does not automatically follow that the “construction of ‘men’ will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that ‘women’ will interpret only female bodies”.²⁰

In Butler’s theoretical approach, gender is constructed “as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body” and vice versa.²¹ She further claims that

gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive”, prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts.²²

The very discourse of gender is thus produced and established in a way that makes it appear as pre-discursive. If instead, following Foucault, we are to look at gender as an always on-going process in constant evolution, this discourse becomes far from pre-given. Nevertheless, due to its prediscursive appearance,

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge Classics, 2008; 1990), 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

it is forced and internalized on the individual human from the very beginning of identity formation.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler further claims that gender and sexual norms are constrained through a number of discourses and that terms such as feminine or masculine “are notoriously changeable”. The definitions depend upon “geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on *who* is imagining *whom*, and for what purpose”.²³ Thus, echoing Foucault, no human being is autonomous from others; it is *through* the other that we make sense in and of the world.

Desire and expressions of love can function as a definition of gender and even of whether one deserves to be accounted for as human. If a desire is accepted or acknowledged within prevailing norms, in a given cultural and historical moment, that desire is mostly problem free. If a desire falls outside of these norms it is often designated as forbidden.²⁴ Hence, the constructions of the human body, as well as gender and sexuality, are *dialogical*. “Terms of gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade”.²⁵ They are practices open to negotiation and interpretation and they take place in human interaction, in conversation and in acting within certain social and cultural milieus.

The negotiation and possible re-definitions of different concepts regarding human configuration are due to the constant *repetition* of terms, words and expressions in conversation, in literature and in enacted forms in social life. Thus, the terms of and norms for love, gender and sexuality are not only consistently repeated throughout history. As Butler puts it: “the recurrence does not index sameness, but rather the way in which the social articulation of the terms depends upon repetition, which constitutes one dimension of the performative structure of gender”.²⁶

²³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

²⁴ Per Linell argues for a similar point, which he calls practical mediation. This mediation could incorporate anything from sexual activity and giving birth to walking, sitting or swimming, when he says that: “Deviations from the received practice, that is, enactments that are not mediated by the ‘right,’ culturally accepted routines, are assigned social meaning and may be sanctioned”. Per Linell, *Rethinking language, mind, and world dialogically: interactional and contextual theories of human sense-making* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2009), 20.

²⁵ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

To enable accounts of any kind of human identity, such as gender, there must be valid social norms for this identity. "One is dependent on this 'outside' to lay claim to what is one's own. The self must, in this way, be dispossessed in sociality in order to take possession of itself."²⁷ An important point here is that this "outside" is never stable either and even if we can assess the major discourses active in the configuration of human identity categories, these discourses, as Foucault also argues, are always intertwined with each other. With regard to the literature I am studying these discourses can be identified both in the context, or outside of the text, as well as within the narrative worlds. The outside provides social codes and norms concerning gender, but also considering literary form and aesthetics. The women writers of this study are evidently performing within the discourses that the genres of love literature provide and within the discourse of love philosophy. What could be articulated within these discourses? And to what extent and through which strategies could women writers claim space? At the same time, I argue that their literary strategies subvert discourses and destabilize early modern norms and ideas about gender, love and sexuality. Lorraine Code builds on Foucault and explains a need to:

move into textured locations where it matters who is speaking and where and why, and where such mattering bears directly upon the possibility of knowledge claims, moral pronouncements, descriptions of "reality" achieving acknowledgement. [...] Often in such spaces discourse becomes a *poesis*, a way of representing experience, reality, that remarks and alters it in the process.²⁸

Code's idea of rhetorical spaces is not applied consistently in this study, but I believe that the citation above underlines the contextualizing and dialogical perspective from which I am working. The women writers are not separated from the male-dominated culture when they write and perform their literature – they are part of the same culture. Nevertheless, their way of representing the experience of love as women and their strategies to do so subvert tradition.

²⁷ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 7.

²⁸ Code, *Rhetorical Spaces*, X.

Destabilizing Gender in the Early Modern Period

Expressions of love played an important part in the construction of gender during the early modern period. A telling example is Renaissance scholar Michael Roche's discussion of the Florentine friar and preacher Girolamo Savonarola's (1452-1498) fear of how sexual activity could destabilize gender roles. As Roche argues:

Sexual behaviour was in fact a basic component of the complex of cultural and social signifiers that distinguished individuals, beyond their belonging to one biological sex or the other, as gendered beings as masculine or feminine. His [Savonarola's] insistence on the transformative capacity of sex to make men into women, and presumably vice versa, indicates an awareness that gender identity was not a natural or fixed quality but was constructed and malleable, and as such it needed to be adequately shaped, reinforced and defended.²⁹

Roche comments on a speech given by the (in)famous Savonarola in 1496, when he was complaining that the "indulgence of sexual pleasures produced a dangerous confusion of gender boundaries".³⁰ His speech illustrates the instability and performativity of gender configurations as well as early modern ideas on connections between sexual desire and gender.

During the early modern period the concepts of heterosexuality, homosociality and homosexuality were not used; they were in fact first mentioned in the late nineteenth century.³¹ However, this does not mean that desires, actions and behaviors that we associate with these concepts today, did not exist – they certainly did, but were understood and spoken about differently. Furthermore, the rules, regulations and laws regarding sexual acts and gender in early modern societies highlight the importance of these matters.

²⁹ Michael Roche, "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy," in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 140. Savonarola is translated by Roche as follows: "Young lads have been made into women. But that's not all; fathers are like daughters, brothers like sisters. There is no distinction between the sexes or anything else anymore".

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

³¹ Michel Foucault discusses the birth of the terms of homosexual and heterosexual. He places it to 1870, when the term homosexual was used in an article to point to a psychological disease. Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, 43.

One reason for the importance of different performative gender norms might be that the perception of the human body from antiquity on was also based on performance. Thomas Laqueur, famous for his “one-sex model”, discusses the early modern period when he says that to be a man or a woman “was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes.”³² He further echoes Butler’s theory on gender in his aim to show:

on the basis of historical evidence that almost everything one wants to say about sex – however sex is understood – already has in it a claim about gender. Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power.³³

Hence, sex as well as gender was a question of behavior, actions and performance within power relations in cultural and social discourses. At the same time, we find strict cultural norms of feminine and masculine behavior, attributes and clothing. The idea of the female body as inferior to the male body has its roots in the classical Greek period and the view of women as inverted, incomplete and imperfect was repeated and revived during the early modern period. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) implemented Aristotle’s thoughts in the Christian context and the mix of classical theories and the religious view of women as bearers of the original sin probably intensified the general premodern misogyny.³⁴ The ideas of women as the weaker sex, as less intellectual and more driven by physical desire than men, dominated the configurations of gender in the early modern period.

Nevertheless, the sixteenth century has often been regarded as more open to women in matters of laws allowing wives to inherit from their husbands and become patrons over property in cases of the death of the husband.³⁵ Significant

³² Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴ See Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1991).

³⁵ Certainly, the situation for women during the early modern period is complex and varies from geographical borders, class and social status. For an extensive overview, see Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*.

for this study is the fact, mentioned earlier, that we see an increasing number of women writers during this period. While writing within a culture dominated by men and by the ideas of women as inferior, some of these women, like Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, contributed explicitly to the ongoing debate on love and gender. Thus, the questions of knowledge and power relations recur and reveal that gender is a matter to be struggled over within specific discourses. The relational character of power provides limits and constraints, but also, as Foucault argues, opportunities to change the discourse.

Method and Material

In order to discuss Marguerite de Navarre's and Gaspara Stampa's literary strategies, I have made certain methodological choices as well as a primary material selection, which will be presented and discussed in the following.

Out of the 72 novellas in the *Heptaméron*, I closely interpret three along with the discussions following them. These are specifically relevant in concern of how the androgyne is used and how gender is destabilized. I also make some connections to other parts of the collection that are of interest to my discussion on her appropriation and employment of Neoplatonic ideas.

Out of the more than 300 poems in Gaspara Stampa's collection, I closely read and discuss around ten that contains subversive expressions of either the phoenix, the androgyne or other ideas related to Neoplatonic thinking. I also comment on a larger number of thematically related poems. I will discuss these decisions in more depth after a more thorough explanation of the methods I apply.

Methodological Perspectives

In order to deeply analyze how the literary strategies of these two women writers enhance female voice and agency, I primarily approach the material

with close readings, both of primary texts and works that are referred to in the primary texts as well as other literary sources that I find relevant to deepen the analysis. The primary texts are read both in the original French and Italian and in translated editions in English.

As it is my purpose to discuss how the two writers make use of Neoplatonic love ideas and figures such as the androgyne and the phoenix, in their discussions and subversions of traditional norms of love and gender, extensive readings of the dialogues by Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo and Tullia d'Aragona are necessary. Furthermore, since part of my aim in this study is to establish intertextual as well as socio-cultural connections between Marguerite, Gaspara Stampa and a number of other cultural figures, such as Sperone Speroni, Antoine Héroët and Benedetto Varchi, I have found intertextual reading very useful. These intertextual relations primarily concern the literary employment of the androgyne and the phoenix figures during the early modern period.

I also discuss visions of love and gender in a broader, philosophical sense and argue for intertextual relations regarding genre (dialogues, novellas, sonnets etc.), and also to actual connections between various figures among the French and Italian courts and salons. Thus, my focus is the intertextual relations which connect the two writers to the discourse on love, and these subtexts are presented in the extensive chapter entitled "Theories on Love" as an exploration of early modern love literature from the troubadours to sixteenth-century Petrarchists, the above-mentioned philosophical perspectives from Plato to Tullia d'Aragona and also the gender debates among the many contributors of *la querelle des femmes*.

Material

The manuscript and editorial histories of the *Heptaméron* and *Rime* look very different, with the former existing in a number of handwritten variants and the latter still are not found in manuscript form. Both of the texts were, however, published posthumously with the involvement of the writers' family members. Regarding re-printing and different editions, the histories again differ. In the

following, these matters are discussed, along with an elaborated section on the selection of novellas and poems chosen as primary readings for this study.

The Heptaméron

The *Heptaméron* was first published in 1558 by the humanist Pierre Boaistuau as *Histoires des Amans fortunez* in an incomplete and anonymous version. Only one year later, 1559, ten years after the queen's death, the complete collection of the 72 short stories was published as *L'Heptaméron des Nouvelles* by Claude Gruget, now attributed to Marguerite. Due to the number of manuscripts, twenty known at the moment of writing, and to the time that passed between Marguerite's death and the publication of the text, there has been a discussion on whether she should be considered as the (sole) author.³⁶ Chilton wrote in his introduction to his English translation that it is just as "difficult to pin down a single authoritative text" as it is "impossible to pin down a single author". He further stated that the collection had to be viewed as a "collaborative enterprise".³⁷ While this is a significant thought to discuss concerning many early modern texts lacking an author's signature, I disagree with Chilton in the case of the *Heptaméron*. The lack of a signature certainly relates to the fact that Marguerite had not finished her collection at her death, but also to the early modern concept of an author, which was still rather different from our modern definition, which has its roots in the eighteenth century.

It is not unusual to find early modern manuscripts signed by the scribe or, in the case of a translated text, by the translator, without mentioning the actual author of the original text. Considering the cultural milieu of the French court, attended by and connected to the cultural elite, not least due to Marguerite's extensive interest in literature and writing, I align with the majority of Marguerite scholars and hold that the *Heptaméron* is the work of the queen,

³⁶ For an extensive overview of the manuscripts and their history, see Cazauran, "Description des Manuscrits de l'*Heptaméron*," in Marguerite de Navarre, *Oeuvres complètes. Tome X. Volume 1, L'Heptameron*, eds. Nicole Cazauran and Sylvie Lefèvre (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011), CXIII-CXLVIII.

³⁷ P. A. Chilton, "Introduction," in Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, trans. P.A Chilton (London: Penguin Classics, 2004: 1984), 10.

perhaps with inspiration and even contributions from people in her entourage. This collective aspiration is even discussed in the Prologue of the *Heptaméron*, to which I will return shortly.

Frontispiece of Claude Gruget's 1559 edition

The Gruget edition, which was authorized by Marguerite's daughter Jeanne d'Albret, was censored by Gruget himself due to religious matters. Gruget replaced three of the novellas (11, 44 and 46) with stories for which we do not know whether Marguerite was the author. Despite the censoring and changes made to the text, Gruget's edition has been reprinted throughout history since its publication and, thus, has had a great impact on the collection's reception and scholarship.

However, the first critical edition, edited by Le Roux de Lincy in the nineteenth century, was not based on Gruget, but on the manuscript version BN fr. 1512. From then on, this manuscript version has been accepted as the most reliable and has been edited several times. Only the latest critical edition in three

volumes by Nichole Cazauran and Sylvie Lefèvre, takes Gruget as its base source along with an incomplete manuscript, rather recently discovered by Cazauran, held by the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. There is a commonly used pocket version of Cazauran's edition, which is the same in all respects except that it does not contain the extensive commentary.³⁸

Renja Salminen, scholar and editor, chose to use and study other manuscripts, especially that of Adrien de Thou (BN. Fr. 1524) dating from 1553. This is the first complete manuscript, of a handful, that we have, showing up four years after the author's death. It is actually attributed to Marguerite as *Le Décaméron de très haute et très illustre princesse ma dame Marguerite de France, sœur unique du Roy François premier, Royne de Navarre, Duchesse d'Alençon et de Berry*.³⁹ The modern edition of Renja Salminen (1991, 1997; 1999), however, uses manuscript BN fr. 2155 as its base text. In her introduction to this edition, she presents and discusses at length the 19 manuscripts known at the time of her edition, as well as the two early printed editions.

Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, on the other hand, reproduces the same edited version as Le Roux de Lincy of manuscript BN. fr. 1512 in her edition from 1999. This was also the manuscript used for Michel François's edition (1943), which has frequently been used and accepted by scholars of the *Heptaméron*. Following the scholarly authorities within the field, I have decided to consult Mathieu-Castellani's edition as my primary source text. I am primarily interested in subversive writing strategies and the source manuscript of this edition is believed not to be censored. Mathieu-Castellani's edition is thus an up-dated edition of the same manuscript as François's edition and is well annotated. For the English translations, I use P.A. Chilton's edition, which is the most recent and, thus, most modern translation. Chilton's translation is based on François's edition but, on some occasions, I have found it necessary to discuss or amend the translation, clarifying my interpretation of the primary text.

³⁸ Cazauran, "Préface," in *Oeuvres complètes*, XCV.

³⁹ Salminen, Renja, "Introduction," in Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron* (Genève: Drotz, 1999), XX.

Stories on Love

Marguerite's collection of novellas consists of a majority of stories on the topic of love.⁴⁰ The theme is represented through various amorous relations: marital, extra-marital, friendships etc. A frame surrounds the stories, in which ten people come together in the abbey of Nostre-Dame de Serrance, not in order to flee the plague as in Boccaccio's Italian collection, but due to a flood. Also, in contrast to Boccaccio's character group of seven women and three men, Marguerite presents five women and five men, all of noble families and already connected to each other upon arrival at the abbey through various relationships: variously husband and wife, friends, or *dame* and *serviteur*.

The storytelling characters, the *devisants*, have been a focus for both speculation and research and claims have been made that actual family members and people from Marguerite's closest circle figured as inspiration for the characters.⁴¹ Parlamente (parle / perle amante), loving pearl, is possibly a pun on Marguerite's name. This is probable since she made the same pun when entitling her earlier collection of poetry *Marguerites de Marguerite des princesses* (1547). But Parlamente also draws on the old French verb *parlementer* meaning to talk, converse or discourse with.⁴² Thus, Parlamente could also refer to one who loves to talk, a talking lover or a lover's talk, and is often interpreted as the voice of Marguerite herself. She often expresses a feminist defense or criticism of misogyny, and especially of men's sexual behavior.

Oisille is the oldest in the company and is generally thought to have been inspired by Louise de Savoie, mother of Marguerite and her brother François I. Oisille has attracted special attention from scholars due to her role as leader of the group's scriptural readings in the mornings, something that is remarkable

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Zegura counts that 67 of the 72 novellas concern love or closely related themes in "True Stories and Alternative Discourses: The Game of Love in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen, (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

⁴¹ Betty Davies, *The Storytellers in the Heptaméron*, (Lexington: French Forum, 1978), Rouben and Patricia Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 248 and Chilton, "Introduction," in *The Heptameron*, 10–13.

⁴² Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, (London: Adam Islip, 1611), <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/697small.html>

both because she is a woman and because it was not permitted for anyone besides the men of the Church to preach or interpret the Bible at this time.

The male *devisant* Hircan, married to Parlamente, and highest in social rank of the group, is commonly related to Marguerite's second husband Henri de Navarre. Often representing misogynist views, he speaks in favor of patriarchal domination. Saffredent and Simontault, two noblemen and *serviteurs*, usually align with Hircan in the discussions and in the stories, they tell, defending men's right to act upon their sexual desires.

S. Freudenberg's illustration of the ten *devisants*

Longarine, Ennasuite and Nomerfide are all younger women who are either unmarried or widowed (Longarine). Nomerfide's 'modern' ideas might contrast with Oisille's traditional views, but all three of the younger ladies argue against male domination and violence and, to various degrees, for women's chastity and honor.

Dagoucin is mainly described as the Neoplatonist of the group but, as I will discuss in this study, he represents rather a mix of Neoplatonic ideas and the courtly code of love. Repeatedly, he defends the position of the chaste and loyal lover who worships his beloved in secret, thus arguing against the aggressive masculinity of Hircan, Saffredent and Simontault.

Geburon is the eldest of the men, 'women-friendly' and a more tempered and life-wise character than the younger ones, similar to Oisille but not as religious as she is.

In the prologue, during a discussion on how to spend the time during their days trapped at the monastery, Parlamente speaks of her idea of taking on the entertainment of telling short stories to each other. They set out to tell one story each for ten days, adding up to one hundred, just as Boccaccio's *Decameron*. However, the tradition of this kind of plot and structure is not unique to Boccaccio. In the French tradition, the short format of the *nouvelle* can be traced, for example, to Marie de France's *Lais* or Chrétien de Troyes' chivalric romances, all however written in verse in contrast to the prose of the novella. The idea of a frame story with characters taking turns telling stories can be found in, for example, *Thousand and One Nights* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Furthermore, the *Decameron* had been translated as early as 1414 by Laurent de Premierfait, probably inspiring the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, which was written before 1462. Nevertheless, the characters in the *Heptaméron* not only tell stories, they also discuss them more vividly than in any previous collection, which makes it stand out in comparison due to its continuous debates on the complexities of human nature.

In the prologue, the actual context of the French court is drawn upon and points towards the collective effort of the literary project, which I briefly discussed above. It is stated that King François I, Monseigneur the Dauphin (future Henri II), Madame the Dauphine (Caterina de' Medici) and Madame Marguerite had decided to engage in a project similar to Boccaccio's.⁴³ There

⁴³ "Le Maçon's translation apparently found an enthusiastic audience in the royal family, some of whom—including the future King Henri II, his wife Catherine de Médicis, and 'Madame Marguerite'—decided to compose a French collection of *cent nouvelles*, in imitation of but departing from the Boccaccian model.", Gary Ferguson and Mary McKinley, "Introduction," in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre*, eds. Gary Ferguson and Mary McKinley (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), 14.

was, however, to be one significant difference between their collection of stories and Boccaccio's: "c'est de n'eschre nulle nouvelle qui ne soit veritable histoire" (that they should not write any story that was not truthful).⁴⁴ However, according to the prologue, this project was delayed and Parlamente suggests that the ten *devisants* should take it up and complete it.

This insistence to commit to truth has been a topic for several researchers. The claim of truth, or reality, that is stated in the prologue is a way for the narrator to distance herself from Boccaccio's collection of novellas. But, what is true within the frames of a literary work and what can be claimed to mirror reality? As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this study, John O'Brien comments on writing as a medium which acts "dynamically as a storehouse replete with narrative choices and potential, ranging from fantasm to the subtle subversion of existing codes".⁴⁵ In other words, and as we will see in the following chapters, the claim of truth can be used as a strategy with purpose to point to a *possible truth* and to reveal the boundaries that gender norms impose on expressions of love.

Furthermore, the idea of truth is clearly a rhetorical act connecting the *Heptaméron* to the genre of the love dialogue. As Reinier Leushuis argues, Marguerite's collection shares the aspiration of a mimetic rhetoric, not least by mimicking an ongoing conversation, but also by employing the names of real persons among the cultural elite and, sometimes, mirroring their actual historical relations to each other. Thus, considering both genre and its thematic interest in the questions of love and gender, the *Heptaméron* closely is related to the Neoplatonic dialogues on love. It has even been referred to as a French version of Plato's *Symposium*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, ed. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, 90; Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, trans. P. A. Chilton, 68. All page references throughout this study will be to these editions and will be placed in brackets directly after each citation, the French followed by the English.

⁴⁵ O'Brien, "Fictions of the Eyewitness," 137-138.

⁴⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Le transfert, Séminaire VIII* [1960-1961] (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1991), 35. Reinier Leushuis, *Speaking of Love. The Love Dialogue in Italian and French Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

The Heptaméron as a Symposium

This view on the *Heptaméron*, as a French *Symposium*, is underlined by Marcel Tetel who puts it this way: “The form of Platonism that really pervades the *Heptameron* in every part is that of the Socratic banquet, the expressions of the unfathomable multiplicity of human conduct without any fixed conclusion”.⁴⁷ Many scholars have further pointed out how Marguerite was inspired by Marsilio Ficino’s Platonic philosophy and that Marguerite herself was associated with a translation of his *De amore*.⁴⁸ Cazauran states in the preface to her edition of the *Heptaméron* that we find an echo of Ficino’s popularized Neoplatonism, as found in his commentary on Plato’s banquet.⁴⁹ Marguerite also wrote other literary works in which she uses the dialogical form such as *Dialogue un forme de vision nocturne* (1524), which is one of the first texts in France to be entitled as a dialogue. Thus, Marguerite favored the dialogical genre and, as Colette Winn points out: “[w]henver she writes of worldly or divine love, it is almost exclusively in dialogue form”.⁵⁰

Ficino is, however, not the only source for her Neoplatonic views on love and desire and, as I will show in this study, her appropriations of the philosophy redefine several of the tropes that Ficino originally presents. Viewed in a general sense, this is not something specific to Marguerite. In early modern translations of Ficino into French and in French interpretations of his work, we find, for

⁴⁷ Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre’s Heptameron; Themes, Language, and Structure*, (Durham N. C.: Duke University Press, 1973), 9.

⁴⁸ Jacob Vance says that Marguerite even commissioned the translation of Ficino’s *De amore*, while other scholars, like Philip Ford (2013) and Stephen Murphy, are more careful about making this assumption. The *Commentaire de Marsile Ficin, Florentine, sur le banquet d’Amour de Platon: fait Francois par Symon Silvius, dict. Jean de la Haye [...]* (Poitiers, 1546) is, however, dedicated to her. Jacob Vance, “Humanist Polemics, Christian Morals: A Hypothesis of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* and the Problem of Self-Love,” *MLN*, Vol. 120, No. 1, 2005.

⁴⁹ Nicole Cazauran, “Préface,” in Marguerite de Navarre, *L’Heptaméron*, eds. Nicole Cazauran and Sylvie LeFèvre (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 45. Paul Oskar Kristeller also points out the relevance of Ficino in the French context and for Marguerite specifically in his *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Contant (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 19: “Outside Italy the influence of Florentine Platonism was specially persistent in France, the main centers of this influence being Lefèvre d’Etaples and his group, including Symphorien Champier, the humanists of Lyon, and Marguerite de Navarre and her circle.”

⁵⁰ Colette Winn, “Toward a Dialectic of Reconciliation. The *Navire* and the *Heptameron* of Marguerite de Navarre,” in *The Dialogue in Early Modern France, 1547–1630: Art and Argument*, ed. Colette Winn (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1993), 79.

example, his philosophy heterosexualized. The intriguing part of Marguerite's Neoplatonic inspiration is that it is used to enhance women's voice and agency, which puts *Heptaméron* closer to ideas that can be found in the writings of Leone Ebreo, Baldassare Castiglione and perhaps even Tullia d'Aragona. They all discuss women's understanding of love philosophy and part of its practice in their respective dialogues. Furthermore, Marguerite's work contains far more than pure Neoplatonic inspiration, also reflecting a strong Christian faith and a cultural tradition stemming from a social context of courtly love, beginning in the twelfth century with the troubadour lyric and, a little later, the chivalric romances.

The work is further structured in the manner of the *querelle des femmes* and the *querelle des amyes*, thus giving voice to different sides of the questions of love and gender. This is announced through the first two stories in the collection, as noted by Ferguson and McKinley:

With that biblical reference to Genesis 3 [in the discussion of nouvelle 1], Simontault follows a long tradition of theologians who judged Eve responsible for Adam's sin and thus for the Fall and its consequences. By putting in her first story an argument that had been used for centuries to support misogynist claims, Marguerite announces at the outset that her book will enter that debate.⁵¹

This view forms a contrast to that found in the second story. In other words, the *Heptaméron's* "opening stories thus present the two opposing extremes of the *querelle des femmes*" and the question of perfect love and the constitution of men and women are then disputed among the ten *devisants* throughout the collection.⁵²

⁵¹ Gary Ferguson and Mary McKinley, "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World," in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre*, 343.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 343.

Selection for this Study

As already mentioned, I will discuss and analyze a certain number of the novellas and the frame story with its discussions by the *devisants*. While questions on love and gender in a broad sense are the most common theme of the collection, my focus lies specifically on a selection of novellas and discussions among the *devisants* in which Neoplatonic love and allusions to the androgyne are used as a strategy to transgress normative boundaries of love and gender. While the stories follow a narratological structure with a beginning, middle and end, the discussions are left open without definite (moral) conclusions, and sometimes do not even seem to discuss the main point of the novella just told. In other words, we can consider the *Heptaméron* as a discourse consisting of power relations both between the characters in the novellas and among the *devisants* that are in constant struggle and are possible to subvert or reinforce.

The discussion following novella 8 introduces the androgyne in the collection, which is why I also begin my study with this section. My material continues with novella 19, which is the story of Poline and a young man who join in Christian Neoplatonic union after being forbidden to marry. This novella is often described as the most representative of Neoplatonic love in the collection. My aim is to re-read the story in order to show how the union between the two lovers is in the hands of and controlled by the female character. To further examine the strategic use of androgyny and subversive writing, I read the story of Jambicque in novella 43. This often-discussed novella presents a woman transgressing gender norms in her desire for a young nobleman. Finally, I read novella 70, which depicts the Duchess of Burgundy as someone who is described by Oisille as a character who has forgotten that she is a woman. In similarity to Jambicque, she should, according to Oisille, more correctly be called a man. While I discuss the destabilization of gender that this judgement entails, I also interpret the employment of the androgyne as a symbol for married love in novella 70. This symbol is used highly strategically by the

Duchess in her bid to get what she wants, which is initially an affair with a young man she desires and later revenge for being denied such an affair.

Gaspara Stampa's Rime

Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* includes 310 poems, and the 1554 edition is structured by genre, making a distinction between the sonnets, the capitoli and the madrigals.⁵³ Gaspara Stampa's sister, Cassandra, commissioned the first published collection, which was printed six months after the poet's death in 1554. No manuscript has yet been found, so this first edition, printed by the small press of Plinio Pietrasanta in Venice, is the closest to an original we have. It is also this volume that readers of her time had in hand, along with three poems published earlier in an anthology by Girolamo Ruscelli in 1553. Included in the 1554 edition are 14 pages of dedicatory poems by Giorgio Benzzone, Torquato Bembo, Benedetto Varchi and Giulio Stufa. Two of these, by Varchi and Stufa, refer to Gaspara Stampa as a new Sappho.⁵⁴

Shortly after the 1554 publication, one of Gaspara Stampa's poems was printed in a collection commemorating Giovanna d'Aragona in 1555. In 1559, Ludovico Domenichi published his collection of women poets and reprinted the three poems found in Ruscelli's earlier anthology. However, after these editions, Gaspara Stampa and her work were forgotten until the eighteenth century when Luisa Bergalli and Antonio Rambaldo, a relative of Gaspara Stampa's beloved Collaltino di Collalto, edited and published the poems again. The editors' foreword initiated a fictional story of Gaspara Stampa as a romantic character, dying due to unhappy love. This depiction inspired books and plays about Gaspara Stampa, which further intensified this romanticized version of her.

⁵³ Jane Tylus comments on the structure of the poems in relation to a singer's songbook. It is known that singing pupils first learned to improvise sonnets and then advanced to madrigals and various forms of 'ottava rima'. "Introduction," in *Complete Poems*, 13-14.

⁵⁴ Benzzone assisted Cassandra with the edition and Torquato Bembo is the son of the more well-known Pietro. Tylus, "Introduction," in *Complete Poems*, 2, and note 3 on the same page.

In Olindo Guerrini's edition of her selected poetry from 1882, Gaspara Stampa is published along with two of the most respected women poets of the period, Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara. In his introduction, Guerrini praises the three women as the most illustrious poets of love of their time. A completely different approach was taken by Abdelkader Salza in his volume in which he collected Gaspara Stampa and the contemporary poet and courtesan Veronica Franco in the same edition. In this edition, he also rearranged the order of the poems to make them fit together with his view that Gaspara Stampa was, like Franco, a courtesan. His presentation of her came to affect the reception of her work, most notably perhaps in the formulation by the Italian literary scholar Benedetto Croce, which I discuss later, in the section on the poet's biographical background.

During the twentieth century, a number of popular editions of her poetry have been printed. As for scholarly editions, Jane Tylus's bilingual edition of 2012 is the most recent and goes back to the first printed edition of 1554 and structures the poems in the order in which they figure there. As already mentioned, the 1554 publication is the earliest edition of the work that we know today. Thus, I cite from Tylus's extensively annotated edition of the *Rime* in the present thesis. I also use her English translations, if not indicated otherwise.

Selected Poems for this Study

Among the 310 poems, I initiate my discussion on Gaspara Stampa's literary strategies and vision of love with poem 17, "Io no v'invidio punto Angeli santi". This sonnet is a brilliant representation of Gaspara Stampa's inventive style where the ideal of Neoplatonic and Petrarchan love of the soul are played with and subverted. I follow this theme through the collection, arriving at an extensive discussion of poems 206 and 207. I aim to show how the two poems both employ the phoenix as a representation for love's constant resurrection, but also as symbolizing the rebirth of poetry itself. Additionally, poem 224 includes the phrase *alma fenice*, which intertextually connects to Michelangelo Buonarroti's poem with the same phrasing. The celebratory poem

commemorating Gaspara Stampa upon her death attributed to Mirtilla is also included in this discussion.

Poem 216 is only discussed briefly, but it is relevant since it is outspoken about Bartolomeo Zen, the second beloved in Gaspara Stampa's collection. Since a major argument in this study is that Gaspara Stampa envisions earthly love to be reborn, her articulation of a second lover is crucial.

"Così m'imprese al core" is numbered 293 in the collection and draws upon the Petrarchan and *il dolce stil nuovo* traditions. The idea that the picture of the beloved is imprinted in the lover's heart is, however, not only used in a traditional manner, but again reinterpreted by Gaspara Stampa. In the same poem, allusions are made to the perfect union of lovers as an androgyne, but this idea is also presented by the poet from a critical point of view.

In relation to poems 163 and 213, I discuss the common trope of love as war, since the poems employ this idea but from a gender-transgressive perspective. In 213, the female poet regards herself as a knight fighting in the war of love, a position that during the early modern period was generally exclusively reserved for men and male poets. The poet presupposes the trope of war in 163, a poem that is also representative of her skillful appropriation of the lyrical technique of anti-thesis. War in this poem is one part of the oppositional pair 'love and war' explaining love's conflicted constitution.

There are also a number of poems in the collection addressing people among the cultural elite, such as Sperone Speroni (228, 269), Domenico Venier (227), and Giovanni della Casa (266). By focusing on those addressed to Speroni, I discuss how the invocations are part of a strategic move which enables the poet to place herself among this elite. Furthermore, there are also ideas on love that demonstrate intertextual parallels to the love dialogues written by Tullia d'Aragona and Speroni. I primarily argue for these parallels in my readings of Gaspara Stampa's employment of the phoenix and in the idea of perfect love as represented by the androgyne.

Poem 309 is the penultimate one in the collection and is the last primary poem to be discussed in this study. Here, the poet articulates love as the fuel and the fire that drive her poetical inspiration. Her goal is to establish herself as

a poet and to create memorable literature in which love is the experience that enables her aspirations.

Biographical Backgrounds, Contexts and Relations

Since there are obvious differences between Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, concerning class, geographical context and social situation, I find it important to underline that both writers shared similar contexts and settings within the literary circles and networks of their time. Their biographical backgrounds and contexts are also relevant to acknowledge since they help us to understand intertextual parallels and the particularity of their literary strategies that are the focus of this study.

Gaspara Stampa lived and composed within the salons of Venice, and Marguerite at the courts in France, where the topic of love, how to behave socially, how to be virtuous etc., were discussed among writers, philosophers, artists and musicians. Both Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa were also well educated, and even though Marguerite had an advantage in assets (library collections, teachers, etc.) they both read or were familiar with many of the same books and texts. The contact and cultural exchanges between Italy and France were extensive during the sixteenth century and even though there is no known contact between Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, there are other cultural figures and situations that connect them.

First, we can consider the letter exchange between Marguerite and Vittoria Colonna, one of the first women Petrarchists and a model for other women poets of the Cinquecento. Colonna and Marguerite wrote to each other on matters of religious beliefs and Colonna considered Marguerite an excellent example and inspiration for other women of her time.⁵⁵ Colonna is furthermore famous for her friendship with Michelangelo, which is revealed through their exchange of letters and poems. Colonna's influence on Michelangelo's religious

⁵⁵ Abigail Brundin, "Vittoria Colonna in Manuscript," in *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna*, eds. Abigail Brundin, Tatiana Crivelli and Maria Serena Sapegno (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 57–59.

thinking and poetic expression has been discussed by a number of scholars. Michelangelo, for his part, visited the French court during François I's reign. Furthermore, Benedetto Varchi, a well-known humanist, historian and writer from Florence, connects Michelangelo, Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona. Varchi knew Michelangelo and taught several lessons about him and his poetry. It is probable that Gaspara Stampa got to know Michelangelo's poetry through one of these lessons.⁵⁶ Also, as mentioned earlier, Gaspara Stampa, composed two poems for the French King Henri II and his wife Queen Caterina de' Medici of France, who were Marguerite's nephew and friend respectively.

Even though we can only speculate on whether Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa knew each other's work, these connections and cultural networks frame them both and connect them at least through common acquaintances to several people among the French and Italian cultural elite. They shared circles, knowledge and interests in philosophical and literary traditions, and, as I will show, they both used their contemporary cultural context to write about, discuss, debate and negotiate the definitions of love and gender of their time.

Marguerite de Navarre

Marguerite's life and writings have inspired many studies, both general biographies and studies on the biographical influences on her literary œuvre. Pierre Jourda's canonized biographical study, *Marguerite d'Angoulême: duchesse d'Alençon, reine de Navarre* (1930), is perhaps the most important study on the queen's life and also the source commonly referred to by scholars. Jourda bases his study on letters and other archival material. Patricia and Rouben Cholakian, in contrast, use Marguerite's literary texts as key sources offering information about her life in their biography, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance*, published in 2006. The Cholakians claim that much of Marguerite's work reflects biographical events and they critically comment on Jourda's work

⁵⁶ Capodivacca, "Le amiche carte: Gaspara Stampa and Mirtilla," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry* (Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 128. I discuss these connections between Gaspara Stampa and Michelangelo later in this study, in the analytical chapter on Gaspara Stampa.

stating that “notwithstanding the thoroughness of Jourda’s research, his study is limited not only by the sexual prejudices of his time but by a somewhat pedantic literalism”.⁵⁷ The biographical approach the Cholakians take to Marguerite is thus a mixture of traditional archival material and other, more literary, sources. Their study has been seen as overly speculative by some critics but as a convincing and well-written biography by others.⁵⁸ I view their book as a rich biography with incorporated literary analysis and I have consulted both Jourda’s and the Cholakians’ volumes in the following sections on Marguerite’s life, as well as in the analytical chapter.

Life and Work of a Queen

Marguerite de Navarre was born in 1492 as the first child of Louise de Savoie. Louise had been predicted to give birth to a king and only two years later she gave birth to a son and the prophecy was to become reality. Marguerite and her brother grew up together at the court of Louis XII, due to their own father’s early death. At court, they were both educated under the influence and supervision of their mother. The library at Louis XII’s court held great collections of the most important works of the time, and Marguerite had access to works by Christine de Pizan, Boccaccio, Symphorien Champier, Chretien de Troyes and many others.⁵⁹ In 1515, François was crowned King of France and continued to maintain close relations with both his mother and his sister. They were called the *trinité*.⁶⁰

In 1509, the now 17-year-old Marguerite was married to Charles d’Alençon, a marriage that lasted until his death in 1525. The drawing above is by Jean Clouet, to whom are attributed several portraits of Marguerite. This beautiful

⁵⁷ Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, Xiii.

⁵⁸ For reviews of *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* see Mary McKinley, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4, Winter, 2006, and Crawford, Katherine, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 76, No. 4 D, 2008.

⁵⁹ Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, 16-17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15, Cazauran, “Preface,” in *L’Heptameron* (2000), 12. Cazauran in her turn refers to Jourda’s *Marguerite d’Angoulême*.

portrait is probably, but not confirmed to be, a young Marguerite. Due to her young age in this portrait, I would suggest that it is was most probably created at the latest in the 1520s.⁶¹

Marguerite's husband died during the battle of Pavia and the marriage ended childless. At the same battle, the enemy captured the French King. Marguerite and her mother, as part of the *trinité*, negotiated for the king's release and for the peace treaty of Cambrai, also called the *Paix des dames*.

With Marguerite's husband dead, the search for a new one began. Marguerite was of course very valuable in the context of aristocratic contract marriages, she was "a matrimonial catch", being the sister of the king. She was married to Henri de Navarre in 1527 and from then until her death in 1549 she bore the title of Queen of Navarre.⁶² In 1528, Marguerite gave birth to her first child, a daughter, who later became the Queen of Navarre entitled Jeanne III.

Nevertheless, Marguerite spent most of her time at her brother the king's court, performing the duties of a queen. During the reign of François I, who showed great interest in humanism, art and literature, Renaissance cultural ideals prospered in France. However, Marguerite's influence and interest was also crucial for the cultural development of the time. As Cholakian puts it, Marguerite was known for:

her exceptional personality, a rare combination of intelligence, wit, charm, gentleness, and zest for life. It was she [not François I himself] who would foster the work of humanist scholars, encourage the social and religious views of the reformers, and nurture the writers who would transform the French language into the vehicle of a great literature⁶³

She was the patron of writers and poets such as François Rabelais, Antoine Héroët and Clément Marot. Furthermore, she was a central figure in the reformist movement and showed great interest in the debates on love and love philosophy, not least the Neoplatonic ideas that were circulating since Marsilio Ficino's translation of Plato's works.

⁶¹ The British Museum states that the drawing dates from some time between 1520-1540.

⁶² Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43, 41.

Jean Clouet, probably a young Marguerite de Navarre, 1520-1540

Her first literary work *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* was published in 1531, one year after her second born child, a son, had died. Remarkably, this was the first literary work in France written by woman to be published during her own lifetime. She then continued to write until the end of her days, producing theatrical works, lyrical and religious poetry and the collection of novellas, later given the title *L'Heptaméron*, which remained unfinished at her death in 1549 at the age of 57.

Gaspara Stampa

Gaspara Stampa's life is not well documented, and most of the knowledge we have today originates from mentions of her in other writers' poems or dedications to her. As noted above, she was repeatedly praised for her talent and for her angelic singing voice by several prominent figures among the cultural elite. The small volume of documented facts that are known about the poet was collected by Fiora Bassanese in her *Gaspara Stampa* (1982), the first monograph written in English on the poet. Bassanese's work corrects earlier presumptions and studies on Gaspara Stampa: as mentioned earlier, both the reception history of her work and her biographical history had been subject to speculation and fictive creation.

Abdelkader Salza wrote the first modern academic article on Gaspara Stampa in 1913, also collecting historical documentation about her life.⁶⁴ This approach was much needed, because almost immediately after her death, Gaspara Stampa disappeared from historical and literary sources. When her collection of poems was brought back into memory through Louisa Bergalli's republication in 1738, it was read as a sort of biographical diary, as a representation of her unhappy life and love affairs. Bergalli's edition inspired Luigi Carrer, for example, to write the best-selling novel *Amore infelice di Gaspara Stampa* (*Unhappy love of Gaspara Stampa*) in 1851, structured as a fictive letter

⁶⁴ Abdelkader Salza, "Madonna Gasparina Stampa secondo nuove indagini," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 62, 1913.

exchange between Gaspara Stampa and her friend Ippolita Mirtilla.⁶⁵ Salza's article can be seen as a reaction to this reception of the nineteenth century, but his conclusions nevertheless came to affect views of Gaspara Stampa in another discrediting manner, as Falkeid and Feng discuss:

Stampa was not the innocent woman caught in the web of love, as she was depicted in the Romantic period by writers such as Luigi Carrer [...] Instead, according to Salza, Stampa was only a courtesan, like her contemporary Veronica Franco.⁶⁶

Since Bassanese's study in the 1980s, the critical interest in Gaspara Stampa's life and poetry has been increasing. Jane Tylus presents a rich introduction to Gaspara Stampa's known biography in her bilingual edition of Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*. The introduction by Unn Falkeid and Aileen Feng to their anthology *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa* also gathers sources of biographical material and has been valuable for my brief section on Gaspara Stampa's life below.

The Life of a Virtuosa

Gaspara Stampa was born sometime around 1523 as the second daughter in the family of a jewel merchant named Bartolomeo Stampa in Padua. The father died while the children were still young and the mother Cecilia moved the family to Venice, a prospering city of culture and commerce that was also Cecilia's native city. Wealthy from the inheritance of their father, the three children, Cassandra, Gaspara and Baldassare, were well-educated. Even before moving to Venice they had received tuition in Latin and while in Venice their education continued. They were all culturally talented; Baldassare wrote poetry, Cassandra and Gaspara played instruments and sang. Baldassare aspired to become a skilled poet, but he died at a young age. Gaspara Stampa was then the

⁶⁵ Luigi Carrer, *Amore Infelice di Gaspara Stampa* (Venice: Naratovich, 1851), 2^a ed.

⁶⁶ Falkeid and Feng, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa*, 3.

most praised of the siblings, mainly for her beautiful singing voice, but soon also for her performance of Petrarch's lyrics and her own lyrical poetry. Her talent led her to her trade as a *virtuosa*, which allowed entrance into the famous salons of Venice, such as the one held by Domenico Venier.

“Il ricco Epulone” by Bonifacio De’ Pitati 1533

As there are no known paintings of Gaspara Stampa we have to allow ourselves to some speculation. De’ Pitati was a Venetian painter active during the lifetime of Gaspara Stampa and his “Il ricco Epulone” depicts a group that could have been inspired by her, here represented with the lute and her sister Cassandra admiring her, along with members of the *literati* circles of Venice.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Chris DiMatteo discusses this painting's possible depiction of Gaspara Stampa on his website <http://cdimatteo.com/italian/translating-gaspara-stampa/>. It is also used as the front-cover of an edition of Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* printed by (Biblioteca Univ. Rizzoli: BUR Classici, 2002; 1994).

However, the Stampa house had also been a meeting place for notable people among the cultural elite of Venice who, according to Tylus, gathered around the younger brother and promising poet Baldassare. When he died at the age of 19, it “prompted one of his close friends, the industrious Francesco Sansovino, to dedicate several works to Gaspara”, mentioned earlier.⁶⁸ Gaspara Stampa’s fame increased, and she was described and compared with the ancient Greek poet Sappho by the well-known scholar and writer Benedetto Varchi. Tylus states that:

it was Varchi who wrote the second dedicatory poem for Stampa that links her to Sappho, calling her “the Sappho of our day” (“Saffo de’ nostri giorni, alta Gaspara”). In another verse written for the volume, Varchi claims to be consoled by the thought that Stampa “will live forever, so that Athens and Rome will see Sappho and Lucrezia descend from their thrones” (“e tal ch’Atene e Roma / Saffo e Lucrezia uscir vedran di sella”).⁶⁹

It is worth noting that Venice at this time was culturally flourishing, being a major city for printing houses; for example, the famous Giolito press and of course that of Aldus Manutius. Nevertheless, as Courtney Quaintance notes, the city was not, in comparison with Florence, for example, an environment specifically encouraging towards women writers. An exception was the Giolito house, which printed the first editions of Tullia d’Aragona’s poems and dialogue on love, both under her own supervision.⁷⁰ But, as Quaintance argues, the contact with “male literati was a double-edged sword, since it was precisely their freewheeling lifestyle that made them [Gaspara Stampa and Veronica Franco] suspect.” In Florence, a courtesan and poet like Aragona could be defended by a duke, but in Venice, “social and cultural norms did not allow

⁶⁸ Tylus, “Introduction,” in *Collected Poems*, 7. Tylus further explains that most of the biographical facts known about Stampa’s life has been compiled from “correspondence and civic records as well as various dedications to her during the last decade of her life”. Also, from “Introduction”, 6.

⁶⁹ Jane Tylus, “Naming Sappho: Gaspara Stampa and the Recovery of the Sublime in Early Modern Europe,” in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa*, 19.

⁷⁰ Androniki Dialeti discusses the implications of Giolito’s ‘female-friendly’ printing house and argues that it mainly had to do with a construction of masculinity rather than actual proto-feminist interests. Androniki Dialeti, “Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity in Early Modern Italy,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2011, and “The Publisher Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, Female Readers and the Debate about Women in the Sixteenth-Century Italy,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, 2004.

patrician men to openly align themselves with women of lower status and questionable morality, especially in a public endeavor such as writing”.⁷¹ Quaintance also notes, however, that Gaspara Stampa’s closest circle in Venice “consisted mainly of middling-status composers, musicians, and writers”. Among them, we find Girolamo Parabosco, the musician who celebrated Gaspara Stampa’s angelic voice in a *Letter amorose* of 1545, Francesco Sansovino and Girolamo Ruscelli.⁷²

Gaspara Stampa wrote and worked as a *virtuosa* within the Petrarchan tradition that was now flourishing in Italy and beyond. Furthermore, she was familiar with and had probably read and discussed many of the love treatises circulating in the salons of Venice and Europe. As Fiora Bassanese points out:

Gaspara Stampa was doubtlessly associated with the circle of people who produced the treatises on love and was inevitably familiar with their concepts and background sources. [...] Venetian high society was impregnated with the ideas and concepts propounded by the Platonizers and disciples of love. Plato, like Petrarca, was in the air, discussed, debated, read, misread, or merely inhaled.⁷³

Sansovino’s dedications to Gaspara Stampa, for example his *Ragionamento d’amore* (1545), displayed in the picture below, is one example of her involvement with these discussions. Furthermore, the dedications by Varchi, the intertextual parallels to Tullia d’Aragona and Sperone Speroni, which I will insist upon, along with Cassandra Stampa’s choice to dedicate the 1554 edition of Gaspara Stampa’s *Rime* to della Casa, broadens the poet’s cultural connections.

Thus, Gaspara Stampa entertained at the salons of Venice and it is probable that she met the man who is addressed most frequently in her *Rime* in this environment, namely count Collaltino di Collalto (1523-1568). Their relationship lasted for some years, but Collalto spent most of the time abroad fighting in different wars. For example, he left first for England in the 1540s with

⁷¹ Courtney Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity and the Exchange of Women in Renaissance Venice* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2015), 141.

⁷² Ibid., 142.

⁷³ Fiora Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 88.

a wish to serve in the military, while in 1549 he fought in France against England. It is generally agreed that it was his choice not to marry Gaspara Stampa due to her lower social rank.

However, opposing a common argument that he married another woman during Gaspara Stampa's lifetime, the records show that he did not marry until 1557, that is, three years after Gaspara Stampa's death in 1554.⁷⁴ Furthermore, as both Stefano Bianchi and Ann Rosalind Jones note with reference to Emilia Ceseracciu Veronese's discovery in the 1970s of her sister Cassandra Stampa's last will and testament from 1576, Gaspara Stampa had two daughters named Elisabetta and Sulpizia with an Andrea Gritti.⁷⁵ The cause of her death has also vexed scholars and biographers, and still continues to do so. The most convincing theory, among heartbreak, poisoning, and others, is that she fell ill with some kind of fever. She died in Venice in the house of the Venetian aristocrat Geronimo Morosini in 1554.

To summarize, both Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite were directly involved in cultural environments in which love and gender were disputed. They respectively attended the Venetian salons and the French courts and they both contributed to the on-going dialogue through their literary works and performances of the same. The theme of love has also been a primary concern for scholars of the two women writers, and in the following I will situate this study within this field of research.

⁷⁴ Tylus, "Introduction," in *Complete Poems*, 11, note 33.

⁷⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones, "Voi e tu, Love and Law: Gaspara Stampa's Post-Petrarchan Jealousy," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa*, 122. Bianchi, *La Scrittura poetica femminile nel cinquecento Veneto. Gaspara Stampa e Veronica Franco*, (Manziana, Roma: Vecchiarelli, 2013), 35 note 1. Emilia Ceseracciu Veronese, "Il Testamento di Cassandra Stampa: contributi alla biografia di Gaspara," *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia patavina di scienze, lettere ed arti, Memorie della classe di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 1979: 3 (1976–7). The father was probably not Andrea Gritti, the famous doge of Venice, but a younger member of his family bearing the identical name. Another man, Andrea di Giovanni di San Martin, is also suggested by Bianchi.

Benedetto Varchi's memorial poem in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*, 1554

Francesco Sansovino's dedications to Gaspara Stampa found in his edition of Boccaccio's *Ameto* and in Sansovino's own *Ragionamento*

State of the Art

This overview of the field of scholarly research concerns both general studies and those containing particular analyses of the discussions on love, gender and sexuality in the works of Marguerite de Navarre and Gaspara Stampa. Being two of the most well-known women writers of the early modern period, the research interest shown in them is extensive. However, the history of their critical reception has been shaped by time and context, which perhaps is most visible in the case of Gaspara Stampa. Due to the gender-critical approach of this study, I mainly build on research published during the last 20 years.

Studies on Marguerite de Navarre

Lucien Febvre was one of the first scholars to discuss the question of the different kinds of love represented in Marguerite de Navarre's work in his *Amour sacré, amour profane: Autour de l'Heptaméron* (1944). Febvre's work has had a great influence on research during the twentieth century and still needs to be considered by any scholar of Marguerite, just like Jourda's biographical study discussed earlier. When it comes to studies of Neoplatonic influences on the queen's work, Abel Lefranc's *Marguerite de Navarre and le platonisme de la Renaissance* from 1898 is one of the earliest. However, this study's lack of distinction between religious Neoplatonism and philosophical ideas on love was later debated by Christine Martineau in an article from 1976, who for her part, accepts the philosophical influence on Marguerite's religious thinking but denies any trace of Neoplatonic love ideals.⁷⁶

In 1966, Jules Gelernt published his *World of Many Loves: The Heptaméron of Marguerite de Navarre*, a dense, short volume on several of the different approaches to love represented in Marguerite's collection. He discusses the courtly love tradition as well as Neoplatonic discourse. Gelernt is, however, not

⁷⁶ Christine Martineau, "La Platonisme de Marguerite de Navarre," *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance*, No. 4, 1976.

humble when he concludes that Marguerite's talent is inferior to that of male writers:

Lacking the imaginative force to create a myth, Marguerite could achieve no synthesis comparable to Dante's; never the detached artist Boccaccio was, she could write no *Decameron* either. Here is undoubtedly a minor work, but nonetheless a classic.⁷⁷

This is a dated conclusion that minimizes the importance of Marguerite's work and her contribution to both women's writing and French literary history in general. Nevertheless, the study sometimes informs my readings of Marguerite's Neoplatonic and narratological appropriation; thus, genre and tradition are both of great importance for my analysis. I will consider some intertextual references to Boccaccio, but primarily those relating to courtly love literature and, especially, Neoplatonic dialogues on love.

In her "True Stories and Alternative Discourses: The Game of Love in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*" of 2004, Elizabeth Zegura assesses how the frame story and setting for the *devisants* are constituted as a neutral space of equality, within which the *devisants* are given the opportunity to speak and express different opinions on love with no regard to their sex or social status. This contrasts with the reality of the court, where strict rules apply to behavior, courting, speaking and dancing. Zegura recently also published *Marguerite de Navarre's Shifting Gaze. Perspectives on gender, class, and politics in the Heptaméron*, which is an ambitious study. She discusses, to name a few examples, sexual difference and gender stereotypes as well as marriage and infidelity. While building on Zegura's studies, I nevertheless also argue that the *Heptaméron* makes use of the manners of real courtly life and conversation in similar ways to the dialogue genre's mimetic rhetoric – a genre to which Marguerite's collection lies very close to.

In *Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (2004), Barbara Stephenson examines Marguerite's political influence through her vast correspondence

⁷⁷ Jules Gelernt, *World of Many Loves: The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 167.

with over one hundred correspondents. Her study contributes a nuanced picture of the queen's roles and argues that she "held an anomalous position in France because of her unique political status, and that she operated in both traditional 'female' and traditional 'male' roles".⁷⁸ This position is further examined in Carin Franzén's studies of Marguerite's literary writings.⁷⁹ As Franzén states "they [Christine de Pizan and Marguerite de Navarre] make use of dominant configurations of love and desire freeing them in ways that serve their own desire and interests in the interplay of power relations".⁸⁰ Franzén's work mainly uses approaches from a psychoanalytical perspective and is also, significantly for my study, as seen in the citation, influenced by Foucault's analysis of subversive possibilities within the power relations that constitute the discourse of love.

Further within the field of feminist and queer studies, Gary Ferguson has made several contributions on Marguerite. A selection of Ferguson's studies includes: *Mirroring Belief: Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry* (1992), *Queer (Re)Readings of the French Renaissance* (2008), and "History or Her Story" in *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the Nouvelle in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France* (2005). He also co-edited *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre* (2014) with Mary McKinley. The introduction to this anthology, written by the two editors, is very informative and contextualizes Marguerite and her work in early modern France. Furthermore, their co-written chapter "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World" contains discussions of importance for my own interpretation of, for example, novella 19 and the question of marriage.

In Ferguson's *Queer (Re)Readings*, I find both the introductory chapter, with sections such as "Pre-modern (homo)sexuality: historical and theoretical issues" and "Homosexuality and gender: historical (trans)formation", and the chapter on the androgyne inspiring. *Narrative Worlds* gives both a background to the genre of the novella and several interesting chapters on Marguerite. Ferguson's

⁷⁸ Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁷⁹ Carin Franzén, "Polyphony on Love," in *Allusions and Reflections: Greek and Roman Mythology in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre et. al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) and "The Divisions of Love".

⁸⁰ Franzén, "The Divisions of Love", 93.

chapter focuses on novella 12, investigating how Marguerite changed the story from other previous versions of the same, for her own purpose of exploring questions of gender. Novella 12 is also part of my material and Ferguson's approach is most relevant.

Philip Ford's "Neo-Platonic Themes of Ascent" is of great relevance for this study, due to the discussion of both the religious side of Neoplatonism and Neoplatonic love theory, respectively analyzed in Marguerite's poetry and in the *Heptaméron*. However, while Ford mentions the presence of Socratic relations in Ficino's perfect love, he does not discuss this deeply, or the fact that perfect love in the *Heptaméron* is strategically appropriated in order to enhance women's positions, as I will in this study. Furthermore, he points out that Marguerite is not a philosopher and, in many cases, "it will be the images with which these ideas are associated rather than necessarily the underlying theory that will have the most impact on her writing".⁸¹ This statement reminds us of the probability that Marguerite was familiar with a broad variety of sources when forming her view of Neoplatonic love, which I wish to emphasize even more than Ford does.

In "Friendship Revisited: *Heptaméron* Tales 10, 21, 15, and 70", Mary J. Baker discusses the importance of conversation and Platonic friendship in Marguerite's stories.⁸² This analysis is also relevant for my study, since I share her interest in the Neoplatonic influence on the work and also on novella 70. Researchers like Katherine Crawford have also shown how the Neoplatonism of Ficino is transformed from homo- to heterosexual when introduced and discussed in France during the sixteenth century. Todd W. Reeser discusses how this transformation is represented by Marguerite in his "Fracturing the Male Androgyne in the *Heptaméron*" (2004). He analyzes novellas 47, 12 and 63, showing how the writer splits up a male-male friendship in favor of a heterosexual relation (marriage).

Reeser has also contributed to the field of gender studies with his *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture* (2006) and in his study of the first French

⁸¹ Philip Ford, "Neo-Platonic Themes of Ascent," in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre*, 90.

⁸² Mary J Baker, "Friendship Revisited: *Heptaméron* Tales 10, 21, 15, and 70," *Romance Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Winter, 2001.

Neoplatonists of the Renaissance in *Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance* (2016). Reeser also discusses the creation of gender binaries in the prologue of the *Heptaméron* in an article from 2002. He states that “although Marguerite is exploring and critiquing gender roles, the question of sex can be factored into the gender equation” and further that the “fluidity of gender, then, is predicted on the existence of a stable sex/gender dichotomy”.⁸³ Building on Reeser, I reassess how the metaphor of the androgyne is used in a number of ways, not only to split up male-male relations, and in which women characters often play a crucial role in these stories and discussions.

The mythological figure has also been studied by Marian Rothstein. In the article “Mutations of the Androgyne: Its Functions in Early Modern French Literature” (2003) and her book *The Androgyne in Early Modern France* (2015), Rothstein discusses the use of Aristophanes’ myth and the transformations through which it passes in several literary works of the Renaissance. Rothstein’s work has great significance for my study and I trace Marguerite’s literary use of the figure in the *Heptaméron* with inspiration from Rothstein’s research on early modern French adaptations of the myth. She divides these adaptations into four major categories:

(1) the spiritual androgyne as human soul made in the image of God, (2) the coital androgyne, in which the joining of two bodies temporarily approximates the originary condition of the creature in Plato’s myth, (3) the marital androgyne, in which the longing for the other in Plato’s figure merged with the Mosaic androgyne, man and wife as one flesh, and (4) as an explanation for infidelity due to the mismatching of the split halves.⁸⁴

The notion of androgyny in the Marguerite’s religious work is assessed in Jeffrey Kendrick’s “Gender Flexibility and Androgyny in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Chansons spirituelles*” (2017).⁸⁵ While this part of her work is not

⁸³ Todd Reeser, “The Assumption and Reorganization of Sex in the Prologue to the *Heptaméron*,” *Women in French Studies*, Vol. 10, 2002, 127.

⁸⁴ Marian Rothstein, “Mutations of the Androgyne: Its Functions in Early Modern French Literature,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 2003, 409.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Kendrick, “Women in the World and Works of Marguerite de Navarre,” *L’Esprit Creature*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Fall, 2017.

discussed in the present study, Kendrick's discussion underlines the importance of the androgyne to Marguerite's subversive ideas of gender. Paula Sommers also assesses the figure in religious terms, as a metaphor for the Christian community, and investigates how the ten *devisants* can be seen in this light.

I have found further inspiration for my approach to novella 43 from Hope Glidden's and Nora Martin Peterson's respective studies of Jambicque's gender transgressions. Peterson argues for the importance of power and knowledge in her "What Women Know: The Power of *Savoir* in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*" (2017), while Glidden is more concerned with how the endeavor of writing as a woman can be viewed in an androgynous light. Both of these aspects are also major focuses in my interpretation of this novella, but also of novella 70 on the Duchess of Burgundy.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Nancy Frelick's research on women's illicit love relations in the *Heptaméron* is also highly relevant to consider, since the question of women's subversions of prevailing gender restrictions in concern of love is a core in her approach as well as in this study.⁸⁷

Richard Regosin's and Reinier Leushuis' respective works on novella 70 are also of relevance for my analysis. Regosin investigates how secrets play a great part in the repression and expression of gender. Referring to Foucault, he states that "by relegating sexuality to silence and to secrecy these same constraints paradoxically ensure its expression".⁸⁸ Even though my focus lies specifically on the use of the androgyne, I build on Regosin's study, especially in my interpretation of the discussion that follows the novella.

Another side of the constitution of gender and of the norms for sexuality and gender that have been studied in the *Heptaméron* is violence and rape. Patricia Cholakian's *Rape and Writing in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron* (1991) investigates the biographical history behind stories depicting sexual assaults

⁸⁶ Nora Martin Peterson, "What Women Know: The Power of *Savoir* in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *L'Esprit Creature*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Fall, 2017. Hope Glidden, "Gender, Essence, and the Feminine," in *Critical tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, eds. John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ Nancy Frelick, "Female Infidelity: Ideology, Subversion, and Feminist Practice in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 56, Fall 2001.

⁸⁸ Richard Regosin, "Leaky Vessels: Secrets of Narrative in the *Heptaméron* and the *Châtelaine's Lament*," *Mediaevalia*, Vol. 22, 1999.

against women. Mary J. Baker also demonstrates in "Rape, Attempted Rape, and Seduction in *Heptaméron*" (1992) how several of Marguerite's stories "contain imagery pertaining to openings and access, including doors and staircases, and imagery suggesting barriers and denial or difficulty of access, including walls and covering".⁸⁹ She points out, through a feminist and psychoanalytical approach, that Marguerite is reflecting upon and stressing the difference between rape and seduction.

Cathleen M. Bauschatz raises the question of marriage in her comparison of Marguerite and Rabelais. She argues that the two writers represent similar views on clandestine marriage in their works and that the question of this type of marriage "forces Marguerite to make a choice between a spiritual, other-worldly definition of marriage as belonging only to God, and a quite this-worldly, practical concern for class, family, and inheritance."⁹⁰ Bauschatz claims that Marguerite tends to speak for the latter definition and that marriage represents the union of physical and spiritual.

To conclude this overview of scholarly studies on Marguerite, it can be noted that the institution of marriage, whether clandestine or entered into in accordance with the law, is one of the most common themes in the *Heptaméron* and also a central part of this study. The importance of this discussion is also enhanced by Robert Bernard but, in contrast to my study, he opposes the importance of Neoplatonism. My aim, however, is to show how Neoplatonic metaphors are also used for marriage, something that remains un-discussed in Bernard's article. Edward Benson in turn discusses the meaning of the on-going religious changes to marriage within sixteenth century French society. He states that "[r]ules for marriage choice were changing, and with them the rules for married life, but many contemporaries, Marguerite among them, understood neither the depth or the speed of the change".⁹¹ As a final note, I argue, in

⁸⁹ Mary J. Baker, "Rape, Attempted Rape, and Seduction in the *Heptaméron*," *Romance Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Aug. 1992.

⁹⁰ Cathleen M Bauschatz, "Rabelais and Marguerite de Navarre on Sixteenth-Century Views of Clandestine Marriage", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer, 2003.

⁹¹ Edward Benson, "Marriage Ancestral and Conjugal in the *Heptameron*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1979, 275.

contrast to Benson's conclusion, that marriage is both problematized and used as a space for negotiation in the *Heptaméron*.

Studies on Gaspara Stampa

The early research interest in Gaspara Stampa was colored by the romantic fictional history created in plays and fictional letter correspondence following upon the re-publishing of her poems in the late nineteenth century. However, the negative view of women writers dominated for centuries, as for example when Benedetto Croce's wrote in an article in *Scritti di Storia Letteraria e Politica* that Gaspara Stampa was "a woman; and usually women, when they do not ape men, use poetry by subjecting it to their affections, loving their lover or their children more than poetry".⁹² This view had already been strongly encouraged by Salza, as discussed earlier, but has unfortunately also been represented in more recent research. For example, Frank Warnke states when comparing Gaspara Stampa with Vittoria Colonna, that "Vittoria was a wife and chatelaine, Gaspara a prostitute" and further that her collected poems "are devoted exclusively to obsessive sexual love".⁹³ These are conclusions that will be thoroughly opposed in this present study, which instead builds upon the feminist re-reading initiated by Fiora Bassanese.

Thus, Bassanese aims to criticize previous researchers like Croce and Salza for their conclusions and comments on the poet's work. She views Gaspara Stampa, not only as a poet, "but also as one of a number of women who developed refined and vigorous artistic skills within the framework of a predominantly masculine culture" in her book *Gaspara Stampa* (1982).⁹⁴ Presenting a detailed overview of the cultural climate in the Venetian salons

⁹² "Fu donna; e di solito la donna, quando non si dà a scimmiettare l'uomo, si serve della poesia sommettendola ai suoi affetti, amando il proprio amante o i propri figli più della poesia." Benedetto Croce, "Conversazioni critiche," in *Scritti di Storia Letteraria e Politica*, vol X., 2^a ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1924), 225. Bassanese's translation, Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 32.

⁹³ Warnke, *Three Women Poets*, 53.

⁹⁴ Bassanese, "Preface," in *Gaspara Stampa*.

and Gaspara Stampa's work and role within them, Bassanese's study is an excellent starting point for all Gaspara Stampa scholars or readers.

Nevertheless, I take a slightly different approach concerning Gaspara Stampa's Neoplatonic influence and appropriation. At the end of her study, Bassanese argues more for a traditional sublimated love ideal, even though she declares in a more recent article that, while "Petrarch sought love as *caritas* and was tortured by the essential negativity of desire as *cupiditas*, Stampa receives love openly and guiltlessly as *eros*".⁹⁵ Concerning the Petrarchan tradition, Mary B. Moore further points out that on one hand Gaspara Stampa follows the Petrarchan stylistic code, but on the other, she renews, transgresses and creates *a new ideal of love*, which stands in opposition to the Petrarchists'.⁹⁶ I agree with Moore on this, but I would like to take it a step further by arguing that Gaspara Stampa also reassesses Neoplatonic ideals in her emphasis on the importance of the body in the experience of love. As I will show, she employs both the philosophical and the lyrical tradition in subversive manners.

Since I will consider intertextual echoes that can be found between Gaspara Stampa, Petrarch, Michelangelo, Speroni and Aragona, the question of the strategies used by women authors when writing in genres and codes created by men has to be raised. Gordon Braden argues that the "dominance of Petrarchism helps explain why more women did not pursue a literary career; it is the means by which an oppressive ideology of gender relations gains power over first-person lyric utterance".⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Gaspara Stampa, and many other contemporary Italian women poets, altered this power relation, and created a female subject, expressing her love within this tradition. Furthermore, Braden also states that Gaspara Stampa "has become the one with something, everything, to say. Sexual love, at least in this context, is the vanishing point between female and male silence."⁹⁸ As the present study also aims to discuss,

⁹⁵ Fiora Bassanese, "Gaspara Stampa's Petrarchan commemorations: validating a female lyric discourse," *Annali d'Italianistica*. 22, Annual 2004, 155.

⁹⁶ Mary B Moore, *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 59-60.

⁹⁷ Gordon Braden, "Gaspara Stampa and the gender of Petrarchism," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. Vol 38, No. 2, 1996.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Braden not only assesses how Gaspara Stampa's female subject position is created, but also how sexuality is used as a strategy to create this position.

Janet L. Smarr points out the role of music and performativity in Gaspara Stampa's collection in her "Gaspara Stampa's Poetry for Performance" (2003). Smarr shows how the poet addresses an audience – an audience she finds important in her aim to achieve fame and praise. In *Rime 1*, Gaspara Stampa rewrites Petrarch's first poem in *Canzoniere*, or *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, and says: "I hope to find glory among the well-born", a line that points both to her aim and to the audience before which she stands, that is, the salon attendances of Venice. As I argue, Gaspara Stampa's work can be seen as both reflecting and subverting the norms of cultural expression of love and gender in her context. And, as I will specifically will show, in how she makes use of references to both people and writings produced among the cultural elite in her lyrical poems, the performative nature of her poetry is important. This underlines how Gaspara Stampa is to be viewed as an active participant in the ongoing discussions regarding the definitions of perfect love within these circles. This dimension is especially relevant in the section where Gaspara Stampa's poem to Speroni is analyzed, but also in her parallels to Tullia d'Aragona.

Smarr has also compared Speroni's and Tullia d'Aragona's dialogues on love in her "A Dialogue of Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni" of 2012. Smarr's method of a close reading of the dialogues leads to the conclusive argument that Aragona's text constitutes a direct response to Speroni's.⁹⁹ While this argument is repeated to a certain extent by Reinier Leushuis (2018), Julia Hairston (2014) and Rinaldina Russell (1997), they all make a broader intertextual reading which reveals more complexities of Aragona's work. Informed and inspired by these studies, I argue for further intertextual relations also between Gaspara Stampa, Aragona and Speroni.

The volume *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry* (2015), edited by Unn Falkeid and Aileen A. Feng, presents a number of chapters of interest for the present thesis. Of particular relevance to this study is Veronica Andreani's chapter "Gaspara Stampa as Salamander and Phoenix: Reshaping

⁹⁹ Janet L. Smarr, "A Dialogue on Dialogues: Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni," *MLN*, Vol. 113, No. 1, 1998.

the Tradition of the Abandoned Woman", in which Andreani discusses the classical tradition of female, abandoned lovers such as Medea, Sappho and Dido. Andreani's central focus, similar to my own, is to investigate Gaspara Stampa's poetics in order to explain the presence of more than one lover in her *Rime*. Andreani argues that the poet's "radical diversion" from both classical subtexts such as Ovid's *Heroids* and Petrarchan tropes forces us to ask: "how can the portrait of the faithful lover, whose loyalty is exemplary, stand side by side with the presence of another flame within the same poetic collection?"¹⁰⁰ This question, and the focus on the phoenix, are central to my study as well. However, while building on Andreani, I primarily seek to explain how the destabilizations of traditional power relations within love are achieved through a rethinking of Neoplatonic as well as Petrarchan figures and metaphors.

Platonic negotiations are also at central in Unn Falkeid's "The Sublime Realism of Gaspara Stampa" and in Frederico Schneider's "Sublime Love Pains in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*", which both informs my study. Furthermore, Angela Capodivacca discusses the phoenix metaphor and the importance of female friendship in Gaspara Stampa's poems in "*Le amiche carte*: Gaspara Stampa and Mirtilla". Capodivacca also discusses intertextual relations between Gaspara Stampa, Michelangelo and Petrarch. The anthology furthermore contains contributions by Tylus, William Kennedy and Ulrike Schneider, which are also discussed and referred to throughout this study.

Stanley V. Benfell's "Translating Petrarchan Desire in Vittoria Colonna and Gaspara Stampa" is of relevance to my argument on Gaspara Stampa's self-fashioning as a woman poet and her appropriations of Neoplatonic tropes.¹⁰¹ Benfell discusses how this is done through a re-writing of Petrarchan desire in his intricate analysis and argues that Colonna handles it by her use of Neoplatonic love ideals while Gaspara Stampa, in contrast, negates some of these ideals. I owe much to Benfell's analysis, but I argue that Gaspara Stampa

¹⁰⁰ Veronica Andreani, "Gaspara Stampa as Salamander and Phoenix: Reshaping the Tradition of the Abandoned Woman," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa*, 172.

¹⁰¹ V. Stanley Benfell, "Translating Petrarchan Desire in Vittoria Colonna and Gaspara Stampa," in *Translating Desire in Medieval And Early Modern Literature*, eds. Craig A. Berry & Heather Richardson Hayton (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005).

strategically re-defines, and thus *negotiates* rather than *negates*, Neoplatonic ideals.

Stefano Bianchi's study of 2013, *La scrittura poetica femminile nel Cinquecento Veneto: Gaspara Stampa e Veronica Franco*, contributes specifically to my analysis of Gaspara Stampa's references to people among the cultural elite, but also to some extent to my discussion of the ironic aspect of her poetry. This is something I discuss specifically in relation to her use of the androgyne as a symbol for perfect union.

Finally, a recent study on Gaspara Stampa consist of Monica Farnetti's *Dolceridente: La scoperta di Gaspara Stampa* of 2017. Farnetti's study aims to provide an overall perspective on the poet's life and work. Thus, it covers many different aspects of her poetics, among which Farnetti's discussion of the earthly aspects of love in *Rime* is specifically informative for my analysis on the same theme.

Theories on Love

The early modern period, and specifically the sixteenth century, was a time when literature on love was enormously popular. This popularity was probably partly due to the ability to print and distribute books in a much cheaper and faster way than previously, and the increased literacy that followed. As Ian Moulton explains:

As literacy spread, notions of romantic love spread with it – not just through elite poetic forms, like the vogue for Petrarchan poetry, but also in more prosaic forms such as *novelle* and self-help books. Philosophical dialogues and medical texts dealing with love also proliferated – both appearing in the vernacular for the first time.¹⁰²

Thus, some of the most important discourses on love of the sixteenth century are the love dialogues, such as Marsilio Ficino's *De amore*, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità de amore*. In other genres, we find Antoine Héroët's *L'Androgyne* and *La Parfaicte Amye* and the reprinted editions of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and *Ars Amatoria*. Love was also the main theme explored in the Petrarchan tradition, in chivalric romances and courtly love poetry.

However, the philosophical sources for the early modern discussions on love were mainly those of the classical period. As cultural historian Peter Burke emphasizes, reassessments of ideas are subject to transformation as they travel through historical periods. In his introduction to *The European Renaissance* (1998), he states that from the "point of view of reception theorists, the Renaissance created antiquity as much as antiquity created the Renaissance. What artists and writers practiced was not so much imitation as transformation".¹⁰³ The term transformation is also used by Stephen Halliwell as

¹⁰² Ian Frederick Moulton, *Love in Print in the Sixteenth Century: The Popularization of Romance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 17.

¹⁰³ Peter Burke, *The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 7.

a title for his chapter on early Neoplatonists, “Renewal and Transformation: Neoplatonism and Mimesis” in *Aesthetics of Mimesis* (2002). He explains that “Neoplatonism is [...] revisionist” and that we seem “to require a concept of Platonism as something more than a static affiliation – rather as a kind of philosophical spirit capable of perpetual revivification, though each time in a subtly different guise.”¹⁰⁴ This act of transformation is something that can be claimed for the early modern reception of Plato’s *Symposium*.

First translated and adapted into Latin by Marsilio Ficino in his *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de Amore* (finished 1469 and printed 1484), or *De amore* as he called it later, after he had translated it into the vernacular.¹⁰⁵ Ficino’s dialogue both initiates a lively philosophical discussion on love and a new renaissance for the dialogue genre. The dialogue on love had its heyday during the first half of the sixteenth century, and a majority of the writers also entered into dialogue with other writers. When discussing the influence of Plato’s love philosophy, it is therefore logical to begin with Ficino’s *De amore*, and in particular to discuss his appropriation of the speeches of Pausanias and of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*.

However, as stated previously, love was represented in a number of literary genres during the early modern period, such as the novella, courtly poetry, *il dolce stil nuovo* and Petrarchan lyrics. As this study aims to discuss the specificity of Marguerite’s and Gaspara Stampa’s perspectives on love and gender, the following pages present the discourses and genres that inform the women writers’ appropriations most closely.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 314.

¹⁰⁵ In the following, I will refer to the Italian version, which Ficino finished in 1474, but was not printed until 1544. Both Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite could have read the Latin edition, but both of them also read Italian. When we reach the 1540s, when they were also highly involved in the debates on love and on women, the Italian version had been printed. As mentioned earlier, Marguerite also commissioned a French translation of the text, but she was familiar with the content of Ficino’s work before this translation.

From the Troubadours to the Novella

The troubadour lyric developed in southern France during the eleventh century within the courts of Provence. Gathering a number of lyrical genres, the connection between all troubadour poetry was the topic of chivalric and courtly love. The word troubadour derives from the Occitan *trobar* for *to compose, to work*, and thus refers to the one who composes poetry, in contrast to the *jongleur*, who performed others' writings at courtly festivities. The classical period of the troubadour lyric was the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, with poets such as Bernard de Ventadour, Bertrand de Born and Beatrice de Dia.

Bernard de Ventadour depicted in a thirteenth-century *vida*

As for the ideal of courtly love, which began as a literary fiction, a trope, it consists of a knight who falls in love with and begins to court a noble lady, preferably his master's wife. This triangular of loyalty, love and duty between lover/knight, beloved/lady and master/husband, make the knight's desires impossible to fulfill, resulting in an intense longing and extreme praise of the noble lady.

Starting within the troubadour lyric, this trope came to develop into other genres such as the *Romans Breton*, the chivalric romances of Chretien de Troyes (1130-1191) and the *lais* of Marie de France (twelfth century). The term *amour*

courtois, courtly love, is thus a concept that incorporates many genres depicting this love practice, named and later popularized by the French scholar Gaston Paris in an article of 1883 on the tales of Lancelot. Paris defined this kind of love as an idolizing and ennobling discipline, as “un art, une science, une vertu”; a definition which was adopted and further developed by scholars of the medieval genres on love.¹⁰⁶

Through the popularity of this love ideal in literary compositions, courtly love also came to affect the social life at courts in Europe. An early example of a treatise discussing the implications for people’s behavior, appearance and way to speak is Andreas Capellanus’s (1150-1220) *De amore* (c. 1185). Capellanus’s treatise, written as a dialogue inspired by Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, was composed at the request by Marie de Champagne (1174-1204). It is structured into three books in which a young pupil, Walter, is instructed in the art of courtly love, or perhaps more correctly, how to avoid the dangers connected with this kind of love.¹⁰⁷

Even more significant for this study is Baldassare Castiglione’s very famous *Il libro del Cortegiano* published in 1528. Widely distributed and immensely popular it became a conduct book for courtly behavior, in which the ability of *sprezzatura* was extremely important. This was the ability to make anything look or sound effortless, regardless of the difficulty of the task or the amount of reading that was needed in order to follow discussions on philosophy, the art of war or literature. The courtier with *sprezzatura* played every role without effort, or at least without showing effort.

In *Il Cortegiano*, Castiglione based one of his characters on Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), a well-known contemporary poet and scholar who himself had written a similar book on love entitled *Gli Asolani* (1505). In *Il Cortegiano*, Bembo represents Neoplatonic ideals on love which, I argue, came to inspire both Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa and will thus be thoroughly discussed in this

¹⁰⁶ Philippa Kim Ji-Hyun, “‘L’Amour courtois’ de Gaston Paris: une lecture décadente du ‘Chevalier de la Charrette?’” *The French Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, Feb., 2010. The citation from Paris is also from this article and is found on page 593. C. S. Lewis discussed the theme in his *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford, 1936), and a more contemporary example is Howard Bloch in *Medieval Misogyny*.

¹⁰⁷ Paolo Cherchi, *Andreas and the Ambiguity of Courtly Love* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1994).

study. I will return to Bembo's impact on Italian language and literature shortly. Castiglione's book was reprinted several times over the following decades and came to influence literature as well as courtly life in Italy, France, and beyond.

Il libro del Cortegiano, Giolito Press 1552, Frontispiece and first page of “Il Primo Libro”

The popularization of the novella genre is attributed to Giovanni Boccaccio and his *Decameron*, but can of course be situated as a development of the epic genres that was undertaken during the early modern period. However, its history and origin are far from easy to unravel, and scholars have argued for a wide variety of sources, as Gary Ferguson and David LaGuardia explain:

Since scholars have been able to locate the *nouvelle's* analogues in narrative and non-narrative forms that developed in the most disparate of linguistic and historical settings, it would appear that the more the *nouvelle's* origins and sources are identified and explicated, the more proliferous and elusive they are revealed to be.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson and LaGuardia, *Narrative Worlds*, 4.

Thematically, the novella is not a genre that only depicts love; it also includes stories about many, often rather comic, topics. However, love and desire are prominent in the most well-known works within the genre, such as *Decameron*, *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelle*, *Canterbury Tales*, and of course the *Heptaméron*.

The novella is characterized by its short format, making it related to the *lai* and the *romance* discussed above. However, the novella is written in prose, in contrast to the versified chivalric romances, and is also known for the use of stereotypical characters such as cuckolds, gluttons, adulteresses and thieves. Many collections of novellas are structured in a similar way, surrounded by a framing story and containing various numbers of storytellers. In *Decameron*, the plot is set in Florence, Italy, where plague is raging and a group of seven women decide to escape the city's misery for a villa in the countryside. Certainly, the women cannot not travel on their own but need three men to accompany them as well as a full staff of servants. The idea is similar in the *Heptaméron*, but instead of plague there is a flood that forces the balanced total of five men and five women to gather at a monastery.

Before I return to the lyrical genres, we can note that the literary impact of the novella, popularizing prose written in vernacular languages, primarily depicting entertaining topics for a broad readership, was crucial as it marked the territory for the development of the modern novel from late the sixteenth century onwards.

Il dolce stil nuovo and Petrarchan Lyricism

The troubadour lyric travelled from southern France to Italy and was fundamental to the development of the new style that Dante famously named and has come to symbolize, *il dolce stil novo*, *stil nuovo* or *stilnovismo*. The motivation for this lyrical style was a desire to create a new literary language and a new softer or more delightful literary style in contrast to

the dominant Latin. However, to a great extent, Italian lyric at the dawn of the Renaissance followed a more sublimated ideal of love than the lyric of the troubadours, due to its background in Plato's philosophical writings on love. Virginia Cox argues that the:

sublimated and spiritualized model of love is often termed 'Neoplatonic', in that it has its philosophical roots in the love theory articulated in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Its presence in lyric poetry is a feature of the medieval Italian lyric tradition that distinguishes it from the prior Provençal tradition of courtly lyric, which was more sensual in its treatment of love.¹⁰⁹

Dante's *Vita nuova* is a first demonstration of the spiritualized love model he later fully explores in *Divina Comedia*. He writes in *Purgatorio* canto 24 that the thirteenth-century poet Bonagiunta Orbicciani tells him how Dante himself, Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizelli were the creators of this new genre. The language of the *stilnovisti* was the vernacular of the Tuscan region, and central to the new style was its theme of love described in metaphors and symbols, and a more intellectual and introspective way of writing that was favored by the scholarly learned. Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch are all three major figures in the appropriation and development of the 'new' literary style, and the latter two were also the writers that Pietro Bembo praised most highly in his *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525); a work whose importance and influence over Italian literature and language cannot be exaggerated.

Pietro Bembo, born in Venice in 1470, was a writer, poet, scholar, humanist, and cardinal, in other words a man of the Renaissance. Not only did he praise Petrarch's poetry and style in the *Prose*, but he was also involved in the printing process of both Petrarch's and Dante's works in the house of Manutius.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, he composed Petrarchan poems and is generally seen to have initiated the movement of Petrarchism. Even though his grammatical treatise was met with criticism, not the least by Tuscans according to Cox, Bembo's

¹⁰⁹ Virginia Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 21.

¹¹⁰ Carol Kidwell, *Pietro Bembo: Lover, Linguist, Cardinal* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 17.

grammatical treatise proved to be highly functional in practice. It allowed for the establishment of linguistic and stylistic norms which “made the attainment of linguistic correctness an accessible aim for any literate person”.¹¹¹

To reconnect to the argument on the influence of Platonic ideals on the Italian lyric that initiated this section: the parallels with Plato’s love as a desire for the highest form of beauty and the idea of the ennobling force that love bears if it is explored in the right way is evident in both Dante’s and Petrarch’s lyrical praise of Beatrice and Laura. However, these two fourteenth-century poets still represent the battle of bodily desires and the spiritual. Laura’s and Beatrice’s beauty and virtue are mirrors of divine beauty and goodness, which lead the poet in his aspiration to transform his bodily desires. Furthermore, in contrast to the lady in courtly love literature, who is unavailable through marriage, Laura and Beatrice both die at a young age. In death, they are made completely unattainable for the lover, but at the same time this enables him to express his longing and his adoration for the angel she has now become. The ultimate goal of this ennobling love is a spiritual union with God. Sonnet 13 in Petrarch’s *RVF* is a demonstration of this ideal:

Quando fra l’altre donne ad ora ad ora
Amor vien nel bel viso di costei,
quanto ciascuna è men bella di lei
tanto cresce ’l desio che m’innamora.
I’ benedico il loco e ’l tempo et l’ora
che sì alto miraron gli occhi mei,
et dico: Anima, assai ringratiar dêi
che fosti a tanto honor degnata allora.
Da lei ti vèn l’amoroso pensiero,
che mentre ’l segui al sommo ben t’invia,
pocho prezando quel ch’ogni huom desia;
da lei vien l’animosa leggiadria
ch’al ciel ti scorge per destro sentero,
sì ch’i’ vo già de la speranza altero.

¹¹¹ Cox, *Lyric Poetry*, 19.

(When Love within her lovely face appears / now and again among other ladies,
/ as much as each is less lovely than she, / the more the wish I love within me
grows. / I bless the place, the time and hour of the day / that my eyes aimed their
sight at such a height / and say: "My soul, you must be very grateful / that you
were found worthy of such great honor. / "From her to you comes loving thought
that leads / as long as you pursue, to highest good, / esteeming little what all men
desire: "there comes from her all joyous honesty / that leads you by the straight
path up to Heaven / already I fly high upon my hope.")¹¹²

The idea of how the poet is led to the highest good through his love for Laura is quite clear in this poem. As long as he represses earthly desires, she will guide him on the path to Heaven. The sublimation of love will be even further enhanced, I would say, in the lyrical poetry of the sixteenth-century Petrarchists due to the exploding interest in Neoplatonism that followed Ficino's translations of Plato's work. Beauty is key, and the lady is viewed as a mirror of her creator God, often described as a divine figure.

Petrarchism as a literary phenomenon developed within Petrarch's own lifetime and kept growing during the three following centuries. His style, poetics and tropes were widespread and by the sixteenth century, they were having a deep influence on love literature, and the *stil nuovo* ideal of love was discussed and represented in many forms in Italy, and also in Spain, France and England. The specificity to the Petrarchan movement was the lyrical "fidelity to Petrarch. At the extreme, the Petrarchist poet used no word that had no precedent in Petrarch".¹¹³ Furthermore, Petrarchism is known for its clear motifs: the beauty of the woman, love as bittersweet pain and the lover who wishes to die. The images, themes and metaphors often have Neoplatonic connotations, but we can find variations among the Petrarchan poets. Most poets, both men and women, however, write of an idealized love, depicting a sublimation of their affection for an unreachable, deceased beloved.

¹¹² Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagat (Mondadori Libri S.p.A., Milan, 2018; 1996), rime 13. Petrarch, *The Canzoniere or Rerum Vulgarium Fragment*, trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), poem 13. All further citations from Petrarch are from these editions, if not indicated otherwise, and will be given in brackets after each citation.

¹¹³ Cox, *Lyric Poetry*, 19.

Furthermore, it is relevant to note the connection between Neoplatonic love, Petrarchan lyric and the Reformist movements. As has been pointed out, it is:

striking how many prominent early-sixteenth-century Petrarchan poets had connections with the Catholic Reform movement, which, like Protestantism, privileged this kind of direct relationship with God. Notable examples are Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, Benedetto Varchi [...], Lodovico Domenichi (1515-64), Laura Battiferri, and Chiara Matraini.¹¹⁴

This connection, I argue, is highly relevant in regard of Marguerite's interest in Neoplatonic philosophy, thus, she was deeply involved in the religious changes that were taking place in France during her lifetime and is famous for her friendships with many of the Reformists. I also believe that the context of the religious reform movement can be valuable for our understanding of Gaspara Stampa's vision of love and while I do not specifically discuss this discourse in my readings of her poems, I still believe it to be intertwined with the early modern discussions on love and gender at a more general level.

La Querelle des Femmes and La Querelle des Amyes

The intense discussions on the constitutions of women and men during the early modern period go back, as mentioned earlier, to Aristotle and the Classical era. Aristotle states in *Generation of Animals* that the "female is, as it were, a mutilated male"; hence, the principal of nature is male.¹¹⁵ The female is incomplete and as consequence of her constitution are the effects of the womb (*hystera* in Greek).¹¹⁶ These effects make her lustful, passive, irrational and deceitful, in contrast to the intellectual and active man, who is in control of his passions. Thomas

¹¹⁴ Cox, *Lyric Poetry*, 22.

¹¹⁵ Aristotle, *Generations of Animals*, 2.3.737a27-28, in *The Complete Works*, 1: 1144, ed. Barnes, Jonathan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹¹⁶ A word used in the Classical times to describe a form of women's disease caused by the womb. In the eighteenth century, psychotherapist Charcot used the term for his female patients; hysterica – disturbed and nervous women due to suppressed sexual desire. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 111-113.

Aquinas was one of the first to implement Aristotle's thoughts in the Christian context during the thirteenth century, and the impact of Aquinas' work on the political and religious discourses on sexuality and love during the early modern period was significant.

However, during this particular time in history, we find an increasing number of treatises and dialogues in defense of women's worth. While the majority of these literary texts were composed by men, we also see an increasing number of women writers during this period. The dominant misogynist discourse regarded women as weaker, less intellectual and more driven by physical desire than men; nevertheless, opinions on gender were contested. At an early point, premodern women writers such as Hildegard of Bingen and Saint Bridget of Sweden paved the way. However, it is Jean de Meun's part of *Roman de la Rose* from the end of the thirteenth century that triggers the so-called *querelle des femmes*, in which a series of writers argues for or against the constitution and capabilities of women. Christine de Pizan is one of the first women to respond to the misogynist writers, especially de Meun and *Les Lamentations* by Mathéolus (d. ca. 1320), with her *La Cité des Dames* of 1405. In this debate, which continues across centuries, in French, Spanish, Italian, German and English, several questions are asked: "Could a woman be virtuous? Could she perform noteworthy deeds? Was she even, strictly speaking, of the same human species as men?"¹¹⁷

Following on *la querelle des femmes* is *la querelle des amyes*, a literary debate during the 1540s, with which scholars often associate Marguerite de Navarre. Even if Gaspara Stampa is not directly in contact with the French debate, she can be seen in light of the Italian *trattati* tradition, which discusses the same questions. In Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano*, probably a common source for both Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, the codes and behaviors of a perfect courtier are outlined and debated among the characters. Even though Castiglione also includes a shorter section on the lady at court, the texts in *des amyes* by contrast focus only on the lady.

¹¹⁷ Marguerite de Navarre, *Selected Writings*, xix-xx.

The debate mainly includes four texts: Bertrand de la Borderie's *L'Amye de court*, Héroët's *La Parfaicte Amye*, Charles Fontaine's *La Contr'amyie de court*, and Paul Angier's *L'expérience de l'amyie de court contre la contre amyie*. They were all published in one volume in 1547 under the title *Opusculs d'Amour*, together with some other poems on the same theme, like Héroët's *L'Androgyne de Platon*, to which I will return to below.¹¹⁸ Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa dispute the same issues, mainly gender positions and constitutions, as well as perfect love and lovers, finding their inspiration and models in these *querelles*. Through these debates, it is clear that understandings of both love and gender are to be seen not as stable or fixed, but as constructed, performed and changeable.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the philosophy of the classical era was strongly shaped by its reception during the early modern period. In the following pages, I aim to clarify some of the transformations that Plato's ideas on love and the androgyne figure, presented in his *Symposium*, goes through in the minds and hands of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century interpreters.

Love's Origin

The myth of the androgyne in Plato's *Symposium* in the speech of Aristophanes contains the story of humanity's origin and the beginnings of the emotion of desire. This part of the *Symposium* proved to be one that caused problems for the translators of the early modern times, mainly along with Alcibiades', due to its praise of same-sex desires. The transformations of the myth that are significant for the purposes of this study are found in the dialogues of Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo, Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni. Due to the two latter writers' appropriations, it is also necessary to present another myth that is often discussed along with, or is understood as interchangeable with, the androgyne, namely that of Hermaphroditus. The most important source for the ancient myth is certainly Ovid and his *Metamorphosis*, which, like Plato's

¹¹⁸ *Opusculs d'Amour* (Lyons: Jean de Tournes, 1547), University of Virginia Library, <http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/uva-lib:729623/view#openLayer/uva-lib:733904/1959/1176/0/1/0>.

writings, attracted an enormous amount of interest among early humanists and early modern readers. While there are distinctions between the two figures and their origins, the words androgyne and hermaphrodite are sometimes confused, by both modern scholars and by early modern writers such as Aragona and Speroni.¹¹⁹ Thus, in their dialogues they both discuss the union of lovers as an “erotic hermaphrodite”. It is particularly important to note that, despite the confusion or slippages between the two concepts that appear in various texts, “there is a tangible distinction to be made between the androgynous ideal and the hermaphroditic reality”.¹²⁰ As we will see in the following pages, Aristophanes’ androgyne was, in its origins, double both physically and spiritually, but it has a completely different background than that of Hermaphroditus.

The Androgyne in the *Symposium*

The frame of Plato’s *Symposium* is presented in a lightly comical tone, in which a gathering of male friends decides not to drink too heavily since they are all tired (hung-over) from the party they attended the previous night. Aristophanes’ speech is introduced in line with this amusing tone. Due to a hiccup, he had to move his speech from the third place to fourth, but now he is ready to present the myth of the origin of humanity and of the desire we call love. He says:

You see, our nature wasn’t originally the same as it is now; it has changed. Firstly, there used to be three human genders, not just two – male and female – as there

¹¹⁹ The use of androgyne as interchangeable with hermaphrodite both within early modern texts and in scholarly studies deserves greater attention than I can possibly give in this format. However, it should be made clear that the hermaphrodite is usually used in cases discussing physiological matters, where a body has been interpreted as to having both sexes. The androgyne is usually used concerning spiritual union. Furthermore, the two stems from two different Greek myths. See Kathleen Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

¹²⁰ Ruth Gilbert, *Early Modern Hermaphrodites* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 12.

are nowadays. There was also a third, which was a combination of both the other two. Its name has survived, but the gender itself has died out.¹²¹

These original humans were completely round in form, having four arms, four legs and two faces, etc. The sexes were three in number and round in form because so are the sun, the moon and the earth, and man was originally the child of the sun, woman the child of the earth and the “combined gender” the child of the moon, which partakes of both the sun and the earth (25-6). These original humans were very strong and made an attack on the gods, which led to a severe punishment. Although, they were not to be killed because they were of benefit to the gods due to their sacrifices and worship, but Zeus decided to cut them in two because “then they’ll be weaker, and at the same time there’ll be more in it for us because there’ll be more of them” (26).

After the split, the two halves tried to reunite themselves again, running towards each other and embracing one another. This did not work and they started to die, so Zeus found pity for them and moved their genitals to the front so that the halves of woman and man could unite and produce offspring together, and “male-male relationships would at least involve sexual satisfaction, so that people would relax, get on with their work and take care of other aspects of life” (27). That is, Aristophanes explains, how our innate sexual desire or drive arose.

Love draws our original nature back together; he tries to reintegrate us and heal the split in our nature Turbot-like, each of us has been cut in half, and so we are human tallies, constantly searching for our counterparts. (27-8)

Aristophanes then goes on to specifying even further the different sexualities that originated from this event. The androgynous gender tends to become adulterous, while women originating from the female unit have no interest in men, but seek the company of other women. Those who have their origin in the male, however, are of the manliest nature, an ideal to be praised. At this point,

¹²¹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Waterfield, Robin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; 1994) 25. All the following references to the *Symposium* will be to this edition and will be given in brackets after each citation.

Aristophanes comments on cultural conventions regarding gender that state the immorality of same-sex relations between men: “they sometimes get called immoral, but that’s wrong: their actions aren’t prompted by immorality, but by courage, manliness, and masculinity” (28). In other words, Plato, in the words of Aristophanes, is critical of the prevailing norms of gender as binary as well as of moral judgements on men desiring other men. Nevertheless, Aristophanes finishes his speech with the advice to all mankind to praise the god of Love because true love is not possible only between men, even if male-male relations are valued most highly:

what I’m saying applies to everyone, both men and women. We human beings will never attain happiness unless we find perfect love, unless we each come across the love of our lives and thereby recover our original nature. [...] If we want to praise the god who is responsible for our finding this person, it is Love we should praise.
(30)

This view that women have the same capacity to reach the state of the highest form of love does not survive, for example, in Ficino’s reading of the *Symposium*. In addition, the androgyne, which Plato actually degrades (as generally being the adulterous) in his text, will appear in several adaptations and interpretations. Occasionally, it even changes name from androgyne to hermaphrodite: a figure with a different mythical background mainly popularized by Ovid.

Ovid’s Hermaphroditus

The Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso’s masterpiece *Metamorphosis* has been one of the most influential ancient texts since its completion around the year 8 B.C. and throughout our Western literary history. During the sixteenth century, it was well-known and influenced many writers, along with other Ovidian works such as the *Heroids* and, the previously mentioned *Ars Amatoria*. The myth of Hermaphroditus informs my readings in this study, since it is

inevitably intertwined, mixed or sometimes confused with the myth of the androgyne.

In the fourth book, we encounter the story of Hermaphroditus, the young son of Hermes and Venus (Aphrodite), who has been raised by the mountain Ida, but at the age of 15 journeys to discover his surroundings. In the woods there is a naiad, Salmacis, the only one whom Diana doesn't know since she refuses to engage in hunting with the other naiads. When Salmacis sees Hermaphroditus in the woods, right by a spring, she is overcome with the strongest erotic desire: "she saw this glorious boy and wanted at once to possess him".¹²² In order to seduce him, she dresses herself in her robe and walks up to speak to him. She makes no secret of her intention and tells the young boy that if he does not have already a betrothed, "let *me* be your bride and take me at once to your bed!" (line 329). Hermaphroditus, who has never experienced love, blushes across his neck and face upon hearing this girl, whom he has never met before, expressing her sexual desire for him. This only makes her more lustful and she tries to wrap her arms around his neck and kiss him. This seems too much for the boy and he yells "Stop!" to the stranger and threatens to abandon her. The naiad is frightened by this and says that the spring is his to keep with all that surrounds it, after which she pretends to run into the woods.

Hermaphroditus stays and in his belief of being alone and safe, he soon takes off his garments to bathe in the spring. The boy dives into the crystal-clear water and his body shines like ivory. Salmacis watches his naked body and is again gripped by with the strongest desire, even stronger than before. It is now impossible for her to resist and she shouts: "Victory! He's mine!" (line 356.) The scene that follows describes how the girl forces herself on the boy, how she practically rapes him while he fights wildly to get her off of him. Salmacis then prays to the gods: "You may fight as you will, you wretch, but you shan't escape me. Gods, I pray you, decree that the day never comes when the two of us here shall be riven asunder!" (lines 369-74). And so, the two become one, one who is neither woman nor man, but both. Looking at his reflection in the mirroring

¹²² Ovid, "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus," in *Metamorphosis*, trans. Raeburn, David (London: Penguin Books, 2010; 2004), lines 272-391, cited lines 316-17. I will from now on refer to the myth only by lines and in brackets after citations.

water, Hermaphroditus asks his parents to hear his wish; that from this day on the water of the spring of Salmacis shall transform every man who bathes in it. He shall be weakened and return to the shore only half the man he was before. The godly parents listened to their “androgynous son” and that is how the spring of Salmacis got its magical power. (line 390).

Salmacis et Hermaphrodite, painted by Paul Mattei, engraved by Antoine L. Romanet, eighteenth century

While *Metamorphosis* often presents stories of violence, it is worth noting that the story of Hermaphroditus portrays a male victim and a female aggressor. However, when the figure is later employed by Speroni and Aragona, we will see that the aggressive part has disappeared and been replaced by the Platonic idea of a lovers' union. However, there is still an androgynous figure of importance for this study; namely, the phoenix. Thus, before I proceed to a discussion of the revival of the love dialogue, I briefly present the history of this mythological bird.

The Phoenix

Herodotus is one of the first to describe the phoenix, along with Hesiod, Pliny the Elder and Ovid. From then on it is constantly reborn in different contexts, often literary. A possible explanation for the constant recurrence of the phoenix is that to a significant extent, the discussions or employments of it are “concerned not with the animal world but with the human world; and it can only be concluded that the phoenix fulfilled an important function with respect to the meaning of human existence”.¹²³ In other words, it is usually employed in order to explain, question or represent matters concerning human life, death, the afterlife and love.

The Phoenix in Early Modern Representations

During the early modern period, the phoenix became a symbol within Christianity and came to symbolize renewal in general, but also of time, Christ, Mary, virginity, resurrection and more.¹²⁴ The connections with Neoplatonic ideology was mainly influenced by Christian and Jewish traditions and concerned, for example, the interpretation of the Primeval man, mainly Genesis 2:2 and, Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. The transformations and various uses of the phoenix during the early modern period can thus be traced to the humanist movement, and the revival of classical learning and culture, in which Petrarch played a central role. Joe Nigg also argues for the impact of the printing press, of travel expeditions and political and religious factors on the various shapes the phoenix takes in, for example, lyrical poetry, emblem books, natural histories and royal portraits.¹²⁵

¹²³ Roelof Van Den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 9.

¹²⁴ Shakespeare makes use of the metaphor as representing purity or virginity referring to Elizabeth as the “maiden phoenix” in the drama *Henry VIII*.

¹²⁵ Joe Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 169.

The phoenix as a Neoplatonic figure can be found as symbolizing the perfect union between two halves, comparable to the androgyne, in the sense that it is either sexless or both male and female. It also symbolizes the soul's resurrection, as the poet's constant revivification through his or her writings or as the reborn flame of love. Its most famous appearance is probably Shakespeare's (1564-1616) complex allegorical "The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601). This poem has been interpreted in various ways; for example, as depicting the tension between spiritual and earthly love, or the death of perfect love, but scholars still remain puzzled by it.¹²⁶ Furthermore, as an example of Neoplatonic union, the bird is employed by the British poet John Donne (1572-1631) in "The Canonization" (1633). Here it defines the concept of perfect unity:

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
Call her one, mee another flye,
We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
And wee in us finde the'Eagle and the dove;
The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.¹²⁷

Donne's poem was most probably written at the turn of the seventeenth century, in an ironic tone and perhaps with intent to mock the love poetry of the time. This particular passage, however, where the loving couple become the phoenix is still relevant to acknowledge as it is presented as androgynous (man and woman united). In other words, Donne employs it as a symbol for perfect love.

When we come to the question of the sex of the phoenix, it can probably be related to Plato, early Jewish and Christian scriptures, and Hermetic ideas,

¹²⁶ For an extensive study on this poem see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Truth of Love: The Mystery of "The Phoenix and the Turtle"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹²⁷ *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse: 1509-1659*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), poem 134, lines 19-27.

which are very much inspired by each other in this context.¹²⁸ We find descriptions in which the phoenix is said to have either no (biological) sex or gender and others where it embodies both male and female; in either case, it is viewed as a complete creature in itself. The conception of the phoenix as androgynous or hermaphroditic is seen as corresponding to the Primeval Man both in Hellenistic-Jewish and rabbinical literature. Since the myth of the androgyne is found in Plato's *Symposium*, the origins of this understanding of the phoenix can probably be traced to Greece.¹²⁹

Van Den Broek also refers to the biblical text Matthew 22:30, pointing out that sexuality is completely insignificant in life after the resurrection.¹³⁰ Last to be mentioned as an early source is Zeno of Verona's (300-371) treatise on the resurrection. The two-sexed phoenix is here a "symbol of eschatological man arisen from the dead, from whom male and female coincide, and who has had returned to him his original, perfect unity".¹³¹ These complex comparisons and connections between an androgynous unity, resurrection, angels and a state in which sexuality is sometimes suppressed, sometimes totally lacking, are central to the early modern poets, who commonly identify with the phoenix. Most famous in this context are Petrarch himself, as noted by Nigg above, and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). It has also been appropriated by French poets such as Maurice Scève and Ronsard as well as Rabelais. While intertextual relations between these poets' employment of the phoenix and Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's use of it will be thoroughly discussed in the main part of this study, I will now turn to the influential genre of love dialogues of the sixteenth century.

¹²⁸ Van Den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, 357-89.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 374.

Marsilio Ficino and the Revival of the Dialogue Genre

The love dialogue was indeed a very popular genre, especially in Italy, during the sixteenth century, and the question of love was widely debated in several contexts, such as literary circles and in cultural gatherings at court and in the salons (*ridotti*). Writers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Bembo, Benedetto Varchi, Sperone Speroni, Tullia d'Aragona and Leone Ebreo all followed in the tradition with roots in Marsilio Ficino's version of Plato's *Symposium*.¹³²

The importance of the *De amore* began before its translation into Italian. Circulating in manuscripts in courts all over Europe, it influenced works of art and writings, philosophical texts on love, poetry and prose. The discussions on the nature of love had been going on at the courts for a long time, and Ficino infused the courtly love ideals with something new: the topic of idealized love on a philosophical level. The new interest in this philosophical theme had a special appeal for the female audience, as Sears Jayne, English translator of Ficino's *De amore*, says in the introduction to his translation:

Though the work had been written for and about men, its doctrine that the love of the body is a step toward a higher kind of love was especially welcomed by women. With their help, the popularity of the *De amore* lasted almost two hundred years, from about 1469 to about 1660, and especially in four countries: Italy, France, Spain, and England.¹³³

It is true that Ficino's as well as Leone Ebreo's influence was great but, toward the middle of the sixteenth century, Plato's original texts also began to have greater influence. His original texts were mainly being translated in Italy and France. These translations are not, however, to be seen as complete or entirely faithful either, as both Ferguson and Reeser point out; hence, large parts of the

¹³² For a list of treatises following Ficino's, see Sears Jayne, "Introduction," in Ficino, *Commentary*, 20. For the most recent and thorough work on many of these dialogues, see Leushuis *Speaking of Love*.

¹³³ Jayne, "Introduction," in Ficino, *Commentary*, 19.

text, which challenged current norms on sexuality and gender were changed, or simply left out by the translators.¹³⁴

Marsilio Ficino was the son of the personal physician of Cosimo de' Medici. Ficino, later a physician himself, was also an educated humanist, and was employed by the Medici family as a translator during the period 1462-1473. His work consists mostly of these translations of Plato from Greek into Latin. He was also the first to use the term "Platonic Love" in one of his letters and, being an authority on the philosophy, he founded the Platonic Academy in Florence.¹³⁵ After finishing the complete works of Plato, Ficino wrote his commentary on the *Symposium*. This work was written in Latin and printed in 1484, but had been circulating in manuscript since its completion in 1469. Years after the Latin text's completion, Ficino returned to it at Lorenzo de' Medici's request. Lorenzo, a poet himself and strongly influenced by Neoplatonic ideals, urged Ficino to translate the dialogue into Italian for two of his friends.¹³⁶ At this point, Ficino added a number of passages to the Latin text before translating it, however these were not amendments of such importance that they change the overall meaning of the work, and in 1474 the vernacular edition was finished.¹³⁷

The *De amore* should be seen as a compilation of ideas about love rather than a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. For certain, it is not a word-by-word translation, but interpretations of both the *Symposium* and other texts regarding the constitution and origins of love. The most central influence was Christianity, as John Charles Nelson writes: "Christianizing tendencies are immediately in evidence" in the dialogue.¹³⁸ Dante, who of course was one of the most central

¹³⁴ Gary Ferguson, "Androgynes, Hermaphrodites, and Courtesans: Women, Queer Nature, and (Queer?) Pleasures," in his *Queer (Re)Readings* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 245-291. Todd Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹³⁵ Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 286.

¹³⁶ Lorenzo wrote both a collection of love poems and later an explanatory text to these poems, in which he praises Neoplatonic philosophy. See Lorenzo de' Medici, *The autobiography of Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent: a commentary on my sonnets*, ed. and trans. James Wyatt Cook (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995).

¹³⁷ Unn Irene Aasdalen, "The First Pico-Ficino Controversy," in *Laus Platonici Philosoph: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, ed. Clucas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 67-8.

¹³⁸ John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love. The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eurici Furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 75. As mentioned at the very beginning, this transformative notion of Neoplatonism is not new to Ficino, but seems to be an accepted part of the renewal of Platonism from the early Neoplatonists such as Plotinus. See Halliwell's chapter referred to above.

writers on love of the early Renaissance, was also a significant source for writers of love dialogues. However, Ficino

does not share all the *stilnuovo* motives adopted by Dante – for example, the theme that love is intensified by the death of the loved one. Neither does Ficino employ the troubadour theme of exalting the lady with praise and service. In fact, *male friendship* rather than love of women remains the basis of moral love.¹³⁹

Certainly, I would argue that there are ideals from the *stilnovisti* influencing the *De amore*, but to a greater extent three principal groups of authorities are often seen as creating the foundation for Ficino's philosophical endeavor: Latin Platonists (already-translated works by earlier writers), the Scholastic theologians and the Greek Platonists, whom Ficino had just translated himself.

The *De amore* takes as its setting at a historical banquet attended by nine Florentines honoring the date of both the birth and death of Plato. It is written in first person whereby Ficino employs himself as storyteller. The two oldest men in the group are called away right after dinner, which means that only seven attend the actual speeches. Some scholars claim this banquet to be a true historical event, while most believe it to be fictional, used by Ficino to tell his story, or to explain his philosophy.¹⁴⁰ The rhetoric of connecting to real life through characters and events that could plausibly to have taken place in the actual salons or academies was to become normative within the dialogue genre.¹⁴¹ The text of the *Symposium* was also mainly used strategically as a backdrop by Ficino in order to allow him to explore the theme in the manner of his choosing.

¹³⁹ Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, 83. My emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, 75, and Jayne, "Introduction," in Ficino, *Commentary*, 8.

¹⁴¹ This rhetorical mimesis is the main argument in Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*.

Love – A Desire for Beauty

According to Plato, love was a desire for beauty, an idea that Ficino repeats and elaborates. In speech one, he writes accordingly: “E quando noi diciamo Amore, intendete desiderio di Bellezza, perché così appresso di tutti i Filosofi è la definizione di Amore” (When we say ‘love’, understand ‘the desire for beauty’. For this is the definition of love among all philosophers).¹⁴² Thus, if love starts in contemplation of a beautiful body it should be transformed step by step into a contemplation and understanding of Divine love, climbing up a ladder as in Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*. In the wake of Plato, Ficino explains how love is found in two kinds, one connected to erotic desire and defined as vulgar love, representing the low and the body, in contrast to the true Platonic love which is high and striving from the soul towards God. This separation of high and low is already found in Plato’s *Symposium*, but Ficino takes it a step further in his Christian version of this Higher Venus. Early in the dialogue, in the second speech, Giovanni Cavalcanti sets out to talk about how Pausanias, also in the second speech of the *Symposium*, explains love as divided into two kinds: a lower and higher Venus. This division is also mirrored on earth, in human love, as a choice between the two. At the end of speech one, it is explained how the ultimate form of beauty is represented on earth:

e dove non lo Animo ma solo il corpo fosse bello, quello come ombra e caduca immagine della bellezza, appena e leggermente amiamo: dove solamente fusse l’animo bello, questo perpetuo ornamento dell’Animo ardentemente amiamo: e dove l’una e l’altra Bellezza concorre, veementissimamente piglieremo ammirazione. E così procedendo, dimostreremo che noi siamo in verità famiglia Platonica.

(where the body is certainly beautiful but the soul is not, let us love the body very little if at all, as a shadowy and fleeting image of beauty. Where the soul alone is beautiful, let us love this enduring beauty of the soul ardently. But where both

¹⁴² Marsilio Ficino, *Sopra lo Amore ovvero Convito di Platone*, ed. Rensi, Giuseppe, (Milan: SE SRL, 2003), 24. Translation Sears, Jayne in Ficino, *Commentary*, 40. All the following references to Ficino’s dialogue will be to these volumes and will be given in brackets after each citation.

beauties occur together, let us admire them vehemently. And in this way we shall show that we are truly from the Platonic family.) (27; 42-3)

Thus, Ficino envisions erotic desire as part of the highest form of love, but while later writers of the dialogue transform Plato's ideal to fit with heterosexual relations, Ficino follows Plato and praises the Socratic relation between a young male and an older male. Aasdalen explains how, all through his dialogue, Ficino emphasizes that "the choice of higher Venus or love, and the earthly form of this higher love, is a Socratic friendship, in which the two friends contemplate beauty and strive to ascend to the higher".¹⁴³

In Ficino's *De amore*, it is not only love that is explained as divided, but the human soul is also split. This is a thought that Ficino has developed from the Platonic division, made by Jupiter, of the original human body as represented in the speech of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. This scene in Plato's text is directly connected to the birth of erotic desire, since the human bodies are drawn to each other due to a desire for physical reunion. As already mentioned, Ficino retains the male reunion as his ideal, but he presents a division of the soul into three parts originating in Aristophanes' myth. However, Ficino illustrates a movement from physical desire towards the soul's desire for completion, which is found in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, but here already in Ficino's version of Aristophanes' myth.

Ficino says that there were originally three genders, male, female and "one composed of both", which is bi-sexual. When these strong humans try to challenge the gods, Jupiter decides to cut them in half, with the natural result that the two halves:

gettando le braccia a riscontro si abbracciavano appetendo di reintegrarsi nel primo abito. *E certamente per fame e ozio sarebbero mancati, se Dio non avesse a tal copula modo trovato.* [...] Ciascuno uomo cerca il mezzo suo: e quando ad alcuno di qualunque sesso avido sia, il mezzo suo si scontra, si risente fortemente: e con ardente amore si invesca, e non patisce pure un momento da lui separarsi.

¹⁴³ Unn Irene Aasdalen, "A Question of Friendship," in *Rhetoric, Theatre and the Art of Design*, ed. Clare Guest (Oslo: Novus, 2008), 343.

(ran to each other, and throwing their arms about each other, embraced each other, trying to be returned to their former condition. *On that account they would have perished of hunger and inactivity if God had not added a means of intercourse.*) (56; 72, my emphasis) [...] each human half seeks its own half. And so whenever his own half meets someone, of whichever sex he may be desirous, he is most violently aroused, clings to it with burning love, and does not even for a moment permit of being separated from it.) (56; 72)

After retelling Aristophanes' myth, close to its original, Ficino continues to explain it from his own central point, where the fusion between the classical philosophy and Christian faith becomes obvious. Thus, according to Ficino, Aristophanes' words are only the surface of the actual meaning of the androgyne myth. In other words, Plato wrote allegorically in order to conceal the mysteries of holy matters from the less intellectual readers of his time. Ficino reveals the truth of the myth and for him it has an obvious Christian meaning.¹⁴⁴ The division of man does not actually mean a physical division of the *body*, but of the soul. Ficino explains that when:

Gli uomini, cioè le Anime degli uomini; *anticamente*, e questo è quando sono da Dio create; *sono interi*, perché sono le Anime di duoi lumi ornate, naturale e soprannaturale: accioché per il naturale le cose eguali e inferiori, per il soprannaturale le superiori, considerassino.

([*m*]en, that is, the soul of *formerly*, that is, when they are created by God, *are whole*, they are provided with two lights, one innate and the other infused, in order that by innate light they may perceive inferior and equal things, and by the infused, superior things.) (57; 73)

¹⁴⁴ D. A. Russell discusses the Latin writers' understanding of imitation, when he states that the imitator "must always penetrate below the superficial, verbal features of his exemplar to its spirit and significance"; an understanding, in my opinion, that is also illustrated by Ficino. D. A. Russell, "De imitatione," in *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*, ed. David West and Tony Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 5. See also Michael Silk, Ingo Gildenhard and Rosemary Barrow, *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), especially Part 1, §7: "Models of Style".

When the humans wished to equal God, they turned themselves only towards the innate light and as a consequence immediately fell into bodies; hence, they were divided. He further argues that these original figures should be viewed as three kinds of godly virtues implemented in the human: *fortezza* (courage), *temperanza* (temperance) and *giustizia* (justice), which manifests in humans as different sexes. Courage is masculine, temperance is feminine and justice is mixed (57; 73). Ficino continues:

l'anime già divise e immerse ne' corpi, quando giungono agli anni della età discreta, per la temperanza, che è femmina, alcune secondo il lume naturale che riserbano, quasi per l'uno mezzo dell' Anima, sono svegliate a ripigliare con istudio di verità quel lume soprannaturale, che già fu l'altro mezzo dell' Anima: il quale cadendo perdettero. E ricevuto questo saranno intere: e nella visione di Dio, beate.

(When souls, already divided and immersed in bodies, first have come to the years of adolescence, they are aroused by the natural and innate light which they retained (as if by a certain half of themselves) to recover, through the study of truth, that infuses the divine light, once half of themselves, which they lost in falling. This once recovered, they *will be* whole, and *blessed* with a vision of God.) (57-58; 73, emphasis in Jayne's trans.)

As we see, the feminine sex, or gender, as well as the mixed, is part of his recapture of Aristophanes' speech, but they regard the soul not the body. Thus, a feminine quality does not necessarily implicate a female body. Ficino further holds that each of these genders can be able to unite with God, if they live in accordance to their virtues. This part of the *De amore*, I suggest, may have played a crucial role for Marguerite, Gaspara Stampa and other female interpreters, since it can be understood as presenting an idea of love that includes a female intellect.

Now, Ficino's retelling of the origin of human and of desire sounds very close to the speech of Aristophanes, with the view that all relations are equally valued and permitted without regard for the sex of the persons involved. However, as already made clear, Ficino, like Plato, values the Socratic friendship as the highest form of earthly love, something for which he also received criticism

from his contemporaries, among others Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. This view will be clearer as Ficino continues to comment on the notion of the body's changeability, in contrast to the stable soul. While the body goes through changes over the course of its ageing, the soul remains the same, "l'Anima sta quella medesima sempre", and further:

Chi sarà dunque tanto stolto, che l'appellazione dell'uomo, la quale è in noi fermissima, attribuisca al corpo, che sempre corre, più tosto che alla Anima, che sempre sta ferma? Di qui può essere manifesto, che quando Aristofane nominò gli uomini, intese le Anime nostre, secondo l'uso Platonico.

Who, therefore, will be so foolish as to attribute the appellation of *Man*, which is firmly fixed in us, to the body, which is always flowing and everywhere changed, rather than to the most stable soul? From these things it can be clear that, when Aristophanes said *men*, he meant souls, in the Platonic way. (60; 75)

Despite this strict focus on the soul, Ficino does allow a controlled sensual desire as part of earthly love. Like Plato, he argues that it is only through the embodied appearance of beauty that we can perceive the beauty of the soul, which itself is not visible to us. As mentioned earlier, Ficino says later, in speech six: "stimiamo che in un formoso corpo uno Animo specioso sia: e di qui avviene, che noi più volentieri insegniamo a' più belli." (we assume that in a beautiful body there is a beautiful soul. That is why we prefer to teach men who are handsome) (117; 132). In other words, moral love begins with the contemplation of a beautiful (male) body, but the striving shall lead upwards, towards the Heavenly Venus and the intellectual form of love.

As many scholars argue, women in Ficino's *De amore*, are connected to the 'lower Venus', needed for physical procreation, but not incorporated into the ideal Socratic relation. Thus, Ficino seems to follow traditional misogynist values of women's lack of philosophical insight, and the belief that they are driven by physical desires and are only able to understand earthly love. Men, on the other hand, not only have the ability to strive for the 'higher Venus', but also to combine this love with a desire for physical beauty. Ficino writes that the intellect of man holds the capacity of eternal love, thus, of seeing the divine

beauty, which also causes man to pursue studies of philosophy and practice justice. Nevertheless, there is also in man “a mysterious urge to procreate offspring”. And he continues:

e questo Amore è perpetuo, dal quale siamo continuamente incitati a scolpire nella effigie de' figliuoli qualche similitudine della superna bellezza. Questi due Amori sono in noi perpetui. Quelli due Demonii, i quali dice Platone alle Anime nostre sempre essere presenti (de' quali uno in su e l'altro in giù ci tira) [...] il secondo Amore si chiama mal Demonio, è che per il nostro uso disordinato egli spesso ci turba e divertisce lo Animo a ministeri vili, ritraendolo dal principale suo bene: il quale nella speculazione della verità consiste.

(This love too is eternal; by it we are continuously driven to create some likeness of that celestial Beauty in the image of a procreated offspring. These two eternal loves in us are daemons which Plato predicts will always be present in our souls, one of which raises us to things above; the other presses us down to things below. [...] [T]he second is called evil because, on account of our abuse, it often disturbs us and powerfully diverts the soul from its chief good, which consists in the contemplation of truth, and twists it to baser purposes.) (102; 119)

Women thus do have a place in the world, since procreation is an eternal drive and also part of the human soul. But, if man gives in to this kind of love he will be misled and “disturbed” in his “contemplation of truth”. Hence, the seduction of the female body is a danger, while desire for male bodies can lead upwards if contemplated in the right way. Ficino discusses this further in speech six, where he says that the love which rules the body desires to procreate handsome offspring by a “bella femmina” (a beautiful woman), while

lo Amore che s'appartiene a lo Animo, s'affatica di empirlo di ornatissime e gratissime discipline: e scrivendo con bello e ornato stile, pubblicare scienza alla sua simile: e insegnando, generare la medesima scienza per similitudine in qualche Animo bello. Bello, è, dico, quello Animo, che è acuto e ottimo.

(the love which pertains to the soul tries to imbue it with most elegant and pleasing learning, and to spread knowledge like its own by writing in an elegant and

beautiful style, and to reproduce it, by teaching, in some very beautiful soul, that is to say, which is pure, intelligent, and excellent.) (117; 132)

Since the soul is not visible, we rely on the body's beauty as the image of the soul. Therefore, we have to assume that in a beautiful body there is also a beautiful soul which is also more willing to learn. ("e di qui avviene, che noi più volentieri insegniamo a' più belli." / That is why we prefer to teach men who are handsome) (117; 132).

Furthermore, as we have seen, Ficino repeats Pausanias' speech regarding the instability of the body, a notion that is of course highly compatible with Ficino's religious context. He may describe a neutral/equal view of gender in the section on Aristophanes, but the emphasis on this matter with which Aristophanes finished his speech is no longer present in *De amore*. Plato's Aristophanes argues that his theory on love concerns men and women everywhere, even if the Socratic relation is valued as the most noble. Ficino only retells this at the beginning, as a pretext before he reaches his true interpretation, that when one human half "of whichever sex he might be desirous" meets with his other half, the highest form of love, the heavenly Venus, in Ficino's regard is still defined in Pausanias' way – as a love only between men.

The interpretation that degrades women's position in ideal love will, however, be contested within other dialogues, such as Leone Ebreo's, that appeared as responses to Ficino's *De amore*, and became part of the lively discussion on love and gender.

Leone Ebreo's Filone and Sofia

One of these responses to Ficino's interpretation of Plato came from Leone Ebreo or Judah Abravanel, who was born in Lisbon, Portugal around 1460. Little is known about his life, but he worked for Ferdinand and Isabella of Castile as a personal physician until 1492, the year when all the Jewish people were driven out of Spain. He then went to Italy, where he lived in Naples and Genoa and continued to serve as a physician to prominent and powerful persons. He died

some time before 1523 and, apart from the dialogue, he wrote a book called the *Harmony of the Heavens*.¹⁴⁵

His treatise on love, the *Dialoghi d'amore* was probably written before 1510 and probably around 1502-1503. Scholars still debate the original language in which Leone Ebreo wrote. The manuscripts we have today are in Italian, but he might have written first in Hebrew, Spanish, Latin or even French. The dialogue was printed in Rome, in Italian, in 1535, but had been read in manuscript before that, since several well-known writers cite it. It became very popular and was republished 24 times between 1541-1607 and was translated into French, Latin, Spanish and Hebrew between 1551-1660.¹⁴⁶

Leone Ebreo's work is not a commentary, but a dialogue on the topic of love between the allegorical figures of Sofia, meaning 'knowledge', a woman who seeks to reach knowledge about the theory of love, and Filone, meaning 'lover of', a man who informs Sofia on the theory. Together, their names form the unity of *philosophia*.

In the first dialogue, they discuss the topic of "D'amore e desiderio", (On Love and Desire), the second is called "De la comunità d'amore", (On the Universality of Love) and the last "De l'origine d'amore", (On the Origin of Love).¹⁴⁷ A fourth chapter, "On the Effects of Love", is mentioned at the end of the existing text, but it is still unclear whether Leone wrote it and if it has been lost or, whether he never got around to writing it.

Leone Ebreo's work contains discussions concerning a broad spectrum of sources. He includes Christian and Jewish thinking, as well as Greek and Latin classics such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. According to Sergius Koderer, we can assume that Leone worked on the dialogue for an extensive period of time, since we can follow a literary and philosophical development within the text, pointing at an intellectual progression.

¹⁴⁵ Sergius Koderer, "The Idea of Beauty in Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel)," in *The Jewish Body: corporeality, society, and identity in the Renaissance and early modern period* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), 305.

¹⁴⁶ "Introduction," to Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, trans. Cosmos Damian Bacich and Rosella Pescatori (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), 7-9.

¹⁴⁷ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Delfina Giovannozzi, (Bari, Roma: G. Laterza & Figli, 2008), *Dialogues of Love*, trans. Bacich, & Pescatori. All further references will be to Giovannozzi's edition and Bacich's and Pescatori's translation and will be given in brackets after each citation.

Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi di Amore*, Frontispiece and “Dialogo Primo”, 3r (Venice: Giglio, 1558)

He moves from an Aristotelian form and content in the first part, to comments on pagan mythology and astrology in a Jewish context in the second and, finally, in the third part to a “considerable (and critical) awareness of Plato’s *Symposium* and generally of some texts written by Renaissance Neo-Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino or Pico della Mirandola”.¹⁴⁸

As already mentioned, Leone Ebreo’s text is a dialogue between only two characters. Instead of using historical or contemporary persons like Plato and Ficino, he decided to employ the allegorical names of Sophia and Filone. The reader is not given any information about the time or place, the dialogue begins *in medias res*, or any other information about the characters. What we do know is that each dialogue plays out over one day, summing up to a total of three days of talk between Filone and Sofia.

¹⁴⁸ Kodera, “The Idea of Beauty,” 306.

On the Origin of Love

It is mainly the third and last dialogue, “On the Origin of Love”, that consists of deep discussions about the definition of love. The dialogue between Filone and Sofia starts when Filone walks by Sofia in the street without noticing her. He claims that he couldn’t hear her calling because he was in such a deep contemplation of the image of her beauty that he couldn’t register what was happening in the real world:

che la mente mia, ritirata a contemplar, come suole, quella formata in te bellezza,
e in lei per immagine impressa e sempre desiderata, m’ha fatto lassare i sensi
esteriori.

(my mind, as it often is, was withdrawn in contemplation of the beauty formed in
you, whose image is impressed upon it, and which is always desired. This caused
me to take leave of my perception of what is outside me.) (164; 171)

The argument gives rise to a number of questions in Sofia, which then leads to the long dialogue in which not only the Christian and Jewish (Kabbalistic) traditions are discussed, but also the Platonic and Aristotelian works in their original and in their interpreters’ Ficino and Pico della Mirandola’s versions.¹⁴⁹ Leone Ebreo takes the reader to new perspectives while developing the theory of love; his “book is consequently more comprehensive than Ficino’s work in its consideration of love” and he declares that “Plato in the *Symposium* spoke only of human love and not of God’s love, whereas he is discussing universal love”.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Leone Ebreo is also focused on earthly love and claims the world to be a creation bound together by heterosexual and highly dynamic relationships. The love for the beautiful and/or the good results in an urge to reproduce that beauty, so, as Koderer puts it, “in order to become meaningful, love has to result in sexual intercourse and in the begetting of a child”.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Koderer, “The Idea of Beauty,” 306.

¹⁵⁰ Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, 87.

¹⁵¹ Koderer, “The Idea of Beauty,” 307.

Filone explains how he contemplates the image of Sofia.

Dialoghi, "Dialogo Terzo", 106r

This perspective is fundamentally different from that of Ficino and other Neoplatonists; and, thus, the intellectual friendship between men that is praised in these earlier dialogues, with obvious homoerotic connotations, is being dismissed by Leone Ebreo.¹⁵²

Leone Ebreo highlights the heterosexual love between a man and a woman, but what about the differences between male and female? In his dialogue, there is a fundamental subversion of gender roles compared to tradition, because the male character Filone is a passive lover, while Sofia often adopts an active role.

¹⁵² Kodera, "The Idea of Beauty," 307.

It could be argued that Leone explains this subversion when Sofia asks: "But what will you tell me of the meaning of the terms, which have deceived me, where 'lover' means active and 'beloved' passive?" The lover, the active one, is male in Leone Ebreo's dialogue in accordance with prevailing gender codes, while the passive beloved is female. However, Filone explains that the beloved should be valued more highly than the serving lover, and also plays an active part:

Così è il vero: perché l'amante è agente de la servitù de l'amore, ma non de la generazion sua, e l'amato è recipiente del servizio de l'amante, ma non de la causalità de l'amore; e [se] io ti dimandarò qual è più degno, o il servitore o il servito, l'obediente o l'obedito, l'osservante o l'osservato, certo dirai che questi agenti sono inferiori alli suoi recipienti. Così è l'amante verso l'amato, però che l'amante è affettante: serve, obedisce e osserva l'amato.

(This is true because the lover is active in his service of love, but not in its generation, and the beloved is the recipient of the service of the lover, but is not passive in the causation of love. And if I ask you which is worthier, the one who serves or is served, the one who obeys or is obeyed, and the one who respects or is respected, you will assuredly answer that the servant, though active, is lower than him who receives his services. And such is the relation of lover and beloved, for the lover serves, obeys, and respects his beloved) (217; 222, Italian editor's amendment).

Thus, Filone himself plays the active role as a loving subject, but also the beloved, in his case Sofia, also plays an active role since she caused his love. Also, the beloved is regarded as worthier than the lover. This idea of a lover who is in his lady's service mirrors the courtly code, in which the lover is the Lady's subject.

What is perhaps more striking in Leone Ebreo's text is how Sofia claims space and voice as an intellectual human being, which contrasts the misogynist hegemonic discourse. As Koderà also points out, she refuses to be "to one of Filone's obsessive mental constructions".¹⁵³ The following

¹⁵³ Koderà, "The Idea of Beauty," 328.

passage demonstrates this very clearly. It concerns Sofia's questioning of Filone's contemplation of her beauty pictured within him. He says to her: "sì che se lamenter ti vuoi, lamentati pur di te, che e te stessa hai serrate le porte." (So if you want to complain, please complain against yourself, who have locked the door in your own face.) And Sofia answers: "Pur mi lamento che possi e vagli in te, più che mia persona, l'immagine di quella" (Yes, I complain that the image of my person has more sway over you than my person itself) (188; 193). They also argue about what they are actually supposed to do, during which Sophia holds strictly to what was said from the beginning; Filone will teach her about the origin of love. But Filone himself is more interested in other activities. Sofia says: "non vedi tu [che] ciò ch'io voglio da te è la teorica de l'amore, e quel che tu vuoi da me è la pratica di quello?" (would you not understand that what I want from you is the theory of love, and what you want from me is its practice?) and she continues

Non puoi negare che sempre debbe precedere la cognizione de la teorica all'uso de la pratica, ché negli uomini la ragione è quella che indrizza l'opera; e avendomi già dato qualche notizia de l'amore, così di sua essenza come di sua comunità, parrebbe che mancasse il principale se ne mancasse la cognizione di sua origine ed effetti: sì che senza ponervi intervallo déi dar perfezione al già cominciato da te e porger soddisfazione a questo residuo del mio desiderio.

(And you cannot deny that knowledge of the theory should always precede application in practice, since it is reason that rules man's work. Though you have already given me some information about love, both its essence and universality, it seems that I am lacking the main subject if I do not know its origin and effects. So, without further delay, you must perfect what you have already begun and satisfy my remaining desire.) (191; 196, Italian editor's amendment)

Thus, Sofia is the one who tells the male Filone that reason should guide our minds and emotions, not the other way around. Consequently, this choice can be argued to criticize early modern ideas on women as inferior to men, and I claim that it is the core of Leone Ebreo's dialogue. Constantly, it is Sofia who,

through her wish to know all about the philosophy of love, not its practice, drives the conversation forward. She is the wise one, as her allegorical name emphasizes. The narratological strategy of allegory, furthermore, is often employed by early modern women writers, such as Christine de Pizan in her *Cité des Dames*, in which Lady Reason guides the narrator.

Leone Ebreo's Androgyne

In Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi*, Aristophanes' myth of the androgyne follows right after a mention of Pausanias, reminding us, as Ficino does, of the connection between these two speeches in the *Symposium*. Leone Ebreo, however, interprets Aristophanes in a different way than Ficino, insisting on the heterosexual necessity of the perfect union.

Filone explains to Sofia in part three of the dialogue how Aristophanes spoke about a third species (besides man and woman) of human race, called the androgyne, which was both female and male at the same time. It was derived from the moon, while man derived from the sun and woman from the earth. However, it is only the androgyne in Leone Ebreo's version that it said to originate from the double human figure. We read that it was solely these figures who became full with pride and, due to their great strength, tried to attack the gods and had to go through the split. Jupiter divides them into one male and one female, and the two halves begin to desire each other but, without the ability to unite, they began to die. Thus, Leone Ebreo follows Plato's original and Jupiter tells Apollo to place their genitals on the front of the body so that they will be able to join physically for reproductive purposes. From this moment, love was born:

è adunque l'amor in ciascuno degli uomini, maschio e femmina, però che ognuno di loro è mezzo uomo e non uomo intero, onde ogni mezzo desìa la reintegrazione sua con l'altro mezzo.

(Love is therefore in every human being, male and female, for each of them is but a half and not a whole man, and therefore desires to be made whole in its other half.) (275; 274)

As we see, Leone Ebreo's version of the story is clearly heterosexualized, emphasizing the notion of procreation as central to the origin of love. The fact that all three sexes in Aristophanes' speech were originally double, allowing desire between men, between women and between man and woman, is erased. Sofia prompts Filone to explain what this philosophy *actually* signifies, and the answer incorporates the religious myths of Judaism. Filone tells Sofia that Aristophanes' story in fact has a much older origin and that Plato was inspired by this tradition; namely, the creation myth of the first two humans, Adam and Eve. The creation myth as described in Genesis is then problematized through a gender perspective; how can Adam be described as both a human individual containing both male and female, created in God's own likeness, and as a single *man* for whom God created a companion to in a later step? Filone refers to ancient Jewish commentators' interpretations, saying:

solo Adam contenere tutti due, e che prima un supposto fatto d'ambidue si chiamava Adam, però che non si chiamò mai la femmina Eva, fin che non fu divisa dal suo maschio Adam.

(Adam alone contained both sexes, and that there was first an individual called Adam, because the woman was never called Eve until she was separated from the male, Adam.) (278; 276)

Leone Ebreo continues to cite Genesis, where it is stated that the man shall leave his father and mother and become one in flesh with his wife. This means, says Filone, that man and woman:

per essere divisi da un medesimo individuo, l'uomo e la donna si tornano a reintegrare nel matrimonio e coito in uno medesimo supposto carnale e individuale. Di qui pigliò Platone la divisione de l'androgeno in dui mezzi separati, maschio e femmina, e il nascimento de l'amore.

(being two divided halves of a single carnal individual, come together again as one body and individual in marriage and coitus. From here Plato took the division of the androgyne into two separate halves, male and female, and of the birth of love.)
(279; 278)

Throughout this dialogue, Leone Ebreo claims the world to be a creation bound together by highly dynamic heterosexual relationships. The love of the good results in a desire to reproduce that good, but also within the union of marriage. Leone Ebreo does not only discuss heterosexual love between man and woman, but also highlights and problematizes the gender norms of male and female in relation to love. Where Ficino keeps the view that only men are capable of an intellectual understanding of divine love and that men are active and women passive, Leone Ebreo explains the origin of man and woman, being created as one in Adam and then divided into two as *equals*. Sofia's comment, mentioned earlier, that she wants to be recognized as human, as a thinking and real being, can also be considered in this context.¹⁵⁴ Her line is a direct reference to Filone's comment about how he was contemplating the imprinted picture of her, with such concentration that he could not hear her calling when he walked by. Sofia insists on her own personality, on herself as an actual being, not as a mere sublimized version in Filone's mind. This enhancement of the worth of women is also a critical comment on the sublime love of *il dolce stil nuovo* of Dante, Petrarch and the contemporary Petrarchism informed by Neoplatonism, in which women are idolized angelic objects adored from afar. In contrast to the silenced Laura, Sophia speaks and participates in the intellectual conversation.

Leone Ebreo discusses a lot of different sources and he definitely transforms the speeches from Plato, mostly Aristophanes', into a more gender equal ideal – certainly more than Ficino does in his version. Both Leone Ebreo and Ficino, however, incorporate their respective religious views, but not in the same way. Ficino is to some extent closer to Plato's philosophy, and he retains the Socratic love between men as the most noble form of earthly love, while Leone Ebreo insists upon women's equal participation and understanding of love even in its

¹⁵⁴ Where Sofia says: "Pur mi lamento che possi e vagli in te, più che mia persona, l'immagine di quella" (I complain that the image of my person has more sway over you than my person itself") (188; 193).

most divine form. He represents women as intellectually capable and thinking individuals, created, just as man was, as an image of God himself. I believe that his way of combining the spiritual and corporeal love in his philosophy of love also made it especially appealing to women writers such as Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa and to other proto-feminist or gender-critical writers of the sixteenth century. Not the least of these, Tullia d'Aragona found inspiration in Leone Ebreo's dialogue, which she praises in her own *Dialogo della infinità di amore* – a dialogue I will discuss in the following section.

Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore*

Tullia d'Aragona, the only woman to write a philosophical dialogue on love during the sixteenth century, was born in Rome around 1510. She was the daughter of Giulia Campana, an educated courtesan, and cardinal Luigi d'Aragona.¹⁵⁵ Tullia was educated as a *virtuosa* and made a career as a poet and courtesan throughout Italy. She moved several times and resided in Venice, Rome, Siena and Florence with her mother. Around 1535 she lived in Venice and established her reputation as the "intellectual courtesan par excellence", entertaining and conversing with the cultural elite who attended her salon. During her years in Florence she befriended Benedetto Varchi, who was a frequent attender at her Florentine salon. However, during the decades of the 1530s and 1540s, the Italian society was shaped by moral conservatism, and a number of regulations and laws affected courtesans. Aragona's reputation as a poet nevertheless granted her exemptions from the obligatory yellow cover, that all courtesans had to wear when in public. She left Florence in 1548 for Rome, where she died in 1556.

¹⁵⁵ Rinaldina Russell clarifies that Tullia d'Aragona's wedding certificate states one Constanzo Palmieri d'Aragona as her father, but that tradition building on both her mother's words and allusions made by Pietro Aretino and Girolamo Muzio, indicate that the father was this Luigi d'Aragona. Russell, "Introduction," in Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, eds. and trans. Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 22.

Tullia d'Aragona was herself involved in the printing process of the first publication of her *Dialogo della infinità di amore* in 1547, printed by the famous Giolito house in Venice. Often, her dialogue is described as a response to Sperone Speroni's depiction of her in his dialogue. Speroni was considered a "leading authority on Neoplatonic philosophy" and, like Aragona, he attended the cultural salons of Venice, Florence, Ferrara and also Urbino. His *Dialogo di amore* (1542) was inspired by his encounters with Aragona within the salons of Venice in 1535, prompting him to base his female character Tullia on her but also to incorporate their mutual friends Bernardo Tasso, Niccolò Grazia, Lattenza Benucci and Francesco Maria Molza. Even if Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue is very much a correction of Speroni's portrayal of her as a courtesan, which will be more thoroughly discussed later in this study, her own intellectual characterization of her 'Tullia' is more complex than that.¹⁵⁶

In accordance with the rhetoric of the dialogue, she too set her stage in a realistic environment, where the character of Tullia debates questions on love with Varchi, built on her real-life friend and possibly lover, the writer and scholar Benedetto Varchi. A third participant, Benucci, is present throughout the debate, but only becomes involved at the end.¹⁵⁷ The conversation takes place in Tullia's own salon and the speakers also have an audience. Thus, "immediate experiences in salon society especially shape these texts", which is a common rhetorical technique, as discussed earlier.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ See Campbell, *Literary Circles*, and Smarr, "A Dialogue of Dialogues" and Russell, "Introduction," to *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*.

¹⁵⁷ To name the female character Tullia was not the primary intention, thus Aragona called her Sabina. But, if we are to believe the editor, Molza's, dedication to Aragona printed in the first edition, it was he who made the decision to name her Tullia, the same as the author herself, whom the character represents and is built upon.

¹⁵⁸ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 24.

Gendering the Dialogue on Love

[C]hé non solamente i poeti, ma i filosofi ancora gli danno tanti nomi [all'amore] [...] ne parlano sotto tante favole e velamenti e misteri, che io, per me, non crederei indovinar mai qual fosse il vero o qual voleste intender voi.

(Poets and philosophers have attributed so many different names to love, [...] and they write about love under so many allegories, in so many fables and different guises, that I'd never be capable of guessing the truth of the matter or, indeed, what you take the truth to be.)¹⁵⁹

These lines are also cited in the introduction to this study and I find them representative of how love has been depicted, discussed and debated in writing. Of course, Tullia d'Aragona's aim with her dialogue is to contribute to the discussions. Notably, her contribution produces new ideas through her extensive intellectual knowledge of previously written works, which she constantly negotiates and questions. A core of Aragona's dialogue is an ideal in which the body plays a central part and where women are included in understandings of love to a much greater extent than in any other philosophical dialogue of the period. For example, she asks:

Chi non sa che tutto il composto, cioè l'anima e il corpo insieme, è più nobile e più nobile e più perfetto che l'anima sola?

(Is anyone ignorant of the fact that the whole, body and soul taken together, is more noble and more perfect than the soul by itself?) (197; 65)

Thus, in order to understand love, it has to be experienced through both body and soul. By drawing extensively on references to classical texts on the subject of love, like Plato, Aristotle, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Marsilio Ficino and Leone

¹⁵⁹ Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogo della infinità di amore*, in *Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento*, ed. Giuseppe Zonta (Bari: Laterza, 1912), 202, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, eds. and trans. Russell and Merry, 70, my amendment. All further references to Aragona's dialogue will be to these editions and will be given in brackets after each citation.

Ebreo, d'Aragona places her discussion among the writers and poets of both Classical times and the early modern period and skillfully makes use of the rhetoric of the genre in order to discuss, criticize and transgress existing configurations of love and gender.

This skillful literary strategy is central to this present study, and I will explore this in depth in relation to Gaspara Stampa. Thus, as Campbell states regarding the relation to Speroni, when Aragona "takes control of the pen and the multiple voices in a Socratic dialogue, the roles she assigns to her characters mimic those in Speroni's dialogue, but at the same time, subvert them".¹⁶⁰ Rinaldina Russell takes it a step further saying that:

Aragona is able to call the bluff of Platonic theories and contest the Aristotelian notion of women's inferiority. The equality of the sexes is implied throughout the dialogue and is upheld by Tullia at crucial points.¹⁶¹

Tullia d'Aragona strongly enhances women's positions both as writers of philosophical and poetical works and in their understanding of philosophies of love. Aragona's dialogue on love presupposes heteronormativity, which can be seen as a strategic choice in her aim to problematize the fact that women had mainly been depicted as silent interlocutors in dialogues and in lyrical poetry. Thus, one of her main purposes, besides discussing the philosophy of love and love's possible infinity, is to reclaim a space for women and women's voices in the disputations on love.

Aragona's view on the Androgyne

The presupposed heteronormativity also informs Tullia d'Aragona's views on the question of perfect union. At the end of Aragona's dialogue, Varchi speaks about "real and authentic virtuous love" and refers to Socrates and Plato.

¹⁶⁰ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 38.

¹⁶¹ Russell, "Introduction," to *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 38.

Aragona's Tullia raises the question of why women are regarded as incapable of such love within the Socratic ideas.

[T]uttavia vorrei sapere perché non si può amare anche una donna di cotesto medesimo amore; ché non penso già che vogliate dire che le donne non abbiano l'anima intelletiva come gli uomini e non siano di una medesima specie, come ho sentito dire a certi.

(I should still like to know why a woman cannot be loved with this same type of love. For I am certain that you don't wish to imply that women lack the intellectual soul that men have and that consequently they do not belong to the same species as males, as I have heard a number of men say.) (229; 97)

Varchi is on her side and explains that it is not only possible to love women with the same kind of love but that one *really should* (229; 97). Before these comments, the two disputants have acknowledged same-sex love and Tullia is clear on her opinion of this matter:

Io lo dico, io. Ma, venendo al secondo vostro dubbio, dico che quelli, che amano i gioveni lascivamente, non fanno ciò secondo gli ordinamenti della natura, e sono degni di quel castigo che non solo dalle leggi canoniche e divine è stato loro dato, ma eziandio dalle civili ed umane. Ed a pena posso credere che chi usa un così brutto, scelerato e nefando vizio, o per arte o per una usanza così fatta, sia uomo. E di ciò avrò caro mi dichiati poi il parer vostro, ché so bene che appresso i greci era tutto il contrario, e che Luciano ne fa un dialogo dove loda questo vizio, e Platone medesimamente.

(Here I consider that those men who entertain a lascivious love for youths are not following the true dictates of nature, so they fully deserve the punishment that canon and divine law have imposed on them, as well as the penalties set up by man-made and civil justice. What is more, I can scarcely believe that people who practice such an ugly, wicked and hideous vice, whether an artificial or habitual form of behavior, are real human beings. I shall be glad if later on you could give me your own view on this, for I know full well that in classical Greece the opposite notion was common and that Lucian wrote a dialogue in which he praised this vice, as did Plato.) (227-28.; 95)

Varchi gives her his answer right away and harshly tells her to get such ideas out of her mind. Of course, Plato and others speak about this love with great passion and they showed their love for youths openly. But, Varchi says, “ma dico che non gli amavano a quello effetto che si pensa il vulgo, e che pare che intendiate ancora voi” (I simply maintain that they did not love them the way that people commonly interpret and apparently you also believe) (228; 95). Tullia’s position is nonetheless expressed explicitly. However, the conversation ends with the question of women’s capacity to understand and practice love of a noble kind. I would therefore suggest that her strong heterosexual norm functions strategically, as previously stated, in her bid to enhance and establish women, and herself, on a position equal with men.

While I insist upon the parallels between Aragona’s and Gaspara Stampa’s visions of love and strategies to present them, I have also found parallels with Sperone Speroni relevant in this study. The relation between his and Aragona’s dialogues have already been discussed to some extent, but his presentation of the androgyne, or “Ermafrodite” as he names the figure, still needs to be reviewed.

Sperone Speroni’s Amore Perfetto or Ermafrodite

Sperone Speroni’s dialogue is generally interpreted as being intended to promote, not a Neoplatonic view on love, but ideas influenced by Aristotelian tradition. Rinaldina Russell discusses the context of Aristotelian scholars that might have influenced Speroni and states that:

[a]n even greater consideration for natural instinct is found in Sperone Speroni’s *Dialogo d’amore* (1542). When the character Grazia celebrates the dual nature of man and of love, he clearly is following the epistemological footsteps of Pietro Pomponazzi, the eminent Aristotelian philosopher whose classes Speroni had attended in Bologna.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Russell, “Introduction,” in *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 30.

Russell further presents the main idea of the Aristotelians following Pomponazzi, which is in opposition to the Platonists regarding how the world, and therefore also love, should be perceived. In the Aristotelian understanding, the human mind is in constant need of *all* the senses, not only hearing and sight as the Platonists hold. Speroni's character Grazia is the main proponent of this view:

Love, Grazia maintains, is an affection born in the senses and shaped by reason. Lovers, dissatisfied with only being able to see and hear their beloveds, endeavor as much as they can to pleasure the other senses too. And when the pleasure of the mind is added to those of senses, the "amorous hermaphrodite", that is, the perfect union between man and woman, is truly achieved.¹⁶³

The allusion to Aristophanes' myth is of course of great interest and relates both to Gaspara Stampa's use of the phoenix and the androgyne, and also to the chapter on Marguerite, where I discuss her strategic employment of the myth. For Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa, the androgyne is useful in order to enhance women's position in love relations, which also has social consequences since traditional gender positions within a patriarchal system are being challenged. The gender aspects of the different interpretations of the androgyne, or the hermaphrodite in Speroni's words, are also central in his dialogue.

The very choice of Speroni to name his united lovers as an amorous hermaphrodite first of all points, in my interpretation, to the centrality of the body in his idea or version of the myth. In contrast to Ficino's allegorical interpretation of Aristophanes' myth, Speroni's hermaphrodite reminds us of the physical aspect, the blending of bodies, taking place in the union of the lovers. We can think of the representation of this blending in the later picture of "Matrimonii typus" in an emblem book by Barthélemy Aneau, but also the Ovidian myth of Hermaphroditus.

¹⁶³ Russell, "Introduction," in *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 31. The "perfetto l'ermafrodito amoroso" is found in Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo d'amore in Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, ed. Pozza, Mario (Milan & Naples, Ricciardi, 1978), 517. All the following references to Speroni's dialogue will be to this edition and will be given in brackets after each citation. The translations are mine unless not indicated otherwise.

Aneau's figure suggests equality and stems from Aristophanes' myth in the *Symposium*, while the myth of Hermaphroditus is a very different one, as discussed in previous sections. In the Ovidian myth, the focus is on the male character, while the woman is depicted as boundless in her desire and forces the blending of their bodies on her male beloved.

Barthélemy Aneau, *Picta Poesis*, 1552

The intertextual connection to Ovid is also made clear by Speroni himself; hence, in his dialogue we read:

Quello è amore perfetto, il cui nodo lega e congiunge perfettamente due innamorati, in maniera che, perduto il loro proprio sembiante, diventino amendue un non so che terzo, non altrimenti che di Salmace e di Ermafrodito si favoleggi.
(514)

(Perfect love is that knot which binds and perfectly connects two lovers, so that, having lost their own appearance, they both become a third and no other than Salmacis and Hermaphroditus.)

I read this statement as a mixture of Aristophanes' myth and Ovid's; thus, the violence incorporated between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus is not taken into consideration, but instead symbolizes the perfect love and union of the androgyne. It is, however, stated in the citation from Russell commenting on Grazia above, that the union of love is between a man and a woman, thus it is a heterosexual version in line with Leone Ebreo and later Tullia d'Aragona. In Speroni's dialogue, though, women are discussed and treated in accordance with the general contemporary view, as inferior human beings without the capacity for reason, perhaps then still connection her to Salmacis.

Janet Smarr compares Speroni's dialogue with Tullia d'Aragona's, arguing that Aragona is writing a feminist response to Speroni's. Her attendance in his dialogue is restricted, thus she "may graciously ask wiser men for their opinions, but her own opinions are considered dangerous, and her attempt to imitate a 'real' poet is mocked and halted."¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, the female character in Speroni's dialogue can be seen in light of a more accepted position for women within the cultural and philosophical elite. Pablo Maurette argues for this view, pointing out that "the return of the female philosopher must [...] be read against the backdrop of a larger debate on the dignity of women" in which Speroni also participated with his love dialogue and his *Dialogo della Dignità delle Donne*.¹⁶⁵ Reinier Leushuis extends the analysis even further, explaining that Speroni's dialogue is to be viewed as subversive in its entirety due to its "unique relationship between the practice of dialogue, and the experience and *praxis* (rather than theory!) of love".¹⁶⁶ Thus, by using a loving couple taken from real life, Tullia d'Aragona and Tasso, Speroni's dialogue is mimetic to a greater extent than others, like Ficino's or Leone Ebreo's. This

¹⁶⁴ Smarr, "A Dialogue of Dialogues".

¹⁶⁵ Pablo Maurette, "Plato's Hermaphrodite and a Vindication of the Senses of Touch in the Sixteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3, 2015, 886.

¹⁶⁶ Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, 57.

relation is perhaps also depicted when Speroni allows his Tullia to criticize the idea of a perfect union between the two lovers. She argues:

[S]olvete meglio il mio dubbio ; che, non ostante ciò che diceste, a me pare che, avendo luogo nel nostro amore la servitù che ha il Tasso con il suo Signore, in maniera che ella il parta da me e stare il faccia in Salerno, non sia perfetta questa unione. (520)

(Solve my doubt more; that, in spite of what you said, it seems to me that, Tasso's servitude towards his Lord having taken hold of our love in a way that takes him away from me and makes him stay in Salerno, this union is not perfect.)¹⁶⁷

In other words, both in Speroni's depiction of Tullia and in Aragona's own dialogue on love discussed above, criticism against the androgyne figure is raised. It is depicted by Speroni's character as a utopian state with no relation to reality. As I aim to show, this criticism is also found in Gaspara Stampa's appropriation of the androgyne figure.

Antoine Héroët and Bonaventure des Périers

Turning from the Italian context to the French *querelle des amyes*, I intend to briefly comment on the most significant parts of Antoine Héroët's and Bonaventure des Périers' (c. 1501-1544) texts on Neoplatonic love, as a backdrop to my interpretations of the *Heptaméron*. Héroët's *Parfaicte Amye* was first published in 1542 and regularly republished over the following decade. *L'Androgyne de Platon* was published by Dolet, Lyon, as part of a compilation of *Amye* and two additional poems entitled *De n'aymer point sans estre ayme* and *La Complaincte d'une Dame surprinse nouvellement d'amour* in 1543.

Héroët, born in Paris in 1492, made an early career in the church and, through his courtly contacts, became a protégée of Marguerite de Navarre's. He was soon promoted to prior of Saint-Eloi-lez-Longjumeau and raised to the

¹⁶⁷ Translation Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, 63 note 38.

episcopacy in 1552. He died as the Bishop of Digne in 1568.¹⁶⁸ Héroët's poem, *L'Androgyne de Platon*, was not a translation, but an expose on the origin of Love according to Aristophanes' myth. Further, it was a "commentary on that allegory which emphasized the purity and virtue of the Platonic conception of Love, sentiments allied with the Christian mysticism of Marguerite de Navarre".¹⁶⁹ I will shortly return to this poem.

Bonaventure des Périers made a French translation of Ficino's Latin version of and commentary on Plato's *Lysis*. The French translation by des Périers was entitled *Les discours de la queste d'amytié* and also contains a commentary with the same name, *Queste d'amytié* (1544, but probably written in 1541), and both were dedicated to Marguerite.¹⁷⁰ Together with Héroët's texts and Jean de La Haye's French translation of Ficino's commentary of the *Symposium*, des Périers's text was part of the queen's 'Neoplatonic project'.¹⁷¹ His translation of *Lysis* mainly follows Ficino, but also takes some liberties.

For example, as Schachter notes, he expands on a line found originally in the *Odyssey*, cited by Plato and translated by Ficino. Des Périers both alludes to the myth of the androgyne and introduces the idea of perfect friendship, or love, between a man and a woman through a known medieval literary pair of lovers, Marion and Robin. This female-male relation is at the center of the *Queste d'amytié*, of course, in contrast to the male-male ideal found originally in *Lysis* as well as in Ficino's Latin version. As Reeser states, the *Queste d'amytié* "makes connections between females and perfect *amytié* as though the lessons of the preceding translation are now being applied to the poet's relation to his protector and to male-female love in a large sense".¹⁷² The poem reads:

¹⁶⁸ W. A. R. Kerr, "Héroët's Parfaicte Amye," *PMLA*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1905, 570–71.

¹⁶⁹ Hochstetler Meyer, Barbara, "Marguerite de Navarre and the Androgynous Portrait of François Ier", *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer, 1995, 307. Hochstetler Meyer refers to Ferdinand Gohin while discussing these implications.

¹⁷⁰ Bonaventure des Périers, *Recueil des œuvres de feu Bonaventure des Periers* (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1544). Jourda comments on the Neoplatonic influence in his *Marguerite d'Angoulême*: "théories auxquelles leur beauté a assuré la pérennité: celles du *Phèdre* et du *Banquet* plus encore que du *Courtisan*, - la Reine a pu les lire dans le texte du divin Platon, dans les commentaires de Ficin, plus encore les entendre développer par des Périers, par Dolet, par Scève, par Héroët", 757. Jonathan Reid places Héroët as a "Member of her household" and states that one of his works was printed in Marguerite's *Le fable du faulx cuidier* (1547). Reid, *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), Vol. 2, 451–52.

¹⁷¹ Marc D. Schachter, "Translating Friendship in the Circle of Marguerite de Navarre," in *Men and Women Making Friends in Early Modern France* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 103, Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*, 228.

¹⁷² Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*, 231.

Tousjours Dieu mène & adresse / Le Pareil à son Semblable, / Dont apres mainte
 caresse / Naist Amytié perdurable: / Et si est tant favorable, / Qu'entre plus d'un
 million, / Par sa bonté secourable, / Robin trouve Marion.

(God always leads and directs / the Like to his Similar kind, / from which after
 many caresses / eternal Friendship is born, / and indeed He is so supportive /
 that from among more than a million, / by His helpful goodness, / Robin finds
 Marion.)¹⁷³

The *Queste d'amytié* thus mainly presents a Christian version of perfect love between female and male, where the goal of all desires is to achieve union with God in the afterlife. This is even more evident in the commentary, in the form of a poem, following immediately after the translation. Furthermore, in the commentary, allusions to the androgyne are found here as we read: "Or, la Belle, Voyant qu'elle / N'a de soy que la moytié, / Se contente, / Soubs l'attante / De sa parfaicte Amytié (So, the Bell[e], seeing that she possesses but half [la moytié] of herself is content to wait for her perfect Friendship.)"¹⁷⁴ The allusion, as pointed out in the translation, lies in the word "moytié", representing the split of the original human and, according to Aristophanes, the birth of desire. De Périers's commentary thus carries significance for the understanding of the myth in the French context.

Both of Héroët's texts, probably composed some years earlier, are perhaps even more important for our understanding of Marguerite's appropriations of the androgyne and Neoplatonism in general. In both *Amye* and *L'Androgyne*, we encounter the ideal of Neoplatonic love as understood by the court poet Héroët, namely as a defense of extra-marital liaisons presented in such a way that it criticizes the system of aristocratic contract marriages. As Perry states: "His *Parfaicte Amye* and *Androgyne* can be considered as signs of a new understanding of human marriage, the marriage of both true minds and true

¹⁷³ Schachter's translation in "Translating Friendship," 106. The French original is also cited from Schachter and found in note 22 on the same page.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 113 and note 47. Amendments to the translation are mine.

bodies".¹⁷⁵ In *Amye*, the lady speaking is envisioning a union with her beloved, whom nature and not civic regulations, has caused her to love. This love is built on mutual affection since, before coming to earth, they were one. Now, split into two souls, they seek to reunite. As noted by Kerr in an early article, the Platonic kiss is also represented in his *Amye*. Kerr argues that Héroët specifically draws upon Castiglione's account in the speech given by Bembo, and also, significantly, points out a poem by Marguerite called *Adieux*, in which she employs Héroët's formulation.¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, Book II of *Amye* presents the Neoplatonic ideal of love as a desire for beauty as well as a version of the perfect union of lovers: "C'est de beaulté jouyssance et plaisir / Dont nostre amour est ung ardent desir" (It is for beauty, joy and pleasure / that our love so ardently desires).¹⁷⁷ As Perry also notes, Héroët is primarily speaking in favor of women's equality in regard to love, and he uses Neoplatonic ideals to enhance their position. Thus, while making space for equality within a love relationship, he also rejects the Petrarchan and courtly ideal of idolization of the lady and of love as a courtly service. In Perry's words: "Héroët's rejection of such a conception of service is to be viewed as an opposition to the courtly love relation of mistress and slave; in fact, the equality of lovers is in Héroët's view a central lesson of the androgyne myth."¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Perry argues that the version of the androgyne that Héroët presents seems to a great extent to be informed by Leone Ebreo's conception of the myth, which is highly relevant since I believe this also to be the case for Marguerite. Either her understanding of the androgyne stems from Héroët, as many scholars have argued, or it could be informed by Leone Ebreo's text first hand or from discussions of his text in her cultural circle.

¹⁷⁵ Theodore Perry, *Erotic Spirituality: The Integrative Tradition from Leone Ebreo to John Donne* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Kerr cites the following lines from Héroët's *La Parfaict Amye*: "Les corps voisins comme morts delaisés, / D'amour & non d'aulture chose pressés, / Sans y penser se mettent à leur ayse, / Que la main touche, ou que la bouche baise" and from Abel Lefranc's edition of Marguerite's *Dernières Poésies* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1896), when he comments on Marguerite's poem: "'Adieu vous dy le baiser juste et saint / Fondé du tout en Dieu et charité.' In the same poem Margaret refers also to the hand: 'Adieu la main laquelle j'ay touchée / Comme la plus parfaite en vraye foy, / Dans laquelle ay la mienne couchée / Sans offenser d'honestete la loy.'" Kerr, "Héroët's Parfaicte Amye," 577.

¹⁷⁷ Antoine Héroët, "La Parfaict Amye," in *Œuvre Poétiques*, ed. Ferdinand Gohin (Paris: Édouard Cornély, 1909), 55.

¹⁷⁸ Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, 76.

The androgyne figure is also central in the concluding section of this overview of the theories on love, since I will now turn to Héroët's poem *L'Androgyne*. His interpretation of the speech given by Aristophanes is a rather free version and should not be called a translation or a commentary. Héroët dedicated the poem to François I and, as stated earlier, also presented it at his court in the 1530s. In similarity to Ficino, Héroët proposes that he is presenting the true meaning of the myth, where the androgyne, this "monstre" symbolizes the reunion of a male and a female in perfect love.¹⁷⁹ This reunion "allegorizes a move toward God that makes up for original sin".¹⁸⁰ In the introduction, the three types of human found in Plato's version are presented, but with the amendment that only the androgyne had been a joined being. As for the original male and female beings, he explains that they "simplement de tous temps simple furent" (were simply always one).¹⁸¹ Those descending from these solitary beings lack the possibility of re-uniting and are not bearers of the divine light needed to transform their love into a transcendent love of God. In other words, while Héroët opens up space for an interpretation of the myth in which three types of desire are possible, male-male, female-female and male-female, he nevertheless "collapses all same-sex love and widespread forms of male-female love into a single category of people that do not love truly".¹⁸² Only the descendants of the androgyne carry the potential for divine love.

What is most significant in Héroët's interpretation of the androgyne and also in his *Amye*, I suggest, is the centrality of the woman as an equal lover. The androgyne presupposes this view and the Neoplatonic ideas of earthly love as a renewal of a spiritual communion, in which a woman should be able seek true, intellectual and noble love outside of marriage, is illustrated in the *Amye*. Thus, as Kerr concludes:

This intellectual love, says Heroet, is to be totally differentiated from the so-called chaste wailings of Petrarch and his imitators. That in practice so many extra-matri-

¹⁷⁹ Héroët, "L'Androgyne de Platon," in *Œuvre Poétiques*, 86.

¹⁸⁰ Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*, 232.

¹⁸¹ Héroët, "L'Androgyne", 90. Reeser's translation, *Setting Plato Straight*, 232.

¹⁸² Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*, 232.

monial love-affairs go wrong is owing, not to the fault of platonic love, but to the fact that but the elect few are capable of entertaining it.¹⁸³

In other words, Héroët presents an ideal of love that is indeed highly Neoplatonic, largely following Ficino's already Christianized version of the philosophy but, in contrast to his Florentine predecessor, he enhances women's capacity to understand and be part of this intellectual kind of love.

¹⁸³ Kerr, "Héroët's Parfaicte Amye," 583.

Marguerite de Navarre's Vision of Love

Marguerite de Navarre's the *Heptaméron* is a literary debate about love. Of the 72 novellas all but nine are on the theme of love, usually containing transgressions regarding gender and amorous relations, and the discussions following upon each novella debate these topics vividly.¹⁸⁴ How to love, how to speak about love and how to behave when in love are questions that are disputed among the ten storytellers, or *devisants*, and the plurality of voices and arguments are central to the structure of the collection. As I set out in the introduction, I will discuss the employment of the androgyne figure in the *Heptaméron*, starting with the discussion following novella 8, followed by analyses of novellas 19, 43 and 70 and their respective discussions. However, the analysis will be introduced by a discussion of how the prologue is set as a stage that enables this narrative debate on love, which continuously destabilizes gender positions in favor of female voices and agency.

Prologue – Setting the Stage

le noble amant
aime les récits d'amants¹⁸⁵

It is well known that Marguerite's collection of novellas differs from her source of inspiration, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in many respects, and her relation to this work has been debated. My view on the relation between the two works is in line with P. B. Diffley's, who points that the *Heptaméron* "treats Boccaccio and his *Decameron* in exactly the same way as it treats all issues: questioningly,

¹⁸⁴ Zegura, "True Stories," 353.

¹⁸⁵ Gottfried de Strasbourg, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. Louis Gravigny (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 2008), 4. In my translation: "The noble lover loves the stories of lovers". Parts of the following chapters have previously been published in Johanna Vernqvist, "Negotiating Neoplatonism and the Androgyne Metaphor: Heptaméron 70 and 19," *L'Esprit Creature*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Fall 2017.

analytically, inconclusively.”¹⁸⁶ This statement is true regarding most of the intertexts and sources to be found in the work, not least the ones that deals with love.

Marguerite’s aim, at least as it is stated in the prologue, is to have her ten *devisants* tell only true stories, in contrast to the Italian model. And where Boccaccio divided his storytellers into seven women and three men, the *devisants* of the *Heptaméron* are equally divided between women and men. Furthermore, many of these *devisants* have relationships with one or more of the others in the group: husband and wife, *serviteurs* to some of the women, friendships between women, between women and men, and between men. Thus, these different relationships are related to love and gender and are important for the frame story and the dialogues between them. As Jules Gelernt points out:

We may imagine the Queen musing to herself that mankind comprises sensualists and romanticists as well as Platonists and Christians, and all of them are to be taken into account before one can form one’s judgment of love. It is this generosity of mind, this desire, so characteristic to Marguerite, to include rather than exclude, which makes the *Heptameron* unique among literary discussions of love.¹⁸⁷

Marguerite goes even further in pointing out the equity created in the narrative in terms of class and social status between the characters when Hircan, the rather misogynist nobleman, says: “car au jeu nous sommes tous esgaulx” (Where games are concerned everybody is equal) (92; 70). This comment comes at the end of the discussion about how the gathered crowd should spend their time waiting for a bridge to be built which will give them free passage to travel. Oisille, the oldest woman in the group, suggests a reading of the Holy Scripture, but is quickly turned down and countered by Hircan, who proposes activities of a sexual nature. Parmente, who is married to Hircan but also courted by at least one of the other men, negates this activity as too exclusive for some of the members of the group and instead proposes a compromise: reading the

¹⁸⁶ P. B. Diffley, “From Translation to Imitation and Beyond: A Reassessment of Boccaccio’s Role in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,” *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2, Apr. 1995.

¹⁸⁷ Gelernt, *World of Many Loves*, 56.

Scripture in the mornings and telling stories in the afternoons. This, as Nora Peterson notes, places the “spiritual and carnal extremes against each other in a juxtaposition of sexuality and spirituality that will coexist – at times uneasily – in the *Heptaméron*”.¹⁸⁸ In other words, desire of a sexual nature is transformed into the creative entertainment of telling stories about love and desire. Furthermore, the main focus of the *Decameron* is the short stories, but already here in the prologue the vivid discussions, which will soon concern the subjects of the stories, can be claimed to be of more importance in the *Heptaméron*. It is particularly interesting to make comparisons between the apparent morality of the novellas and what is later the actual topic for discussion after each novella. The discussions mostly concern the moral right or wrong in the love relations the stories depict, but also love’s definition and norms for gender, and on occasion they seem to have almost nothing to do with the plot of the novella. Since the *devisants* constantly represent different opinions, the discussions are often left open without a clear, agreed meaning of right and wrong, which makes the narratological strategy of the *Heptaméron* very similar to the genre of dialogues. This diversity is a key strategy, as we will see, to enable the inclusion of arguments that transgress the definitions and constitution of love, gender and sexuality.

One of the main ideas I discuss in this study is the notion of equity that the androgyne incorporates and I want to point out early on that the very choice to use this idea is transgressive. Thus, allusions to the marital androgyne or the Neoplatonic versions as represented in the text can be seen as utopic visions where a form of equality is possible between men and women. Norms of gender are a central argument in the discussions and stories throughout the *Heptaméron*. The *devisants*’ potentially equal positions in the game of telling stories are enhanced by Hircan in the citations above, while another example is found in Ennasuite’s declaration before novella 36: “je n’esparneray homme

¹⁸⁸ Peterson, “What Women Know,” 25. Jeff Kendrick also notes a close relation between sexuality and spirituality in Marguerite de Navarre’s poetry, noting specifically how she re-uses erotic images from the original song for her *Chanson XVII*: “She [Marguerite] sets in motion a collision between the spiritual economy described in the remake and the physical reality of everyday existence by insisting on the carnal side of life midway through the *chanson* when she explicitly brings this source song to mind.” Kendrick, “Gender Flexibility and Androgyny,” 112. Also, Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane*.

ne femme, afin de faire tout esgal" (I shall spare neither men nor women, in order to make everything equal) (449; 352). Thus, men and women should be equally viewed in terms of being good and virtuous or bad and immoral.

One can argue, following Elizabeth Zegura, that through her choice to place the frame story outside of the French court, Marguerite "ensures that a plurality of opinions will be heard, through the invention of an equalizing jeu or game."¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the *devisants* still relate to each other in various ways; it is clear, for example, that Parlamente is subordinate to her husband Hircan. Also, gender inequality is a common topic in their stories and discussions, and is thus renegotiated and debated throughout the collection.

As Todd Reeser argues, gender criticism within the collection is enabled through the idea that sex is a stable binary concept. In the *Heptaméron*, "there is an assumption of a pre-given sex, a stable male and female body that exists before gender is inscribed on it and before it can become fluid".¹⁹⁰ This is a valid observation, but as we will see there are still examples of women within the stories, such as 43 and 70, who behave in masculine ways to such a degree that they can no longer be called women. They become androgynous.

In some novellas, like 70, the equal union of the androgyne falls apart due to the fact that the two parts are not truly equal parts. Instead, the allusions to the perfect union are narrated in order to reveal and challenge the prevailing boundaries of love and gender, which often prove to be unequal. In other novellas, such as 19, the androgyne is actually fulfilled in the union of a man and a woman. What I specifically aim to show in this study is that the agents in these stories are women, and some of them are examples of the initial agreement on equity in the prologue, which enables women "free reign to explore their own voices".¹⁹¹ Thus, in the *Heptaméron*, women speak, act and claim space, and they repeatedly challenge, reverse and transform traditional views on gender and gender positions. Consequently, the *Heptaméron* has to be regarded in the broader context of *la querelle des femmes*, as well as in the philosophical debate on love that was on-going within the various dialogues in Italy and France.

¹⁸⁹ Zegura, "True Stories," 358.

¹⁹⁰ Reeser, "The Assumption," 127.

¹⁹¹ Peterson, "What Women Know," 25.

Introducing the Androgyne

The Neoplatonic influence on the *Heptaméron* from philosophical thinkers and texts of the early modern period and context has been debated at least since Lefranc's study in the late nineteenth century. Marguerite's use of and relation to the androgyne metaphor and myth have attracted special attention from a number of scholars, especially over the last decade. The *dizain* by Clément Marot is often cited by scholars as a first example of how Marguerite herself was described as being more than a woman; she is both woman and man and, on top of that, has the enlightened intellect of an angel:

De Ma Dame la Duchess d'Alençon

Ma Maistresse est de si haulte valeur,
Qu'elle a le corps droit, beau, chaste, & pudique :
Son cueur constant n'est pour heur ou malheur,
Jamais trop gay, ne trop malancolique.
Elle a au chef un Esprit Angelique,
Le plus subtil qui onc aux Cieulx volla.
O grand' merveille : l'on peult veoir par cela
Que je suis Serf d'ung Monstre fort estrange :
Monstre je dy, car pour tout vray elle a
Corps femenin, cueur d'homme, et teste d'Ange.

(My mistress is of such great worth/ That her body is upright, fine, chaste, and discreet;/ Her constant heart is, in good times or bad/ Never too merry or too sad./ Her head contains an angelic spirit,/ As spiritual as ever flew heavenward./ Oh great marvel: from this it can be seen/ That I am the servant of a most strange monster:/ Monster I say because in all truth she has/ A womanly body, the heart of a man, and the head of an Angel.)¹⁹²

¹⁹² "De Ma Dame la Duchesse d'Alençon", *Premier Livre d'epigrammes* in Clément Marot, *Œuvres poétiques Complètes*, ed. Gérard Defaux, 2 vols. (Paris: Bordas, 1990-93), Vol. 2, 204-5. Translation by Rothstein, *The Androgyne in Early Modern France. Contextualizing Power and Gender* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 129.

As we see in this poem, Marguerite's personality is described in words alluding to the androgyne; she is androgynous. Marot calls her a "monstre fort estrange", having the body of a woman, the heart of a man and the head of an Angel. The "head of an angel" indicates that her intellect is celestial and a consequence of her androgynous personality or soul. This idea can also, I argue, can also be related to the Neoplatonic idea of the perfect union that the androgyne symbolizes, which also signifies a divine or enlightened state of being.

Marguerite's interest in and representation of Neoplatonism can be traced not only in her own literary works, but also in the works of others, and through other written sources connected to her. Marguerite's interest and eagerness to learn more about the philosophy led her, as previously discussed, to organized a "veritable 'Plato project', commissioning the members of her entourage to undertake translations of Plato's dialogues as well as the commentaries of Ficino."¹⁹³ Marguerite further discussed her thoughts on Neoplatonic philosophy in her letters to her brother the King and to Briçonnet and, importantly for our purpose, she let her *devisants* discuss Platonic ideas and "les philosophes du temps passé" repeatedly in the *Heptaméron* (438). The figure of the androgyne and the metaphors associated with it reappear in the *Heptaméron*, in Neoplatonic, in Christian and mixed contexts, and all describe a union that presupposes equal parts. Thus, in the following I will discuss how the figure of the androgyne enters the discourse of the *Heptaméron*.

Dagoucin Enters the Conversation

When the influence of Platonic ideas on the *Heptaméron* has been disputed, Dagoucin's position has been repeatedly in focus. While Marcel Tetel argues that his Platonic guidance is not strong at all and Todd Reeser refers to him as the Neoplatonist in the group, I claim that Dagoucin actually incorporates both the role of a *serviteur* and traces of Neoplatonic ideals.¹⁹⁴ Dagoucin presents comments with a clear Neoplatonic foundation, such as his allusions to the androgyne discussed below. But, at the same time, he reveals a strong belief in

¹⁹³ Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, 204.

¹⁹⁴ Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, and Reeser, "Fracturing the Male Androgyne".

the codes of courtly love that actually contradicts fundamental Neoplatonic thought. Dagoucin is, however, not the only *devisant* to present Neoplatonic ideas; Parlemente speaks positively about elements of the philosophy, especially regarding the possibility of reaching divine love. I suggest that this choice, to position a woman as a leading figure in the discussion, reminding us of Plato's Diotima, is a strategy in the project of enhancing women's agency and voice. But, before going deeper into my arguments on this strategy, we need to discuss the introduction of the androgyne figure in the *Heptaméron*.

In novella 9, Dagoucin tells a story of a man who dies from unrequited love, but who in his last breath gets to embrace and kiss his beloved and, by this event, becomes united with her as though they were two inseparable halves. In the discussion preceding this novella, allusions to the androgyne appears among the *devisants*.¹⁹⁵ They discuss infidelity and Dagoucin "qui encores n'avoit sonné mot" (who had not yet said a word) can no longer resist getting into the discussion (146; 112). He is of the opinion that anyone, or more correctly any *man* since the story under discussion is about an adulterous man, who already has everything he needs, a wife, should be content. This comment provokes Simontault to ask: "Mais que ferez-vous à ceulx qui n'ont pas trouvé leur moictyé?" ("But what about people who have not yet found their 'other half'?") (147; 113). The word *moictyé* is an allusion to the androgyne from Plato's myth as well as the biblical interpretation of the myth.¹⁹⁶ Thus, a wife and husband are viewed as each other's other half if a marriage is considered happy, but Simontault's comment actually opens up space for a defense of infidelity, one of the four categories that Rothstein traces for the employment of the androgyne. Simontault continues: "Appellez-vous inconstance, de la chercher en tous les lieux où l'on peut la trouver?" ("Would you still say it was inconstancy if they seek her wherever she may be found?") (147; 113). If you are married but not to your other half, which is something that was the reality for many husbands and wives within the aristocratic contract marriages of the time,

¹⁹⁵ Also noted for example by Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, 16. Rothstein is more specifically concerned with the Androgyne as a metaphor that could defend infidelity in the discussion. Rothstein, *The Androgyne*, 432.

¹⁹⁶ Mathieu-Castellani, *L'Heptaméron*, 147 note 2.

you are still in search of your true half and thus have the right to seek her or him outside of marriage.¹⁹⁷ In Simontault's interpretation of the androgyne myth, infidelity is defended and he uses Dagoucin's arguments to strengthen his own view. Hence, Simontault suggests that *constancy* in love is the reason for infidelity; you are in constant search until you have found the other half of yourself. If we recall Aristophanes' story in the *Symposium*, he actually explains that humans originating from the androgyne gender tend to become adulterous. The very same argument is found in Marguerite's protégé Antoine Héroët's poem *L'Androgyne de Platon*. As Rothstein also argues, it is probable that Héroët strategically added this twist to the poem, "situating it in the present of his authorial audience", namely the court of the French king.¹⁹⁸ It is thus probable that Marguerite was inspired by Héroët's poem and his discussions on Plato and Ficino, when letting Simontault present this view.¹⁹⁹

The notion of constancy is of great importance for Dagoucin's understanding of ennobling love in the courtly setting. Nevertheless, there are also significant similarities to Ficino's interpretation of the androgyne in his reply to Simontault:

Pour ce que l'homme ne peult sçavoir, dist Dagoucin, où est cette moictié dont l'unyon est si esgalle que l'un ne differe de l'autre, il faut qu'il s'arreste où l'amour le contrainct ; et que, pour quelque occasion qu'il puisse advenir, ne change le cueur ne la volonté ; car, si celle que vous aymez est tellement semblable à vous et d'une mesme volonté, ce sera vous que vous aymerez, et non pas elle.

('No man can know', replied Dagoucin, 'where his other half is to be found, this other half with whom he may find a union so equal that between [the parts] there is no difference; which being so, a man must hold fast where love constrains him and, whatever may befall him, he must remain steadfast in heart and will. For if

¹⁹⁷ The theme of courtly love versus married, or religious, love is the major focus of Febvre's study *Amour sacre, amour profane*.

¹⁹⁸ Rothstein, *The Androgyne*, 430-31. Rothstein refers to lines 257-61 of the poem: "Ce changement est chose naturelle / Et advient tant à masle qu'à femelle; / Car de si loing nous sommes descenduz, / Et si long temps avons esté perduz, / Que nature est elle mesme abusée." (This change is a natural thing / It happens to men and women both / For we are so far descended / And for so long have been lost / That nature herself is fooled.)

¹⁹⁹ Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, 205. Jourda, *Marguerite*, 757. Also discussed by Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*.

she whom you love is your true likeness, if she is of the same will, then it will be your own self that you love, and not her alone.’) (147; 113)

Thus, constancy of love, comparable to or even an earthly version of divine love, is central to Dagoucin. If the lover were to abandon his beloved, then the love is not of the noble kind but merely rooted in pleasure. These Neoplatonic influences on his courtly ideal will become even clearer in Dagoucin’s response to Hircan’s critical remark on his speech.

– Dagoucin, dist Hircan, vous voulez tomber en une faulse opinion ; comme si nous devons aymer les femmes sans estre aymés ! – Hircan, dist Dagoucin, je veulx dire que, si nostre amour est fondée sur la beaulté, bonne grace, amour et faveur d’une femme, et nostre fin soit plaisir, honneur ou proffict, l’amour ne peult longuement durer ; car, si la chose sur quoy nous la fondons default, nostre amour s’envolle hors de nous. Mais je suis ferme à mon oppinion, que celluy qui amye, n’ayant autre fin de desir que bien amyer, laissera plus tost son ame par la mort, que cest forte amour saille de son cueur.

(‘Dagoucin, I think you’re adopting a position that is completely wrong, said Hircan. ‘You make it sound as if we ought to love women without being loved in return!’

‘What I mean, Hircan, is this. If love is based on a woman’s beauty, charm and favours, and if our aim is merely pleasure, ambition and profit, then such love can never last. For if the whole foundation on which our love is based should collapse, then love will fly from us and there will be no love left in us. But I am utterly convinced that if a man loves with no other aim, no other desire, than to love truly, he will abandon his soul in death rather than allow his love to abandon his heart.’) (147; 113)

Since the allusion to the androgyne has already been made earlier, it is not hard to trace Dagoucin’s Platonic statement in this citation, which is echoing the interpretation presented by Ficino of Aristophanes’ myth in his *De amore*. I briefly repeat Ficino’s words on this as a reminder:

Chi sarà dunque tanto stolto, che l’appellazione dell’uomo, la quale è in noi fermissima attribuisca al corpo, che sempre corre, più tosto che alla Anima, che

sempre sta ferma? Di qui può essere manifesto, che quando Aristofane nominò gli uomini, intese le Anime nostre, secondo l'uso Platonico.

(Who, therefore, will be so foolish as to attribute the appellation of Man, which is firmly fixed in us, to the body, which is always flowing and everywhere changed, rather than to the most stable soul? From these things it can be clear that, when Aristophanes said men, he meant souls, in the Platonic way.) (60; 75)

As we see, the foundation of true love cannot lie in the “everywhere changed” body according to Ficino, nor in the pleasures that come from enjoying the body or in the wealth that can come from a relationship. All these earthly possessions or attributes are never stable or constant; thus, love for these things cannot be constant, or in other words, true. But, even though this quote could be read as gender-neutral with its “*uomo/uomini*”, Ficino is mainly interested in the Platonic relationship between men. His “*uomo*” then is neutral only in the logic of a social context structured by and for men, such as the one surrounding him. Leone Ebreo’s transformation of Aristophanes’ myth is, however, clearly heterosexual and also, as I argued earlier, informed by courtly as well as *stilnuovo* ideals, very similar to Dagoucin’s. As a side-note, it should also be said that there are also a number of male relationships described as true and perfect within the *Heptaméron*. Dagoucin is even himself part of what, at least at the beginning, can be interpreted as an inseparable pair of gentlemen, *les gentilzhommes*, of whom Saffredent is his other half.²⁰⁰

As for the dispute after novella 9, Dagoucin never convinces his fellow *devisants*, but is met by a mocking comment from Simontault:

Par ma foy, dist Symontault, je ne crois pas que jamais vous ayez esté amoureux ; car, si vous aviez senty le feu comme les autres, vous ne nous paindriez icy la chose publicque de Platon, qui s’escript et ne s’experimente point.

(‘Quite honestly, Dagoucin, I don’t think you’ve ever really been in love,’ said Simontaut, ‘because if you had felt the fire of passion, as the rest of us have, you wouldn’t have been doing what you’ve just been doing – describing Plato’s

²⁰⁰ This relation and the split of the male-male androgyne is at the center of Reeser’s research, for example in his article “Fracturing the Male Androgyne”.

republic, which sounds all very fine in writing, but is hardly true to experience.')

(147-48; 113)

Simontault, like Saffredent and Hircan, thus represents what is often described as a misogynist view whereby men regard themselves as having the right to possess women, not the least sexually. Repeatedly, they argue that a man categorizes himself *as* a man when he is an active lover who can take what is rightfully his, which on many occasions is a female body that satisfies his desire.²⁰¹ This is a matter of performing one's gender, and showing weakness can, in such a view, be profoundly dangerous to the patriarchal order. As Jeffrey C. Persels points out, "[a]ny display of impotence in the individual male body threatens impotence in the body politic".²⁰² Furthermore, Judith Butler stresses the performative notion of gender and how it is constantly changeable in the repeated actions and employments of words such as masculine and feminine.²⁰³

Therefore, to Simontault, the idea of never getting any (sexual) pleasure from loving a woman is not only wrong, but also incompatible with his idea of what defines masculinity. Platonic love in the way Dagoucin describes it (mainly through Ficino and Héroët) is nothing more to Simontault than a philosophy written in words without any connection to experience. Simontault even accuses Dagoucin of never have been truly in love, because "le feu", the fire of passion, or sexual desire, would in that case have made him aware of the weakness in his philosophy. Dagoucin nevertheless explores his idea further in his answer to Simontault, claiming that he most certainly has been in love.

Si j'ay aymé, dist Dagoucin, j'ayme encores, et aymeray tant que vivray. Mais j'ay si grand paour que la demonstration face tort à la perfection de mon amour, que je crainctz que celle de qui je debvrois desirer l'amytié semblable, l'entende ; et mesmes je n'ose penser ma pensée, da paour que mes oeilz en revelent quelque chose ; car, tant plus je tiens ce feu celé et couvert, et plus en moy croist le plaisir de sçavoir que j'ayme parfaitement.

²⁰¹ See, for example, the discussion following upon novella 4.

²⁰² Jeffrey C. Persels, "'Qui sommes tous cassez du harnoys' or, the *Heptaméron* and Uses of the Male Body," in *Heroic Virtue, Comic Infidelity: Reassessing Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron*. ed. Dora E. Polachek (Amherst: Hestia Press, 1993), 95.

²⁰³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

(‘[Yes] I have loved,’ he replied, ‘I love still, and shall love till the day I die. But my love is a perfect love, and I fear lest showing it openly should betray it. So greatly do I fear this, that I shrink to make it known to the lady whose love and friendship I cannot but desire to be equal to my own. I scarcely dare think my own thought, lest something should be revealed in my eyes, for the longer I conceal the fire of my love, the stronger grows the pleasure in knowing that it is indeed a perfect love.’) (148; 113 modified)²⁰⁴

Dagoucín’s view consists of a sublimated love in which the beloved’s reciprocity is redundant, even though he wishes that his lady’s love would equal his own. In other words, we have now reached the point where he contradicts the Neoplatonic androgyne instead of defending it. His idea differs both from Plato’s text and the Neoplatonic interpretations of reciprocal love, presented by Pausanias in Plato’s *Symposium* and discussed by Ficino in his second chapter of *De amore*. In these texts, we find an emphasis on the necessity for the beloved’s response to the lover. Mutual love would also prove the lovers as one’s other true half, according to Neoplatonic ideals, which is considered by Dagoucín early in the discussion but proves less important at this point.

However, on the other hand, Dagoucín could be said to follow Plato’s last speaker and the crescendo of the *Symposium*, namely Diotima. Jourda argues that the ideas presented by Plato’s female speaker is at the center of Marguerite’s Platonic influence. This love, Jourda explains, if one can understand what it is and know how to take advantage of it, can be a marvelous way to progress towards the good, and thus, to finally reach God.²⁰⁵ This interpretation of Platonic/courtly love is also evident in one of the most famous books of the period, with which we can assume Marguerite was familiar, namely *Il Cortegiano*.²⁰⁶ Thus, Castiglione’s book presents a “fusion of Christian Platonism with social grace is most evident in [his] *Cortegiano*, in which the

²⁰⁴ In Chilton’s translation the word “Si” is translated “If”, but the word is also understood as “Yes”. The argument Dagoucín makes speaks for the “Yes”, hence he continues that he still loves and always will love and he makes it clear that he truly understands what it means to love.

²⁰⁵ Jourda, *Marguerite*, 902.

²⁰⁶ See primarily Bembo’s speech in the last chapter of *Il Cortegiano*.

capping attribute of the perfect courtier becomes love, and the love he is to experience is none other than the metaphysical love proposed by Ficino".²⁰⁷

However, while scholars have argued for the significance of Bembo's speech in relation to Dagoucin, I hold that the idea of a progressive understanding of love starting with love, or desire, for a human body and ending in the enlightened knowledge of divine love is more clearly present in a later speech by Parmente. Dagoucin's view, on the other hand, cannot be regarded as purely Neoplatonic; thus, he insists on constant love for a specific lady, but never argues that this ennobling endeavor will lead him to God. Instead, the ennobling power of his love concerns his role as a true courtier.²⁰⁸ This is further underlined by the notion of concealment of love, which is central within the courtly code and fuel for Dagoucin's passion. This idea is not an appropriation of Neoplatonism, but a legacy of the French court ideals. The longer Dagoucin conceals his affection, the stronger his love becomes because the very silence, the secret, is itself proof of his perfect love.

Secrets, the silenced truth, also play a part in many stories in the *Heptaméron*, as various scholars have pointed out.²⁰⁹ Marcel Tetel puts it this way: "in order to succeed (if it is ever to do so) perfect love needs to be kept secret from others – a near impossibility, owing to human nature".²¹⁰ In the collection, secrecy is often involved in stories challenging normative boundaries of gender, especially in relation to the patriarchal political structure when women are active and in control of the narrative.

In his speech, Dagoucin even enhances the role of secrecy within his vision of love, claiming that he would never even tell the beloved of his affection for fear that it would diminish as a consequence. However, the male *devisants* involved in this discussion will not be convinced by his argumentation.

²⁰⁷ Gelernt, *World of Many Loves*, 45.

²⁰⁸ Marcel Tetel also refers to this mixture in concern of Parmente and the concept of ideal or perfect love. He states that "If Marguerite/Parmente (or /Dagoucin) ever tried gropingly to posit perfect love as an eventual code of behavior, it was never done convincingly nor was she ever completely convinced herself". Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, 18-19.

²⁰⁹ Mary McKinley, "Telling Secrets: Sacramental Confession and Narrative Authority in the *Heptameron*," in *Critical Tales*, Richard Regosin, "Leaky Vessels," and Jacob Vance, *Secrets: humanism, mysticism, and evangelism in Erasmus of Rotterdam, Bishop Guillaume Bricomet, and Marguerite De Navarre* (Boston: Brill, 2014).

²¹⁰ Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, 24.

Geburon remarks that Dagoucin would certainly be more than happy if his love where to be returned. Parlamente, in her turn, warns him that she knows of plenty of men who have actually died rather than to speak their minds.²¹¹ Saffredent responds that he has never heard of any lover dying due to unrequited love and even though a victim of this himself, he has never been near a death experience. Dagoucin has a simple answer to this:

Ha, Saffredent ! dist Dagoucin, où voulez-vous doncques estre aymé ? Et ceulx de vostre oppinion ne meurent jamais. Mais j'en sçay assez bon nombre qui ne sont mortz d'autre maladye que d'aymer parfaitement.

(Ah! Saffredent, the trouble is that you desire your love to be returned,' Dagoucin replied, 'and men of your opinions never die for love. But I know of many who have died, and died for no other cause than that they have loved, and loved perfectly.')(148-49; 114)

This is the line that puts an end to the discussion of novella 8 and also to the claim that Dagoucin is a true Platonist. While he incorporates elements of Neoplatonic philosophy on love in his argumentation, not least the androgyne, the ennobling power of Dagoucin's love still concerns his loyalty and constancy to a lady as a true courtier, not as a way to ascend to a higher understanding of love. His rejection of the necessity of reciprocal love is also a rejection of a fundamental Neoplatonic trope but, as I have discussed, it is also an exaggeration of courtly ideals.

Neoplatonic Love by Force in Novella 19

One of Jourda's conclusions is that women are more capable than men of understanding ideal love in the world of the *Heptaméron*, but he also enhances Parlamente's view that the ideal is rarely realized. Jourda refers to the mixture

²¹¹ In other discussions, however, Parlamente explains perfect love in Neoplatonic terms (after novella 19), also defending marriage as the best compromise for a noble love on earth. But she also warns of the dangers of spiritual love (after novella 35).

of Neoplatonism and Evangelism that is represented in a number of novellas in the *Heptaméron* and states that only one male character in the collection is able to understand the concept.²¹² The story of Poline and her beloved is perhaps the most representative novella, in which the Neoplatonic ideal informs Marguerite's vision of love, which has been discussed by many scholars. What is missing in previous discussions however, is the active role played by the female character. Thus, in my reading of this story, I assess how Poline's voice and agency are crucial for the transformation of human love into divine love.

Marguerite's understanding of Neoplatonic philosophy in the *Heptaméron* certainly displays contradictory attitudes to Ficino's ideal love, which has already been shown in the discussion on Dagoucin. Robert Cottrell states that, at least, two different appropriations of Neoplatonism were present in the French context during the 1500s, and also in Marguerite's writings. The first, Cottrell claims, is a version strongly influenced by Christian faith and the other is that of Neoplatonic love, strongly inspired by Ficino.²¹³ Furthermore, in his view, there was a specificity to the French reception of Neoplatonism and also to Marguerite's interpretations, which never suggested that human love can develop into love of God. He stresses, in contrast to Jourda, that "[h]er positioning of human love within the arena of sinful flesh is a mark of her profound rejection of Ficinian Neoplatonism".²¹⁴ Even though this statement may capture the general position against Ficino's idea of Neoplatonic love in the *Heptaméron*, there are a few novellas, such as 19, that contradict the conclusion of an overall negation of Neoplatonism.

Furthermore, and importantly, Ficino cannot be said to present a pure Platonic view without influence from the religious context of Florence in the late fourteenth century. On the contrary, as I discuss in the chapter on love dialogues, his *De amore* is clearly a work written within Christian values. In fact, Greek philosophy had already been, at least to some extents, adapted to

²¹² "C'est là l'idéal : il se réalise rarement, et Parlamente doit à regret constater que les femmes seules savent concilier les exigences de l'amour humain et les devoirs de l'amour divin. Dans l'esprit de Marguerite le seul homme qui ait obéi à la règle que suppose cette conception de l'amour est le milord de la 57e nouvelle", Jourda, *Marguerite*, 903.

²¹³ Cottrell, Robert D., "Inmost Cravings: The Logic of Desire in the Heptameron," in *Critical Tales*. 9-10.

²¹⁴ Cottrell, "Inmost Cravings," 10.

Christian values and beliefs, by the time it reached Ficino's hands. What is instead more relevant, I claim, is how Marguerite negotiates the presupposed male privileged philosophy into an ideology in which women have as much agency and intellect as men regarding understandings of love.

In the following, I discuss how Neoplatonic love is possible and achieved to fulfillment in novella 19. This remarkable story of Poline, which also has interesting similarities to the *vitas* of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, brings traditional gender positions into question by enhancing the role of the feminine protagonist in the transformation of a true earthly love into a divine love – a transformation that is completed through Poline's words and through her initiative to kiss. In fact, words, the ability to speak or not, and physical gestures or movements are central throughout the novella. Even though the Neoplatonic union of souls represented at the end of the story is forced upon the lovers, it nevertheless shows that a relationship consisting of equal parts, alluding to the androgyne, is not only possible between a man and a woman, but can also be dependent on and completed by a woman's agency.

In Search for True Love

It is Ennasuite, who has been challenged to recount a story of love that is not founded on one or the other partner's wealth, who tells the story of Poline and her beloved servant. We are told that Poline and her servant are truly in love but are forbidden to marry since, according to Poline's guardian and the one who decides the matter, they would be the poorest and most miserable couple in Italy ("*les plus pauvres miserables de toute l'Itallye*") (278). At this point the central issue of poverty is introduced, which we will see returning throughout the story. In their claim of true love, the couple will negate money, which is strongly connected to earthly life and to one of the seven deadly sins; namely greed. Moreover, poverty is a central rule within the Franciscan order which they will both join. Thus, their disregard of economic wealth could be said to foreshadow their monastic lives. The word *pauvre*, with its meaning of

miserable or poor, is also repeated in the novella; “son pauvre serviteur”, “la pauvre Poline”.

The gentleman in the novella, who remains unnamed throughout the story, is captured and imprisoned during a war in which he takes part. When released, he decides once again to ask for Poline’s hand in marriage, now believing that he deserves the marriage due to his time in prison and for all his other services. However, Poline’s guardian, the Marchioness, still answers no and the gentleman decides to join the Franciscan order, aiming to transform his earthly desire to unite with his beloved in marriage into a love of divine character. The characters in the story do not expect this choice since the young man does not seem to be of monastic material at all, a statement that will prove to be true since he will be dependent on Poline in his progression towards higher love.

Nevertheless, his choice is the starting point of the most illustrative representation of Neoplatonic love in the *Heptaméron*, in which Poline and her anonymous lover are united in mutual affection and led to spiritual union, which clearly contradicts Cottrell’s conclusion that Marguerite negates all capacity of human love to transform into a love of God.

Forbidden to marry, or even to speak to each other, the two lovers are forced to remain separated, longing for each other just as the two halves of Aristophanes androgyne – an effect caused by the word “no” from Poline’s guardian: “en une parole ilz ont blessé deux cueurs, dont les corps ne sçauroient plus faire que languyr” (by uttering one word they have wounded two hearts, two hearts in two bodies that cannot now but languish unto death) (280; 221). Furthermore, the man blames himself for breaking the courtly code of secrecy. By proposing marriage, he has admitted his desire and even though Poline still succeeds in hiding her feelings (which is important for her reputation and honor), they are no longer able to see each other. When telling Poline of his decision to join the Franciscan order, he expresses his wish that God will “changera mon cuer, pour aymer autant les choses spirituelles qu’il a faict les temporelles” (change my heart, that I may come to love spiritual things as I have loved those which are temporal) (281; 222). In other words, he hopes that his

choice will guide him and transform his earthly love (lower Venus) into a divine love (higher Venus) in accordance with Platonic-Christian philosophy.

Attempted Kissing and Loss of Speech

In giving up his hopes of marriage, the gentleman asks his beloved for a kiss, as she might give a brother or, more correctly in this context, a friar, referring to their relationship as sister and brother within the Christian communion. He is speaking of the Holy kiss, which is a religious custom that was traditionally performed in early Christianity with roots in St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians.²¹⁵ Later it was practiced only during Mass (the kiss of peace) and preferably only man-to-man, or woman-to-woman, not man-to-woman. It was notably a custom that had more or less disappeared, with the exception of Mass, by the time of the sixteenth century, which makes its appearance in this text somewhat strange, and therefore worthy of attention.²¹⁶ The kiss is, however, central in Neoplatonic love philosophy and we find a clear explanation of it in *Il Cortegiano*. I will return to this discussion towards the end of the analysis, since the kiss is not performed at this moment, but it will instead conclude the story. In this present scene in the narrative, the couple is instead united in an embrace, initiated by Poline.

She is so moved by the man's words and his suffering that she loses her ability to speak and cannot help but throw her arms around him. In this physical encounter they are both overwhelmed by their feelings and they faint in each other's arms and fall to the floor – an effect of passionate feelings often described in literature and medical books of the period.²¹⁷ However, in novella 19 we do

²¹⁵ Mathieu-Castellani notes that he is referring to his coming position as a friar and therefore to the "saint baiser de dilection", from St. Paul's Corinthian letters, that later concludes the story. *L'Heptaméron*, footnote 2 on page 281.

²¹⁶ As noted by Craig Koslofsky the ritual of mouth-to-mouth kissing had transformed during the Middle Ages into a kiss of a "pax-board" and when we reach the fifteenth century the Reformist movement heavily criticized it. Craig Koslofsky, "The Kiss of Peace in the German Reformation," in *The Kiss in History*, ed. Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 29.

²¹⁷ Judy Kem offers an extensive analysis and overview of this medical condition and its meaning in the *Heptaméron*. Kem discusses novellas 9 and 26 thoroughly, but also points to novellas 3, 10, 13, 20, 22 and 50 for descriptions of lovesickness. In 9 and 26 the sickness proves to be fatal due to the lack of reciprocity and in both stories, kissing plays a central part, as it does in our story of Poline. Judy Kem,

not find the type of fatal melancholy that Judy Kem primarily refers to in her study of the deadly sickness of unreciprocated love. In the stories upon which she focuses, lovers are physically affected, famished and torn, and eventually die because they were never nurtured by the love of their ladies. In novella 19, it is clear that the two lovers are sick due to their inability to act upon their love and desire to be together. In the scene described, the couple are not able to rise again by themselves but are helped and treated with “remedes” (medicaments) (281; 222).²¹⁸ It seems rather obvious that the inability to rise represents the two still being prisoners of earthly desire (they are fallen). This inability is further signified by Poline’s loss of speech, since her words are the means by which they will both subsequently be led towards union with each other and with God.

A Poem of Persuasion

After the gentleman has entered the monastery, Poline convincingly hides her feelings, since it would be disastrous for her reputation if anyone found out that the love was mutual. After some months however, she receives a letter containing a lyrical poem written by her beloved. The refrain and the first stanza read:

Que dira-elle,
Que fera-elle,
Quant me verra de ses œilz
Religieux ?

Las ! la pauvette,
Toute seullette,

“Fatal Lovesickness in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol 41, No. 2, 2010.

²¹⁸ Kem states that the most common cure for lovesickness, although caused by unrequited love, during the early modern period was actually sexual intercourse, but only to a certain extent since too much of this activity could also prove fatal. “Fatal Lovesickness,” 357-58 and 361. This cure is, however, not possible for the couple in novella 19, since they are trying to overcome the desires of the body.

Sans parler longtemps, sera
Eschevelée,
Deconsolée ;
L'étrange cas pensera :
Son penser, par adventure,
En monastere et closture
À la fin la conduira.

(What will she say, / My Lady, pray, / What will she do, when her fair eyes / See
me thus dressed in monkish guise? // Dear one, my own, / Sweet one alone, /
Long speechless, wond'ring will she be, / Troubled and torn / Lady forlorn. /
Strange will it seem, then presently / Her thoughts they will begin to dwell / On
convent close and holy cell, / There to reside, eternally.) (283; 223-24)

The young man thus expresses his wish for Poline to also join the convent and comments on her family's lack of understanding of how their negative decisions will only make the love between them stronger. To some extent, this poem is predicting or pointing us to the solution of the novella, but, as we will see, it is Poline's agency and not the man's words or actions that will be crucial for the events to come. In the second stanza we read this comment to her family:

Que diront ceulx
Qui de nous deux
Ont l'amour et bien privé,
Voyans qu'amour,
Par ung tel tour,
Plus parfaict ont approuvé ?
Regardans ma conscience,
Ilz en auront repentance,
Et chacun d'eulx en pleurera.

(What will they do, / Who from us two / Our love and joy did cause to go, /
Seeing that love / Howe'er they strove / They yet more perfect caused to grow? /
When they do look into our heart / They surely will repent their part / And bitter
tears will surely flow.)

In these lines, it is clear that the young man blames Poline's family for the choice he has made. He did not want to be a friar, he wanted to marry Poline and live a life of shared love as an earthly couple. However, he believes their love to be of the most noble kind, *plus parfait*, and he is sure that the family will bitterly regret their decision.

It is also interesting to note the appearance of the phoenix, the mythical bird and symbol of eternal love, to which I will return at length in the chapter on Gaspara Stampa. In this poem, which is said to be composed in Italian (pointing the reader to the original song) but translated by the *devisant* Ennasuite, we read:

Viens donques, *amye*,
Ne tarde mye
Après *ton parfait amy* ;
Ne crains à prendre
L'habit de cendre,
Fuyant ce monde ennemy :
Car, d'amitié vive et forte,
De sa cendre fault que sorte
Le phoenix qui durera

(Come then away, / Make no delay, / And with your best beloved go, / Fear not,
I pray / The habit grey / Nor yet to flee this world below. / For with that love
that's live and strong / From ashes must arise ere long / the phoenix true,
enduringly.) (285; 225 my emphasis)²¹⁹

The gentleman calls himself a perfect lover in these lines (*ton parfait amy*) and is referring to Poline as his beloved (*amye*). Just above, we also saw his view on their love as most perfect. The phoenix can thus be interpreted as the vision of their union within a Christian and Neoplatonic discourse. Their love is lively

²¹⁹ Ennasuite explains: "De laquelle le chant est italien et assez commun ; mais j'en ay voulu traduire les motz en françois le plus près qu'il m'a esté possible". (The tune was Italian and is quite well-known, but I have translated the words as closely as possible.) (283; 223) This poem is cited by Salminen, "Notes et Commentaires," in her edition of the *Heptaméron*, 710-11.

and strong and will rise like a phoenix in its transformation from two to one and will be reborn into a higher form.

Maurice Scève, "De Mort A Vie", in *Délie*, 1544

The appearance of the phoenix is not surprising or unusual in the context of the French Renaissance, even if this is the only time, to my knowledge, that it is found in the *Heptaméron*. As discussed earlier, the employment of the bird in differing literary genres was common in France. Notably for our reading here, writers in different relations to Marguerite, such as Ronsard, Du Bellay, Rabelais and Maurice Scève make use of the figure; Ronsard in his sonnet 36 to Cassandra (1552), Du Bellay in his sonnet 36 in *L'Olive* (1550), Rabelais when telling how Pantagruel visited Satinland and, perhaps most relevant due to its publication date of 1544 – the time Marguerite was writing the *Heptaméron* – Scève's *Délie*.²²⁰ His emblem XI below, depicting the phoenix, is from the 1544 edition of *Délie*. Perhaps, we can also consider the probability of inspiration from Dante, Petrarch and even Michelangelo.

The poem in novella 19 not only "spells out the neo-Platonic implications of their love", as Ford puts it, but it can more or less be seen as an abstract of

²²⁰ Nigg points out the employments of the phoenix by Du Bellay and Rabelais, but does not mention Ronsard or Marguerite de Navarre in his discussion. Nigg, *The Phoenix*, 184–85.

Neoplatonic love philosophy.²²¹ The phoenix, I argue, is the metaphorical figure carrying the central message found thematized throughout the poem. Repeatedly, over the eight stanzas and a refrain repeated nine times, the gentleman refers to “nostre ame”, “nostre amour mutuelle”, underlining the reciprocity of their love and their union to come. In the final, and frequently cited, stanza we read:

Ainsy qu’au monde
Fut pure et monde
Nostre parfaicte amityé ;
Dedans le cloister
Pourra paroistre
Plus grande de la moitié ;
Car amour loyal et ferme,
Qui n’a jamais fin ne terme,
Droict au ciel nous conduira.

(Just as on earth / Our love had birth / Pure and perfect, noble, rare, / It may appear, / Hidden here / In cloistered cell, beyond compare. / For loyal love that’s true and sure / And endlessly shall e’er endure / Must lead to heav’n, eventually.)
(285; 225)

While reading the poem, Poline understands that her beloved has not yet forgotten her, and she is so moved by his words (the only ones she has heard, or rather read, from him since he entered the monastery some months ago) that she bursts into tears. We can also read in this final verse that their earthly love has not yet transformed into divine, but will “au ciel nous conduira”. Thus, the young man has not been able to sublimate his earthly affections towards Poline *by himself*, as he hoped. Poline understands and decides that she too must turn away from her earthly life in order to conclude the transformation of their *parfaicte amityé*.

Still concealing her feelings for the young man and also, from now on, her plan to join the convent of Saint Clare, Poline continues to live at court. Her

²²¹ Ford, “Neoplatonic Themes,” 104.

secrecy and constancy protect her reputation and her noble love from becoming dishonest. These details of Poline's story are very similar, though not identical, to the legend of Saint Clare herself and how she left her noble life to become a nun.²²² It is said that when Clare was about 17, her family and relatives wanted her to marry a nobleman. But "Clare refused, insisting that she wished to remain a virgin and live in poverty."²²³ Clare's intention was then nurtured through her meetings with Francis, which were kept secret. The legend also "addresses the reciprocal nature of Clare and Francis's conversations before Clare's conversion" and when she heard of "Francis's preaching, Clare wanted to meet him; Francis also desired to met [sic] and speak with Clare, as he was impressed with her reputation."²²⁴

Besides pointing out obvious parallels between the man's and Poline's decisions to become friar and nun in the orders of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, I argue further for similarities that mostly concern the emphasis on reciprocity, poverty and female speech and action. As a side-note, the same emphasis can be traced in the famous love-story of Abelard and Héloïse.²²⁵ Thus, it is not wrong to suggest that these earlier stories may have inspired the writing of the novella. However, in novella 19, in contrast to the *vitae* of Saint Francis and Saint Claire, it is Poline's continued life as a lady at court that, despite her loyalty to the man she loves, hinders her beloved from attaining the transformation of his love for her into divine love. This is not the case in the *vitae*.

²²² In the *A Companion to Clare of Assisi: Life, Writings, and Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), Joan Mueller states that: "When speaking of Clare's refusal of a noble marriage, Clare's Legend adds the interesting detail that Clare delayed the expectations of her family, feigning that she intended to marry at a later time. The Legend also addresses the reciprocal nature of Clare and Francis's conversations before Clare's conversion—something, of course, that the sisters would have been solicitous to clarify during the interview. [...] Clare left her home for these visits, according to the Legend, with only one close companion.", 31.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²²⁵ For the legend of Saint Francis and of Saint Clare, see de Jacobus Voragine, *Legenda Aurea* or *Legenda Sanctorum*, (c. 1266). The text was a bestseller in Europe from its first appearance and throughout the early modern period, early on translated into several languages such as English and French. There are also similarities between our story and the famous love of Abelard and Héloïse, once again mostly concerning the women in the stories. Héloïse argues against the secret marriage proposed by her uncle and, as stated by Betty Radice, Héloïse is more concerned "with the betrayal of the ideal which they both admired, that of the philosopher as a man who is set apart and above human ties. She argues from a classical rather than a Christian viewpoint [...] They should be bound only by gratia – love freely given; marriage can add nothing of significance to an ideal relationship which is also classical in concept: that described in Cicero's *De amicitia*, a work they both knew, which sets the standard for true friendship in 'disinterested love' where physical love would be sublimated". *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 17-18.

Furthermore, the enhancement of Poline's role contradicts the Ficinian view that women lack the capacity to reach the highest level of reciprocity and understanding of love. As Crawford argues, reciprocity for Ficino is only possible between equals and, even if he does not explicitly say so, the choice not to speak about women at all in this context, strongly suggests that women cannot play a part in this kind of love.²²⁶ In novella 19, however, the union of man and woman as equals is central. The gentleman is not able to ascend the ladder of love until Poline travels with him. Thus, their reciprocity and a joint sublimation are key to this progression.

Perhaps the gentleman is also to some mild extent representative of the more common depiction of Franciscan friars that pervades the *Heptaméron*. These men, who are supposed to neglect bodily desires, are often depicted as the most hypocritical. There are a number of stories in the collection portraying men of the church who should have conquered the earthly temptations but instead prove unable to live up to these rules and expectations. As Ferguson and McKinley state:

Since the *cordeliers* did not live an enclosed contemplative life but exercised an active ministry, often in an urban setting, they mixed with the population in ways that might place them in situations of perceived or real temptation, demanding a level of self-control not all of them possessed.²²⁷

This aspect of intermingling with the community is important to bear in mind in novella 19. The young friar is still able to see and meet Poline, even if these meetings only take place in church or on the Franciscan premises. It is possible for him to go outside the monastery, and this is in fact an important part of the Franciscan mission, and as long as Poline is still living out in civil society, he (and also, she) is in danger of earthly temptations. His object of desire needs to be placed safely beyond regular social life. Consequently, Poline has to join the

²²⁶ Katherine Crawford, "Marsilio Ficino, Neoplatonism, and the Problem of Sex," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Spring 2004, 13.

²²⁷ Ferguson & McKinley, "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World," 335. Ferguson and McKinley, however, further states that novella 19 is the "positive example that confirms the negative picture painted thus far", 337.

convent as well and in that way leave her earthly life. This act will make her unavailable to him, or to anybody else, but it will also make them equals.

United in a Kiss

After some time, the two lovers encounter each other in church, during Mass, and they cannot help but react to their affection towards each other. First, Poline sees her beloved and physically reacts through a blush, being even more drawn to him when he is wearing his vestments. She covers up her reaction with a cough. The gentleman immediately recognizes her voice and, even as he tries to avoid doing so, gazes upon her. These gazes and sounds are significant, thus sight and hearing are both central to Neoplatonism, being the senses that perceive true beauty.²²⁸ By the sight of his beloved, the man cannot help but be reminded of his love for her and, overwhelmed by the fire (*le feu*) he thought he had been able to transform, for the second time in the story he falls to the ground right in front of her. Poline now realizes that she is the one who has the power to enable them both to move on from their earthly desires.

Quant Poline congneut que le changement de l'habit ne luy pouvoit changer le coeur, et qu'il y avoit si longtems qu'il s'estoit randu, que chacun excusoit qu'elle l'eust oblyé, se delibera de mettre à execution le desir qu'elle avoit eu de rendre la fin de leur amitié semblable en habit, estat et forme de vivre, comme elle avoit esté vivant en une maison, soubz pareil maistre et maistresse.

(But when Paulina realized that his change of habit could not change his heart, and that it was so long since he had entered the monastery that everyone would think she had forgotten him, she decided to carry out her long resolve. It was her desire that at the last their love should bring them together, that they should be alike in habit, condition and manner of life, just as at the beginning [they had] lived under the same roof, under the same master and under the same mistress.) (287; 226-27)

²²⁸ In novella 26, Marguerite lets another young woman live in accordance with Platonic values, while her beloved's desires are more earthly: "Elle, qui avoit Dieu et honneur devant les oeilz, se contentoit de sa veue et parole où gist la satisfaction d'honnesteté et bon amour." (She for her part kept God and honour firmly in mind and satisfied herself with seeing him and hearing him speak, for in the faculties of sight and hearing lies the whole satisfaction of love that is noble and good) (375; 293).

In Poline's argument, we find the forbidden marriage negotiated into the union implied in the young man's poem. This is a union of their soul(s) with the divine instead of the two united as "one flesh, one soul" through an earthly marriage. She is nevertheless, due to her role as a courtly lady, still concerned lest her true motivations for her choice may be discovered, namely her love for the young man and her desire to unite with him spiritually. This matter is also the first she speaks of when she goes to meet her beloved.

Again, in similarity to Saint Clare, Poline goes to see her beloved secretly at the Franciscan buildings under the premise of attending mass. They meet in a chapel and she explain to him: "Si mon honneur eust premis que aussy tost que vous je me fusse osé mectre en religion, je n'eusse tant attendu" (If my honour had allowed me to dare to enter a cloister as soon as you did, I should not have waited until now) (287; 227). In other words, even their desire to be united in a Christian-Platonic manner is regulated by the courtly code. A lady like Poline, even if she is of low noble rank, has to protect her reputation and cannot join a convent if there might be any suspicion of that it is out of a frustrated desire to be with a man, not even if they desire their relationship to be spiritual. However, because a long time has passed since the young man asked for her hand and their love has proved consistent, Poline concludes that she is safe. Furthermore, she does not even care what people might say anymore. She knows that their affection will be transformed into noble, divine love as soon as she devotes herself to their mutual love. She says:

Car, si vous y avez du bien, j'en auray ma part ; et, si vous recepvez du mal, je n'en veulx estre exempté ; car, par tel chemyn que vous irez en paradis, je vous veulx suivre : estant asseurée que Celluy qui est le vray, parfaict et digne d'estre nommé Amour, nous a tirez à son service, par une amityé honneste et raisonnable, laquelle il convertira, par son saint Esperit, du tout en luy ; vous priant que vous et moy oblyons le corps qui perit et tient du viel Adan, pour recepvoir et revestir celluy de nostre espoux Jesus-Christ.²²⁹

²²⁹ A direct reference to *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* 3, 9-10.

(For if your chosen way has brought you joy, I shall have my part therein. If it has brought you suffering, I have no wish to be spared. Whatever path you tread to Paradise, I wish to follow in your steps. For I believe that He who alone is worthy to be called true and perfect Love has drawn us to His service through a love that is reasonable and good, a love that through His Holy Spirit He will turn wholly unto Himself. And I beg you that we may put away the flesh of the old Adam that perisheth, and accept and put on that of Jesus Christ our Spouse.) (287-88; 227)

Poline's words are transforming the matrimony in which they never could be united into their joint matrimony with God. Her choice of words clearly alludes to the vows of a marriage ceremony: through joys and sufferings, whatever way you go I shall follow, and ends with her faith in God's intention to convert their love "du tout en luy".²³⁰ Remarkably, she seems to embody the role of a priest and *her words* have the powerful effect of transforming the servant, who is now a "serviteur religieux" and their love:

qu'il ne pavoit plus avoir d'elle au monde autre chose que la parolle, il se tenoit bien heureux d'estre en lieu où il auroit toujours moyen de la recouvrer, et qu'elle seroit telle, que l'un et l'autre n'en pourroit que mieulx valloir, *vivans en ung estat d'un amour, d'un cueur et d'un esperit tirez et conduictz de la bonté de Dieu.*

(he could have nothing of her but the enjoyment of the words she spoke, he held his lot happy indeed, for henceforth he would always be able to hear her, and her words would be such that both he and she would profit by them, *living as they would in one love, one heart and one spirit, drawn and guided by the goodness of God*) (288; 227, my emphasis)

Once again, we see the allusions to the androgyne, here with a clear Christian-Platonic meaning, that of living united in love with one heart and one spirit (soul) guided by God.²³¹ The man, covered in tears of love and joy, starts to kiss

²³⁰ Radice comments on Héloïse's views on marriage show the same ideal of a perfect love, even if Héloïse is more daring in her language: "She has loved Abelard only for himself, not for anything he could give her, and indeed, in her view, marriage for what either party could get from the other was no better than prostitution. By contrast, a lasting relationship should rest on the complete devotion of two persons; this is true disinterest in love, based on what she calls 'chastity of spirit'. To such an ideal union in a legal marriage could add nothing, and the presence or absence of an erotic element is, in a sense, irrelevant. The intention towards the ideal relationship is all-important." *The Letters*, 18.

²³¹ The relation between heart, soul and spirit is discussed further by Vance, "Humanist Polemics".

Poline's hand, but "elle abbaissa son visaige jusques à la main, et se donnerent par vray charité le saint baiser de dilection" ([she] lowered her face to his, and in true charity they exchanged the holy kiss of love) (288; 227). First of all, this physical movement Poline makes is strange to imagine. How would it look to anyone who saw it? A noble and virtuous woman, bending down to the man at the level of her hands, reaching for his mouth – that takes some effort and might even appear somewhat comic. The gesture's incongruity makes the significance of the kiss even more evident. As I argue, this is clearly not supposed to be interpreted as a romantic kiss, as a modern reader might understand it and as might also be implied in the way Poline makes it happen. The Holy kiss of Love, as mentioned earlier, is a religious gesture performed between Christians. But, at the time of both the novella's production and its plot setting of the sixteenth century, this kind of kiss was no longer practiced. As Koslofsky states, "Protestant liturgies suggested that public kisses were always treacherous. The resulting shift of the kiss from the social to the erotic, and from the communal to the private, is fundamental to its place in the modern West".²³² This makes its appearance in the novella even more strange and, consequently, important to note.

I would nevertheless argue for a Christian influence from the letters of Saint Paul, in which he repeatedly insists on kissing and kisses.²³³ Yon Oria acknowledges how the group involved in Evangelical renewal, led by Briçonnet and Lefevre, gathered in the town of Meaux:

The Evangelic renewal was preached as a reversion to the purity of the Gospels and to the theology of St. Paul, which they enriched with Neo-Platonic ideas, Dionysian symbolism and Hermetic teaching. Marguerite herself decided to join the group, consenting to be initiated into this strange mixture of Pauline evangelism and Neo-Platonic ideas and the "credo of Meaux" became fashionable in the French court.²³⁴

²³² Koslofsky, *The Kiss*, 29.

²³³ Also noted by Mathieu-Castellani, *L'Heptameron*, 281 note 2.

²³⁴ Yon Oria, "Platonic Symbolism of Marguerite d'Angoulême [sic] in the Royal Courts of France and Navarre (1492–1549)," *Principe de Viana* 177, 1986, 320.

This mixture of “Pauline evangelism and Neo-Platonic ideal” could thus have inspired the story of Poline. Moreover, I argue, Poline’s very name obviously alludes to (Saint) Paul, which certainly underline the influence of both Pauline evangelism and the authority of the female character of Poline.

Furthermore, in the tradition of Neoplatonic love, the kiss is central and enables the lovers’ souls to unite. This kind of union is traditionally (in Plato and Ficino) only possible between men, since only men are regarded as equals in the general view on gender positions during this period. However, in other sources, women are brought into the equation. In *Il Cortegiano*, as mentioned earlier, Bembo discusses Neoplatonic love in heterosexual terms and explains the kiss in particular as having roots both in Platonic and Christian sources, but presents it as a gesture of courtly ideals. The Platonic kiss, according to Bembo, enables the souls of the lovers to meet, which causes them to mix so that “una sola [anima] di quelle due così composta regga quasi dui corpi” (a single spirit composed of the two governs their two bodies).²³⁵ Thus, the kiss is a union of souls, and, referring to Plato, Bembo explains that the act of kissing allows the lovers to “totalmente unirsi alle intelligibili” (complete union with spiritual things) (289; 336).

In novella 19, as we have seen, it is the woman who decides when she wants to grant her lover a kiss, in accordance with courtly codes. It seems agreed though that it is the man who should ask for the kiss and also should deliver it, in accordance with Bembo’s speech. What is remarkable then in novella 19, is the fact that it is Poline and not the servant/friar who initiates the mouth-to-mouth kiss. Even though at an earlier point he asked her to kiss him and that it is said that they exchanged (*se donnerent*) the kiss in this scene, the emphasis in the text is on Poline’s movement of bending her head down to the level of her hand, which enables hers and her lover’s lips to meet. To some extent, she follows the courtly code, but the male lover only wanted to kiss her hand not her mouth.

²³⁵ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano* (Milan: Società Editrice Sonzogno, 1903), 289, and *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 2003 [1967]), 336-37. All further references to *Il Cortegiano* will be to these two editions and will be given in brackets after each citation.

The effect of the kiss, finally, is also described from her viewpoint; her soul is filled with happiness and she leaves to join the convent of Saint Clare. Why is that? Is the man's transformation already completed through her words before the kiss is performed? No, he still needs the kiss just as much as she does in order to complete his soul's union with her and with God. In this they are equal, even if Poline's words are of greatest importance, because as we know from *Il Cortegiano* "l'amante razionale conosce che ancora che la bocca sia parte del corpo, nientedimeno per quella si dà esito alle parole, che sono interpreti dell'anima" (the rational lover knows that although the mouth is part of the body nevertheless it provides a channel for words, which are the interpreters of the soul) (289; 336). And, in the end, the gentleman will be left only to live with Poline's words and is happy to profit from them.

Nevertheless, as I have aimed to show, the story is told from Poline's perspective; thus, her actions and speech have been accentuated from the very beginning. Furthermore, we get to know Poline's name but not the gentleman's, which indicates that this is *Poline's story* (even if the focal point changes during shorter sections, such as the time the man spends in prison). Also, in order to bring the story to an end, Poline makes sure that the Marchioness gets to know about her new path in life.

In great surprise, she pays Poline a visit at the convent with the intention of changing her mind, but only to receive Poline's explanation of the impossibility that lies in this inquiry:

A quoy Poline luy fait response, que, si elle avoit eu puissance de luy oster ung mary de chair, l'homme du monde qu'elle avoit le plus aymé, elle s'en devoit contanter, sans chercher de la voulloir separer de Celluy qui estoit immortel et invisible, car il n'estoit pas en sa puissance ni de toutes les creatures du monde.

(But Paulina's reply was firm. *The Marchioness might have the power to remove her fleshy husband, the one in the world whom she had loved above all others*, but that being so, she should now be satisfied and not seek to separate her from Him who was immortal and invisible, for neither the Marchioness nor any other creature on earth had such power.) (288-89; 228, my emphasis)

The point I wish to emphasize here regards Poline's refusal of her mistress's decision not to let her marry for love. In the courtly world, social status, wealth and property are prioritized before true love and affection. This very notion is what Poline firmly refuses to accept. But also, by choosing divine love, she is able to control and complete her union with her beloved – a decision the Marchioness can do nothing about.

During the time of Marguerite's life, the ideal of marriage as founded on affection and attraction between both parties was shaking the traditional pre-arranged marriages that followed aristocratic values. In the *Heptaméron*, the two conflicting models for marriage are present, mirroring the French society of the sixteenth century. And, as Ferguson and McKinley point out, "idealistic words cannot silence the institutional authoritative voice that dominates the discussion; likewise, the alternative voice protesting in the stories [...] remains on the printed page and in the reader's memory."²³⁶ Poline, I argue, possesses one of these protesting voices. Poline's refusal of society's and her family's conventions to marry for economic benefits, along with her words and agency in relation to her lover, enables them to live in spiritual union in their convents. And as the novella ends, we read that there is no doubt that God will forgive them their sins and transport them "en paix ou lieu où la recompense passe tous les merites des hommes" (in peace [to the] place whose recompense surpass all human merits) (228; 289).

In the discussion between the *devisants* following novella 19, Neoplatonic love continues to be thematized and questioned as a perfect way of loving. As we will see, the discussion among the *devisants* is also led by a female character. Hence, Parlamente is the primary advocate of Neoplatonic-Christian love.

²³⁶ Ferguson & McKinley, "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World," 349.

Parlamente as Neoplatonist

The first sentence of the discussion actually seems to contradict my claim that novella 19 creates agency and space for gender transgression. Ennasuite concludes her story by emphasizing, not the woman's love or the couple's equality in love, but the man's love:

Vous ne povez icy nyer, mes dames, que l'amour de l'homme ne se soit monstrée la plus grande ; mais elle luy fut si bien randue, que je voudrois que tous ceulx qui s'en meslent [d'aymer (ms. 1511, 1515)] fussent autant recompensez.

(Now you can't deny, Ladies, that the man's love was clearly the stronger. But it was so well repaid, that I only wish that everybody who fell in love had the same recompense.) (289: 228, addition from Mathieu-Castellani's comment)

This reversal of the novella's own conclusion is not an unusual strategy in the *Heptaméron*. This is a matter of the form, as the structure of the text is polyphonic and very much reminiscent of the genre of the dialogue, as mentioned earlier. The novellas often tell one story while the *devisants'* discussions trace various moral points to which there is often no conclusion. However, I suggest that we may interpret Ennasuite's words in a more neutral manner, as not making a comparison between the man's and the woman's love but simply read it as a statement: the man's love was of the highest kind (noble, constant, the best kind of love). This puts her following words considering the reciprocal love that Poline shows on a higher level. This is also emphasized by the words "mais elle luy fut si bien randue", which replace the focus on Poline.

Later in the discussion of novella 19, we find a speech by Parlamente on perfect love with clear Neoplatonic references. As stated previously, Parlamente sometimes represents Neoplatonic views that outpace Dagoucin's. Moreover, for my aim to discuss women's voices and agency, it is significant that it is Parlamente, the female character who is usually seen to portray Marguerite's voice in the narrative, who represents these views.

Regarding women's space and agency in the *Heptaméron* in a general sense, Ferguson and McKinley argue:

In defiance of her society's gendered access to the right to speak, Marguerite allows a number of female characters to deliver eloquent orations. Through their words, she expresses women's anger against the unjust authorities, parental, royal and ecclesiastical, that controlled so many aspects of their lives.²³⁷

Both Poline in the novella and the female *devisants* involved in its discussion, especially Parlamente and to some extent also Ennasuite, are repeatedly doing exactly that; they defy society's gendered access to speak and argue against "unjust authorities". In this specific case, both novella 19 and its discussion, the women's orations concern Neoplatonic-Christian ideal love.

Parlamente begins her oration with a Neoplatonic allusion affirming that man must experience earthly love before being able to understand divine love: "jamais homme n'aymera parfacitement Dieu, qu'il n'ait parfacitement aymé quelque creature en ce monde" (no man will ever perfectly love God, unless he has perfectly loved some creature in this world) (289; 228). In this statement, as noted by Ferguson and McKinley, she is both "drawing on neo-Platonic ideas and echoing the First Letter of Saint John 4:20: 'those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen'".²³⁸

Saffredent wonders whom she would define as a perfect lover and mocks the courtiers (like Dagoucin) who love their lady from a distance, never showing their true feelings. Parlamente states that a perfect lover seeks some form of perfection in his beloved, be it beauty, goodness or grace – words echoing views present in both Ficino's and Leone Ebreo's works. The soul was created by God and continuously desires to return to Him, which leads it to seek perfection in the visible things around it, or with Parlamente's words:

²³⁷ Ferguson & McKinley, "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World," 353.

²³⁸ Ibid., 357. Mathieu-Castellani also points out the reference to St. John and Neoplatonism saying that Parlamente's speech is an "[e]xposé où s'exprime le platonisme christianisé de la Renaissance," *L'Heptaméron*, 290, note 2.

Mais, quant il congnoist, par plus grande experience, que ès choses territoriales n'y a perfection ne felicité, desire chercher le facteur et la source d'icelles.

([But] when they learn through experience that in earthly [...] things there is neither perfection nor felicity, they desire to seek the source and maker of these things) (291; 229, my amendment)

As pointed out earlier, Neoplatonism strengthened Marguerite's Christian view, and it is important to underline this here. We see this, for example, when Parlamente emphasizes the fact that if the lover lacks faith in God, he or she is out on deep waters:

Toutefois, si Dieu ne luy ouvre l'œil de foy, seroit en danger de devenir, d'un ignorant, ung infidele philosophe ; car foy seullement peult monstrier et faire recevoir le bien que l'homme charnel et animal ne peult entendre.

(Yet, if God does not open the eyes of faith, they will be in danger of leaving ignorance behind only to become infidel philosophers. For only faith can reveal and make the soul receive that Good which carnal and animal man cannot understand.) (291; 229)

Also, here, as extensively pointed out in notes to the text by Mathieu-Castellani, we find numerous references to St Paul (both Corinthians and Galatians) and to St John.²³⁹ Because it is in God's hands whether a lover will ultimately be able to transform his earthly love into divine, even though the lover must first be willing and have the capacity to seek the perfect love of God. This is also stated at the end of novella 19, when the loving couple has made all their efforts and turned their love and lives towards God, but it is still up to Him to forgive them their sins and embrace them through their faith.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, to whom is this "infidel philosophe" referring in the citation above? I suggest that it could be yet another critical reference to Plato, like the one made by Simontault in the discussion preceding novella 9 or Oisille's comment after novella 34 (to which I will return below). Equally, it might be a comment regarding religious thinkers

²³⁹ Mathieu-Castellani, *L'Heptaméron*, 291, note 3 and 4.

²⁴⁰ Also noted by Ford, "Neoplatonic Themes".

of Marguerite's own time. Her pro-reformist activities and traces of these in her literary texts have been well researched.²⁴¹ The following remark by Saffredent seems to support a more pro-reformist reading:

Voylà pourquoy [...] la plus part des docteurs ne sont spirituelz, car ilz n'aymeront jamais que le bon vin et chamberieres laydes et ordes, sans experimenter que c'est d'aymer dame honneste.

(So that's why most of your doctors of theology aren't spiritual doctors! [...] It's because all they ever like is good wine and ugly, sluttish chambermaids. They never try out what it's like to love ladies who are more refined.) (291-92; 230)

Saffredent not only expresses his low opinion of these *docteurs*, but also raises the issue of social class, as well as the ugliness and loose living of the women these doctors prefer. These are characteristics opposing the goals of Christian Neoplatonic love – a sublimated love of divine beauty. Beauty in the body is also, as we know from Ficino, proof of a beautiful soul, which defends bodily desire but also the notion that those who are beautiful are more likely to understand divine love. This notion of the body as the first step towards an understanding of the divine returns when Simontault, to some extent repeating Parlamente, quotes St John and comments:

Si je sçavois bien parler latin [...] je vous allegueroye que saint Jehan dict que « celluy qui n'ayme son frere qu'il voit, comment aymera'il Dieu qu'il ne veoit point ? » Car, par les choses visibles, on est tiré à l'amour des invisibles.

(If I could speak Latin properly [...] I'd quote St John to you. He says 'he who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he cannot see?' For it is through things visible that one is drawn to the love of things invisible) (292; 230)

²⁴¹ Gary Ferguson, *Mirroring Belief. Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) and Jonathan A. Reid in *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549) and her Evangelical Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

The reference to St John is written out, but we also hear the echo of Ficino's testament that one is drawn to beautiful bodies because they often hold souls of the same beauty. Saffredent is further suggesting that social class is a matter to consider; hence, as long as the ladies are not noble and honest, but *chamberieres laydes et ordes*, they can never lead men towards spirituality.²⁴² Thus, Saffredent imposes an elitist perspective when he disregards people of lower class, which can also be argued to echo Ficino, who enhances the necessity of intellect in the comprehension of true beauty.

Ennasuite still wonders who this man can ever be who is so perfect, which is somewhat surprisingly since she has just told the story of a man who actually lived according to these principles. Her question is answered by Dagoucin, who repeats his argument on the concealment of one's love from the discussion preceding novella 9, showing again that his view on love is more in accordance with the courtly code than the Platonic philosophy. Saffredent in his turn declares that men who live in accordance with Dagoucin's ideas live on nothing but air, like a "camalercite".²⁴³ On the contrary, says Saffredent, there are *no men* who would not like to declare their affections and wish for them to be returned. In his words:

et si croy qu'il n'est si forte fiebvre d'amitié, qui soubdain ne passe, quant on congnoist le contraire. Quant à moy, j'en ay veu des miracles evidentz

(What is more, if it *isn't* returned, I don't think there was ever a love fever that wasn't cured instantaneously. I've seen miracles enough to prove it!) (292; 230 Chilton's emphasis).

While the first part of his statement might sound like a proclamation of the importance of reciprocity in a Neoplatonic sense, Saffredent's view is as far from

²⁴² The virtue of ladies is, however, one of the most-discussed topics in the collection and we get several speeches and novellas also proving that women from the lower social classes can be the most virtuous. Already during the first day we get, for example, the story of the mule keeper's wife who dies defending herself from a rapist.

²⁴³ A reference to the chameleon as described by Pliny the Elder, as noted by Mathieu-Castellani, *L'Heptaméron*, 292, note 5. Notably, Ronsard also make a similar critique against Neoplatonic love as fed solely by air when drawing on the myth of Ixion who tried to seduce Juno in *Sonnets pour Helene*, sonnet L.

both Christian and Neoplatonic ideas of desire and love as can be. The love of which he speaks primarily involve physical desire, which has no other goal than to be satisfied and lacks all constancy.

To summarize, as I have shown and emphasized in my readings, *women* are the ones speaking of and living through Neoplatonic ideals of love both in novella 19, through the character of Poline, and in the discussion, through Parlamente. They both present a Neoplatonism, heavily mixed with Pauline evangelism, that depends on reciprocal love where women and men, seen as equals in terms of their souls, both have the capacity to understand and to experience divine love. This literary appropriation of Neoplatonic ideals, in which the female voice and agency are enhanced, destabilizes traditional power relations within the discourse of love. The story I will turn to in the following is even more startling, thus, Jambicque's gender transgression in novella 43 destabilizes not only the relation between *serviteur* and lady, but the very configurations of male and female.

Jambicque and Passionate Love in Novella 43

In order to highlight how the power of passion is understood within the *Heptaméron*, I begin my reading of novella 43 with two citations by the female *devisants* Parlamente and Longarine. Both of these affirmations are informative of both the story of Jambicque and the discussion following upon it. These effects described by these two women, of being seized by a passion so strong that the heart and mind cannot handle it through reason, and of how passion can turn things, such as gender roles, upside-down, are at play in the story of Jambicque.

In a passage during the fourth day of storytelling, Parlamente acknowledges the strong power of love, but she insists upon women's loyalty and chastity within marriage. She says:

Car amour de soy [amour en soi] est une passion qui a plus tost saisy le cueur que l'on ne s'en advise ; et est ceste passion si plaisante, que, si elle se peut ayder de la vertu, pour luy servir de manteau, à grand peyne sera-elle congneue, qu'il n'en vienne quelque inconvenient. [...] mais je ne lairray pas, pour cella, desirer que chascun se contantast de son mary, comme je faictz du mien.

(Love by its very nature is a passion which seizes the heart before one realizes it. It's a passion that provokes such pleasurable sensations that if it can disguise itself under the cloak of a virtuous exterior, it's hardly ever recognized before something unfortunate ensues. [...] but in spite of that, I still think it desirable that every woman should be content with her own husband, as I am with mine!) (448-49; 351-52, addition from Mathieu-Castellani's note)

Parlamente's sense of loyalty towards her husband is clear in this statement. Nevertheless, as is repeatedly mentioned in the discussions between the *devisants*, Parlamente has at least one *serviteur* present within the group.²⁴⁴ Also, she is wearing a mask on several occasions, a *touret de nez*, which also is worn by Jambicque. For example, at the end of the second day's storytelling, Parlamente covers her face with her mask in order to disguise her reaction to a comment from Saffredent.²⁴⁵ It is also established, much earlier, that she is aware of her own husband's liaisons, but still loves him in spite of them.²⁴⁶ In other words, Parlamente is playing by the rules of the game of courtly love, the same rules applying to Jambicque.

In another discussion, Longarine explains the capacity of the God of Love, which is reminiscent of Parlamente's statement; however, without the judgement upon women who have lovers. In this section, which also introduced this study, Longarine explains that:

²⁴⁴ For example, even in the prologue, Simontault makes Parlamente cough with his allusions to her cruelty against him (92; 70).

²⁴⁵ "En disant ces parolles, Parlamente meit son touret de nez, et, avecq les autres, entra dedans l'eglise" (On hearing these words Parlamente raised her mask to her face, and went in to church) (297; 234).

²⁴⁶ Parlamente says to Hircan in the discussion of novella 6: "Ne craignez point pour moy à dire la verité ; car il me sera plus facile de ouyr raconter voz finesses, que de les avoir veu faire devant moy, combien qu'il n'y en ait nulle qui sceut diminuer l'amour que je vous porte" (Don't be afraid to tell the truth because of me. It will be much easier for me to hear about your little games than to have had to watch you playing them under my nose – though nothing you may do could diminish the love I bear you) (136; 104).

Sa Majesté que à faire tous les jours miracles, comme d'affoiblir les fortz, fortisfier les foibles, donner intelligence aux ignorans, oster les sens aux plus sçavans, favoriser aux passions et destruire raison ; et en telles mutations prent plaisir l'amoureuse divinité.

(His majesty Love delights in constantly working miracles – strengthening the weak, weakening the strong, making the ignorant wise, depriving the most learned of their wisdom, encouraging the passions and destroying reason. Turning things upside down is what the god of Love enjoys.) (364; 284)

At the very beginning of novella 43, we are intended to realize that the female character in the story, Jambicque, is an example of how the God of Love affects the human being to such an extent that she decides to act against the directions of a true Christian.

Thus, the young noble lady, in the entourage of a powerful princess, is married and in public she totally disregards and looks down upon “folle amour”, this silly love that is guided by emotions rather than reason. So firmly does she condemn illicit love that she herself is more feared than loved (“beaucoup plus craincte que aymée”) (502). Through her way of only speaking to men in a loud and arrogant voice and her habit of relaying condemning reports of her companions’ lovers to the princess, she has gained the reputation of being the “ennemye mortelle de tout amour, combien qu’elle estoit contraire en son cuer” (mortal enemy of love – although in the depths of her heart she was the very opposite) (502; 392). So, when Jambicque falls in love with a gentleman at court, she finds herself in deep misery:

Mais, après avoir porté ceste passion bien ung an, ne se voulant soulaiger, comme les aultres qui ayment, par le regard et la parolle, brusloit si fort en son cuer, qu’elle vint sercher le *dernier remede*. Et, pour conclusion, advisa qu’il valloit mieulx satisfaire à son desir et qu’il n’y eust que Dieu seul qui congneut son cuer, que de le dire à ung homme qui le povoit reveler quelquefois.

(She suffered her passion for a good year, but refused to be like other women in love and obtain relief by means of a glance here and a word there. The fire of

passion was so intense within her breast that she was driven to resort to the *ultimate remedy*. And she settled the matter by telling herself that it was better to satisfy her desire and have God alone know what was in her heart, than to tell a mere mortal who might reveal all.) (503; 392, my emphasis)

In other words, already in the introduction to the story, Jambicque is represented as unconventional, and thus she will not act like everyone else “*qui aymant*” and accept a gaze or become involved in conversation with the object of her desire. Instead, she refuses with all her might the power of passion and expresses her total disapproval of dishonest love, very much in line with Parlamente’s belief in a wife’s loyalty towards her husband. (However, the reader does not know at this point that Jambicque is married.) Nevertheless, the passion that has seized her heart will not fade.

Seized by Passion

All of Jambicque’s efforts to resist only result in an increase in her desire, and in her suffering. This lead, as seen in the citation above, to her decision to seek the “*dernier remede*”, namely to satisfy the desire that has seized her. As Kem explains, this is actually considered to be a valid cure for lovesickness, but for men and not for women, during this period. While discussing novella 26, which I suggest is a counter example to novella 43, Kem informs us that:

Therapeutic intercourse as medical cure for lovesickness originated in the first century AD and was popularized in the Middle Ages by such “Arab” medical authorities as Rhazes (d. 935) and Avicenna (d. 1087). Although it “jarred with Christian morality,” western Christian doctors began to recommend the practice as well, and by the sixteenth century it had become the prominent cure.²⁴⁷

Kem refers to this in the context of a young man’s sexual adventures, which he undertakes in order to forget the one lady he actually loves – a lady who in

²⁴⁷Kem, “Fatal Lovesickness,” 357-58.

secret also desires him but hides her feelings with all her strength, with the consequence that she dies. In novella 43, the opposite is about to happen.

One day, Jambicque looks out from her mistress's chamber and sees the man she desires on a terrace. She watches him all day and when darkness falls she asks a "petit paige" to deliver a message to the man, a message saying that there is a friend who wants to see him in the gallery. Significantly, despite the darkness of the night, Jambicque disguises herself: "ayant mis sa cornette basse et son touret de nez", as depicted in the illustrations below.

Jambicque in her disguise, *Contes et Nouvelles De Marguerite de Valois*, 1698

DAME DU TEMPS DE CHARLES IX.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

"Dame du temps de Charles IX", Robida Albert, *Mesdames Nos Aïeules - dix siècles d'élégances*, 1891

Thus, in secret, masked by both the darkness of the winter evening and by an actual mask, she meets her lover to tell him about how strongly she desires him. In a whisper, she speaks:

Il y a long temps, mon amy, que l'amour que je vous porte m'a faict desirer de trouver lieu et occasion de vous povoir veoir ; mais la craincte de mon honneur a esté pour un temps si forte, qu'elle m'a contraincte, malgré ma volonté, de dissimuller ceste passion. Mais, en la fin, la force d'amour a vaincu la craincte ; et, par la congnoissance que j'ai de vostre honnesteté, si vous me voulez promectre de m'aymer et de jamais n'en parler à personne, ne vous vouloir enquerir de moy qui je suys, je vous assureray bien que je vous seray loyalle et bonne amye, et que jamais je n'aymeray autre que vous. Mais j'aymerois mieulx morir, que vous sceussiez qui je suys.

(For a long time, my love, the love that I bear you has made me desire a time and a place to see you. But my fear for my honour was so great that against my will I was constrained to hide my passion. Yet in the end the power of love has overcome my fears. I know you are an honourable man, and so, if you will promise to love me and never tell a soul, nor ask me who I am, I will promise in turn to be a good and faithful mistress to you and never love another man. But I cannot tell you who I am, for I would rather die.) (503-4; 393)

Jambicque's first priority is, naturally, to protect her social reputation. She sets clear conditions and promises her lover complete *loyalty*, to love him and only him if he agrees to never break his promises to her. Also, at this point, the reader is informed of the "force d'amour", again alluding to both Parlamente and Longarine cited above, which has forced Jambicque to overcome her fears. But, being who she is, first of all a woman and secondly a noble lady with a fierce reputation as the most virtuous of all, she feels the need to be anonymous. The darkness of the winter evening already provides a disguise and one might imagine this would be enough. Nevertheless, Jambicque wears this mask, *touret de nez*, which could either cover the eyes, cheeks and nose, as we see in the illustrations above, or as an illumination of *La Coche* from 1542 shows, cover the

lower part of the face.²⁴⁸ The choice to mask herself is, thus, significant due to its redundancy.

Through this disguise, as Nora Peterson argues, Jambicque “separates her physical body from her identity”. Hence, she allows the man to know her body, but the separation “constructs a wall around the *non-physical* part of her identity – her self, her name, her reputation” (emphasis in original). Through this separation, Peterson continues, Jambicque seeks to “define herself as a lady who *does* have an identity apart from her sexual organs”.²⁴⁹ I will come back to this argument below, but for the moment I would like to suggest that the idea of separating her body from her identity can be rephrased to ‘separating her sex from her gender’. Hence, she is aware that her actions would be condemned due to the fact that she is a woman through her body, although acting in ways that are socially gendered as masculine.

The man agrees to Jambicque’s terms and she, in her turn, promises to “ne luy refuser chose qu’il voulaist prendre” (let him have whatever he might wish) (504; 393). The erotic scene that follows is playing on the senses; the man, who cannot see anything, touches her clothes, and when realizing they are velvet he concludes that the lady has to be of noble class (“de grande maison et d’auctorité”) (504). He then seeks what lies beneath the clothes:

En touchant ce qui estoit dessoubz autant qu’il en pouvoit prendre jugement par la main, ne trouva rien qui ne fust ne très bon estat, nect et en bon point.

(And as he felt what lay beneath, he found that there too everything was of high quality, firm and generally in good shape!) (504; 393)

After this they make love and, apparently, Jambicque’s evident sexual

²⁴⁸ As Mathieu-Castellani explains, *cornette basse*: “abaissé sa cornette (sorte de coiffure en forme de cône); touret de nez: sorte de petit masque qui couvre en partie de visage”. *L’Heptaméron*, 503, note 7. For the history of the masque see Nancy Odd, “Le masque”, <https://litteres.hypotheses.org/index-des-objets/masque>. Odd points out this manuscript and comments on the touret de nez: “Le touret de nez, fabriqué par les tailleurs, consistait en une pièce de tissu qui s’accrochait à la coiffe comme représenté en 1542 par Maître De François de Rohan dans ses enluminures d’un manuscrit de *La Coche ou Débat d’amour* de Marguerite de Navarre.” Article retrieved 2018-07-12. The manuscript illuminated by Maître De François De Rohan is held at Musée Condé à Chantilly, Ms522-folio3verso, and can be viewed here: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&IID=2C6NU0GREWHU>

²⁴⁹ Peterson, “What Women Know,” 29.

knowledge reveals to the man (and the reader) that the lady is married (congneut bien le gentil homme qu'elle estoit mariée) (504).

Is the Lady an Evil Spirit?

For some time, the promises between the lovers are kept; the man resists investigating the identity of the lady and they continue their secret love meetings in the dark of the evenings. Nevertheless, after some time, the man cannot imagine any woman who would not want to be loved and seen. His thoughts lead him to fear that she might be an evil spirit, “maling esprit” (505). Thus, he has heard the saying that no one would love the devil if one were to see his face. This frightening suspicion, paired with his curiosity to reveal the lady’s identity, bring him to decide to break his promise and to find out who his mistress actually is. This idea of Jambicque being an evil spirit is a symptom, I argue, not only of the Christian context, but also of prevailing gender structures that permeate the novella. Her actions are so transgressive that she might not even be thought of as human, but as a demon or even the Devil himself.

The man’s suspicion caused by Jambicque’s transgressive behavior can be connected to Butler’s arguments about genders that do not fit within or do not accept the norms and, consequently, cannot be accounted for within the discourse.²⁵⁰ Through her actions, Jambicque is challenging structures of power and destabilizing the social order of male and female. Butler appropriates Foucault’s view on power relations, saying that norms of recognition are predetermined by the power that “emerges in language in a restrictive way or, indeed, in other modes of articulation as that which tries to stop the articulation as it nevertheless moves forward.” To recall my earlier discussion, this “double movement” incorporated in power relations is “found in the utterance, the image, the action that articulates the struggle with the norm”.²⁵¹ Jambicque, I

²⁵⁰ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2–3.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

suggest, represents this struggle, both in her utterances and her actions, to such an extent that, at this point in the novella, she falls out of that space that is recognized as human. But “those deemed illegible, unrecognizable, or impossible nevertheless speak in the terms of the ‘human’, opening the term to a history not fully constrained by the existing differentials of power.”²⁵² Thus, as I will argue in the following, Jambicque’s presence in the narrative reveals the boundaries of gender in a critical sense.

The gentleman now acts in order to re-stabilize the power relation between himself and the lady. He has to know who she is, which is why he cleverly marks Jambicque on her shoulder with a piece of chalk. This mark on her dress, but also on her *body*, reveals her identity when she later joins the courtly gathering after their secret meeting. This chalk-mark, this sign, I argue, is used as a way for the lover to re-signify her as a woman and as the object of his passionate feelings. In other words, the man attempts to bring the gender roles, transgressed by Jambicque’s agency as a desiring subject, back in order. To paraphrase Nora Peterson, the re-stabilization of power will also rejoin the separation of Jambicque’s identity and body. He wishes to force her back into a normative female position – a position in which she is no longer in control of the relationship but also in which she will be ridiculed and condemned by everyone at court.²⁵³ Nevertheless, he will not succeed.

When the young man approaches Jambicque in public with his love confession, he asks if she wouldn’t prefer to have a perfect love rather than an imperfect one. However, his desire to know who she is does not have the effect he hopes for, but destroys their relationship and immediately also his own reputation. His action proves him disloyal both to her and to their agreement. Thus, Jambicque denies their relationship and calls the man a liar. At this point, her reputation and her relation to the powerful princess are much stronger and more valid than the man’s story, with the consequence that *he* has to leave court:

²⁵² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 14.

²⁵³ This action from male characters is also found in, for example, novella 49 as Nancy Frelick discusses at length in her “Female Infidelity”. Frelick states that when the men in this story realize that “they have all been duped by the lady, and that she has therefore stepped beyond the bounds reserved for women in patriarchy, they work together to return her to her rightful place as an object to be circulated in a system regulated by men”.

Et, tant que Jambicque demoura avecq sa maistresse, ne retourna le gentil homme en ceste maison, ne oncques puyt n'ouyt nouvelles de celle qui luy avoit bien promis qu'il la perdroit, de l'heure qu'il la chercheroit.

(And for as long as Jambicque remained in the princess's household he never came back, nor did he hear any more of this lady, who, after all, had sworn that he would lose her if he ever tried to discover her identity.) (508; 396)

His attempt to re-establish the power structure is consequently unsuccessful and, even though outlived or expressed passionate love should be an impossibility for Jambicque, she is freed of accusation at the end of the novella.

As we will see in the following section on the *devisants'* discussion, Parlamente clearly does not approve of Jambicque's choice to act on her desire. Nevertheless, I argue that this narrative reveals the differences enforced by normative gender roles and, significantly, that transgressions of gender norms can destabilize power relations within the discourse of love.

“Claiming Gender for Oneself”

The novella ends in Jambicque's favor, but the *devisants* and the reader know the truth of her actions and thoughts. In the discussion following upon the novella, Parlamente does not conceal her critique and judgement, recalling her view that women should be content only with their husbands. She explains that

celles qui sont vaincues en plaisir ne se doibvent plus nommer femmes, mais hommes, desquelz la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur ; car ung homme qui se venge de son ennemy et le tue pour ung desmentir en est estimé plus gentil compaignon ; aussy est-il quant il en ayme une douzaine avecq sa femme. Mais l'honneur des femmes a autre fondement : c'est douceur, patience et chasteté.

(Women who are dominated by pleasure have no right to call themselves women. They might as well call themselves men, since it is men who regard violence and

lust as something honourable. When a man kills an enemy in revenge because he has been crossed by him, his friends think he's all the more gallant. It's the same thing when a man, not content with his wife, loves a dozen other women as well. But the honour of women has a different foundation: for them the basis of honour is gentleness, patience and chastity.) (508-9; 397)

In Parlamente's statement, we find a criticism of the shifting views on loyalty, virtue and love, views that clearly depend and rely upon gender. Her criticism is directed not least at the definitions applicable to men's virtue, which is something that runs like a red thread throughout the *Heptaméron*. The violence of men and the social agreement that men can have mistresses if they desire to do so when not content with their wives, are criticized on many occasions within the collection. Jambicque has acted outside of the accepted norms for the female gender. However, the very ideals that define male virtue and to which she is compared, should not be acceptable for men either.

Jambicque has no right to call herself a woman, according to Parlamente, pointing to the extreme nature of her actions. She *acts* and *feels* like a man, when she gives in to her sexual desire and is the one taking the initiative for a sexual relationship. Thus, she is bound up within the prevailing discourse of gender, but at the same time destabilizes its definitions. As Butler states:

[I]ndividual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation. One only determines "one's own" sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One is dependent on this "outside" to lay claim to what is one's own. The self must, in this way, be dispossessed in sociality in order to take possession of itself.²⁵⁴

Jambicque is aware of the transgression she is undertaking by acting upon her desire, which is why she decides to act in secret. It is a way of "claiming gender" that is not supported within the social norms. As Glidden argues, the character transgresses the code when she gazes upon her desired object and initiates the sexual relation; thus, these acts are generally attributed to male behavior within

²⁵⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 7.

the courtly code.²⁵⁵ I agree on the significance of this action and with Glidden's interpretation of its significance in the novella. However, I believe, as mentioned earlier, that right from the beginning Jambicque can be identified as transgressive, although in the opposite direction from that in which we find her at the end.

Jambicque goes through a transformation due to the power of passion. In the first lines, she is not described as a typical young lady at court, but as a fierce dame who is more feared than loved. She has built a reputation primarily founded on the very norm that Parlamente praises for women: chastity. But while other young ladies, in line with the courtly code, agree to flirtations once in a while, Jambicque refuses. Similarly, to the lady who dies from lovesickness in novella 26, Jambicque has fought the passion that seized her heart and tried to be content only with her husband, whom by the way the reader knows nothing about except that he exists. He is never present in the story and we do not know whether Jambicque should be added to other examples of wives in unhappy aristocratic contract marriages – this can only be assumed. In fact, apart from the love affair between Jambicque and her lover, the relationship that is emphasized in the story is the female friendship between Jambicque and the princess.

However, and in contrast to novella 26, the God of Love overpowers Jambicque and, in Longarine's words, he "*oster les sens aux plus sçavans, favoriser aux passions et destruire raison*", with the result that gender roles are turned upside-down. Nevertheless, Jambicque is very aware of the danger in which she is placing herself in by acting on her passion, which is why the extreme disguise is necessary.²⁵⁶

As the discussion proceeds, Oisille stays true to her character and draws on religious discourse in her judgement saying that Jambicque's action was:

une vilenye inexcusable ; car qui peut parler pour celle, quant Dieu, l'honneur et
mesmes l'amour l'accusent?

²⁵⁵ Glidden, "Gender, Essence," 30–31.

²⁵⁶ Also noted by Peterson, "What Women Know," 29.

(an inexcusable crime. How could anyone defend her, when she stands accused by God, by honour and even by love?) (508; 396, my amendment of trans.)

However, despite the judgement of the two female *devisants*, Jambicque cannot simply be read as a negative exemplum for women.²⁵⁷ Hircan answers Oisille that one could defend her by appealing to Ladies' two greatest advocates pleasure and folly ("le plaisir et la folie, qui sont deux grands advocatz pour les dames") (508). Hircan has previously been outspoken in this view and it is specifically noteworthy to recall his statement, concerning the story of Rolandine in novella 21, on a woman's right to withdraw her love from a man. Not only does it highlight the fact that Jambicque does exactly that – abandons the nobleman upon his betrayal of his vow of secrecy – but it also underlines the performativity of gender:²⁵⁸

Voylà doncques une raison, dist Hircan, forgée sur vostre fantaisie, de vouloir soustenir que les femmes honnestes peuvent laisser honnestement l'amour des hommes, et non les hommes, celle des femmes, *comme si leurs cueurs estoient differens* ; mais combien que les visaiges et habitz le soyent, si croy-je que les volutez sont toutes pareilles, sinon d'autant que la malice plus couverte est la pire.

('If what your maintaining', said Hircan, 'is that an honest woman can honourably abandon her love for a man, but that a man can't do the same, then it's just an argument made up to suit your own fancies. *As if the hearts of men and women were any different!* Although their clothes and faces may be, their dispositions are the same – except insofar as the more concealed wickedness is worse!') (325; 254, my emphasis).

²⁵⁷ This might also be a possible judgement of readers of the early editions of the collection discussed in the section "Material," where for example Gruget added moralizing introductions to the novellas and, in this case, judges Jambicque as a hypocrite and a bad exemplum.

²⁵⁸ Beth Talvacchia discusses the performativity of gender and the early modern period's strict regulations of clothing as a consequence stating that "[s]exuality was very much read in the surface of Renaissance fashions, when clothes were insistently regarded as 'second skins' that should properly signify the biological structure beneath". She discusses this in relation to the theatre and explains further that the "capability of the costume to visually declaim fundamental identification was especially important when a young male actor played a female role; his costume manifested what biology denied. This could function because of the very strict codes of clothing established in the period, where specific items were assigned to define the person who wore them. Articles of clothing expressed gender and status and were often regulated by law". *A Cultural History of Sexuality. Vol. 3*, ed. Bette Talvacchia (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011), 17.

Hircan certainly speaks from within a masculine and patriarchal discourse without regard to the severe consequences that women can face when following their hearts and acting upon their love. Nevertheless, the emphasis above still draws upon the idea that the human heart has no gender, and that desire is something experienced whether you are man or woman. Hircan argues against his wife's statement that women's love is based on God while men's love is based on pleasure, whereupon Parlamente answers:

Parlamente, avecq ung peu de collere, luy dist : « J'entends bien que vous estimez celles les moins mauvaises, de qui la malice est descourverte ?

'I'm well aware', said Parlamente somewhat angrily, 'that you think more highly of women whose wickedness is *not* concealed!' (325; 254, emphasis in trans.)

The argument in the debate on Rolandine is thus very similar to the one on Jambicque. Parlamente's opposition is targeted directly at Hircan's report on women, but she is primarily concerned with her husband's taste for women who does *not* conceal their desires, not with his suggestion that women and men have the same hearts/desires. As a follow-up to her comment on malicious women in the Rolandine discussion, after novella 43 Hircan asks Parlamente, somewhat rhetorically, if she is speaking only of wise women: "Vous parlez des saiges ?" (509). Adhering her opinion, Parlamente assures him, that they are the only ones she would like to recognize.

The binary concept of sex, as Reeser argues, which has already been created in the prologue, is what enables the fluidity of gender. Thus, this fluidity is "predicated on the existence of a stable sex/gender binary".²⁵⁹ This fluidity, I suggest, is exactly what is revealed in novellas such as 43. In other words, Jambicque and the arguments put forward concerning the accepted gendered sexuality, are strong examples of how Marguerite reveals the instability of gender.

As Glidden argues, novella 43 is one example of "Marguerite's exercise in the

²⁵⁹ Reeser, "The Assumption," 127.

'outing' of feminine desire in the unlikely force field of an aristocratic culture".²⁶⁰ What I would underline is that both the novella and the discussion reveal that gender is a question of performance within this force field. What determines the judgement of the female character and what regulates the discussion of the novella are the "cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose."²⁶¹ Because the terms for gender are recurring and constantly debated throughout the narrative, we find that "the social articulation of the term depends upon its repetition, which constitutes one dimension of the performative structure of gender." Thus, as the story of Jambicque shows, actions and utterances that struggle against the norms of gender are "never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade."²⁶² In this case, the struggle as it is revealed in novella 43 and its discussion constitutes Jambicque as in-between male and female or as both male and female.

Thus, to conclude, I suggest that we can interpret Jambicque in androgynous terms. As I have discussed, in her body she is female and expected to act according to female conventions. But, through her actions, she destabilizes gender configurations and is determined as masculine by the *devisants* and even feared to be inhuman at one point in the story. She goes beyond the naturalized binary conception of female and male and, thus, challenges prevailing norms of gender that are valid both in this novella depicting a courtly milieu and in the aristocratic society of the historical context.

In my view, there are close similarities in terms of the subversive articulations of love and gender between the character of Jambicque and the Duchess of Burgundy in novella 70. However, while Jambicque had the opportunity to act on her desire, the Duchess's love for a young nobleman is non-reciprocal. Nevertheless, she too is judged by the *devisants* to be more a man than a woman due to her performance of her sexuality. The next section will discuss this novella at length in order to show how gender is destabilized throughout the narrative and how the figure of the marital androgyne is used in a strategic manner by the Duchess.

²⁶⁰ Glidden, "Gender, Essence," 26.

²⁶¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 10.

The Marital Androgyne in Novella 70

In this chapter, I primarily discuss novella 70 in light of the figure of the marital androgyne. This specific interpretation of the androgyne is used repeatedly by the main character, the Duchess of Burgundy, in this story. As many scholars have pointed out, she has a plan of vengeance as motivation for her strategy. I am, however, more interested in the way in which her actions and words destabilize gender roles and place the different relationships in the narrative under negotiation. Who is supposed to stay loyal to whom? Which relationship is the most valued?

The common interpretations of this novella are focusing on the Duchess as an example of a bad woman, an evil and treacherous person who deceives her husband without moral qualms, connoting previous female characters such as Phaedra. My contribution to the discussion is not to consider the moral of the character's actions, but rather to focus on the strategy she uses in her bid to attract the young servant into a courtly relationship, and also how she plays on the assumed equality between herself as a wife and her husband. Consequently, I intend to broaden the interpretation of this character, which will also include the way in which judgements that depend on her gender are passed in the introduction preceding the story as well as the fact that she disappears from the *devisants'* discussion afterwards.

The Duchess's Story

Many scholars have commented on Marguerite's choice to include this particular story, a re-telling of the thirteenth century poem *La chastelaine de Vergy*, in her collection and the Cholakians refer to its Neoplatonic connotations. They argue that Marguerite had probably read the courtly romances as a young girl and that, in the writing of the *Heptaméron*, she contemplates "this idea that 'perfect love' between men and women was a paradigm of mystical union with God" and how she "began to look at the old stories in a new light. Weren't these

legendary lovers the prototypes and exemplars of Plato's vision?"²⁶³ As we will see the Cholakians refer to the relationship between the young nobleman and the Lady of Vergy as embodying Plato's vision. This relationship is also the most prominent in the Medieval version, as the title, *La chastelaine de Vergy*, indicates. Scholars such as Reinier Leushuis have also sought to investigate the intertextual notions between the original poem and Marguerite's version.²⁶⁴ Joshua Blaylock takes another perspective and considers the actions of the young nobleman according to the courtly codes as stipulated in the treatises of Andreas Capellanus and Castiglione, especially to the trait of *sprezzatura*.²⁶⁵

However, I will begin my reading with the argumentation of the Duchess of Burgundy at Oisille's introduction of the novella, because the struggle and destabilization of gender informs the narrative from its very start.

Oisille introduces the story by admitting that it differs from the *devisants'* agreed rule of only telling stories they have witnessed themselves or have been told by a reliable source. Her source is written and not from their own time and therefore, in accordance with their primary agreement, she should not be allowed to recount it. Parmentaire, however, argues that this is a story that only Oisille and she herself have heard, due to the old form of language in which it was written, so it can nevertheless be regarded as new.

For the last hour of the seventh day Oisille tells the story, which she introduces as being about a lady who is both beautiful and well-married, but who "par faulte de vivre de ceste honneste amityé, devint plus charnelle que les pourceaulx et plus cruelle que les lyons" (did not live in accordance with what is honourable in love, did in fact become more carnal in her desires than swine and more cruel than the lions) (656; 512). Thus, the novella is not presented as the story of the Dame du Vergy, but as the story of the Duchess. This statement indicates several things: 1) the main character of the story is the Duchess, 2) the shifting gender positions we are about to meet in this story, thus this behavior is not womanly but manly, and 3) the fact that her actions even displace her

²⁶³ Cholakian and Cholakian, *Mother of the Renaissance*, 205.

²⁶⁴ Leushuis, "Dialogue, Space and Selfhood in La Chastelaine de Vergi and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* 70," *The Romanic Review*, Vol 98, No. 4, 2007.

²⁶⁵ Blaylock, "A Transparent Veil: The Secret as a Tragic Spectacle in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* (1559)," *MLN*, Vol. 142, No. 4, September, 2017.

humanity. Using Butler's words, we can begin to read this story by employing the argument that:

to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not. If I am a certain gender, will I still be regarded as part of the human? Will the "human" expand to include me in its reach? If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for social existence?²⁶⁶

As in novella 43, the story of the Duchess articulates questions of power relations and social codes of conduct, which lead to a destabilization of norms for gender on several levels.

Destabilizing Gender, Love and Loyalty

Novella 70 is set in the Duchy of Burgundy and we are told early on that the Duke living there was a handsome prince married to a lady of such beauty that he was ignorant of her true character. Already at this point, we can recognize Neoplatonic ideals, which hold that external beauty indicates a good character, a beautiful soul. In other words, already at the outset of the novella, the Duchess overturns Neoplatonic expectations. Thus, she desires, not her husband, but a young courtier, who also happens to be a good friend of the Duke. Soon the Duchess will transgress both her marital obligations and the courtly codes when she aims to win the young man's affection.

Thus, while her first attempts do not capture any attention from the virtuous young man, her passionate feelings develop into "ung furieux desespoir" and make her forget her wifely duties and, even further, her gender as female:

²⁶⁶ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2–3.

ung jour, la poussa tant, que, oubliant qu'elle estoit femme qui debvoit estre priée et refuser, princesse qui debvoit estre adorée, desdaignant telz serviteurs, *print le cueur d'un homme transporté* pour descharger le feu qui estoit importable.

(one day her desperation drove her to forget that she was a wife whose duty was to receive advances and reject them, to forget that she was a princess who ought to receive adoration of her servants while disdaining them, until, with the reckless courage of one beside herself, she sought to quench the unbearable flames within her.) (658-59; 513)

In accordance with the courtly code for women, the Duchess should be the one to turn down invitations from courtiers. However, as Regosin points out, the narrator “portrayed [the Duchess] as having literally [...] become a mad *man*” (*print le cueur d'un homme transporté*).²⁶⁷ While Regosin attends more to the “mad” aspect and to the importance of secrecy in his reading of the story, I want rather to focus on the change of gender that takes place in this formulation. Thus, the Duchess’s flaming desire has transformed her (gender) identity. The similarity to novella 43 about Jambicque is striking.

This gender transgressions are also explored by Ferguson, who shows that, not only does the Duchess invert gender norms, but so does the male servant.²⁶⁸ Thus, while the Duchess’s character and behavior transgress, and thereby reveal, the boundaries of female gender, we will also see that the servant acts in accordance with the rules of a courtly lady. Nevertheless, Blaylock argues that the young man’s reactions and behavior are in accordance with the codes of a courtier with *sprezzatura*. However, as will be shown in the following, I build on Ferguson’s interpretation and claim that the gender roles are inverted, and my reading will also consider the Duke’s position in this triangle of power, love and gender. Thus, the main character’s actions will lead to a destabilization of love and loyalty. Throughout the story, the Duke is drawn back and forth between his wife and his servant due to “*jalousie*”, “*honneur*” and “*amour*”.

²⁶⁷ Regosin, “Leaky Vessels”.

²⁶⁸ Gary Ferguson, “Paroles d’hommes, de femmes et de Dieu : Langage, genre et transcendance dans la nouvelle soixante-dix,” in *Lire l’Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. Bertrand, Dominique (Clermont-Ferrand : Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, Masion de la Recherche, 2005), 197-210.

A Female Courtier

In her first attempt to catch the servant's attention, the Duchess invites him for a walk in a gallery; a meeting that is possible since the Duke, her husband, is not home. She talks to the servant about how he has never seemed to be in love and he answers that he could never imagine any of the women at court finding his love worthy. The Duchess becomes even more fond of him after this virtuous exclamation and some days later she makes further advances towards him. When the man, in accordance with his virtuous heart, pretends not to understand her desire, she takes the opportunity to reveal herself in a more concrete way:

La duchesse, voyant qu'il n'y vouloit entendre, luy vat entreouvrir le voile de sa passion ; et pour la craincte que lui donnoit la vertu du gentil homme, parla par maniere d'interrogation, luy disant : « Si Fortune vous avoit tant favorisé que ce fust moy qui vous portast ceste bonne volonté, que diriez-vous? »

(Seeing that he still was refusing to understand what she was saying to him, she lifted a little the veil that hid her passionate desires, and, fearful of the young man's virtue, she phrased her declaration as a question, saying: 'Suppose that Fortune had so favoured you that it was I myself who bore you such goodwill – then what would you say?') (660-61; 515)

The Duchess is worried about how the man will react to her amorous advances, which she now chooses to show openly to him. We can also note the metaphorical “voile” employed here, which connects the narrative intertextually with novella 43 and Jambicque's mask, the *touret de nez*. In contrast to the Duchess, who is not concealed by an actual mask, Jambicque never wants to reveal her true identity. On the other hand, like Jambicque, the Duchess actively advances towards the object of her affections in the manner of a courtier towards a lady, which places the men in both novella 43 and 70 in a feminine position, as the one being courted. In other words, already at this point of novella 70, we can confirm that the gender positions of the courtly code have

been reversed, destabilizing the relation between the Duchess and the young man.

The young servant is nevertheless said to possess all the qualities of a true courtier in relation to the Duke. He explains to the Duchess his complete loyalty towards the Duke and also to her as being the wife of his master. In an attempt to follow the courtly code, he will view her affection as the greatest reward for his service at court, however *not* as an amorous *serviteur*. He further says that he is sure that her love for her husband is so deep and chaste

que non pas moy, qui ne suys que ung ver de terre, mais le plus grand prince et parfait homme que l'on sçauroit trouver ne sçauroit empescher *l'union* de vous et de mon dict seigneur

(that no one, not even the greatest prince and most perfect man on earth, far less I, a mere worm, could ever mar *the union* that joins your grace with my sovereign lord.) (661; 515, my emphasis)

The servant, in other words, reminds the Duchess both of her role as a wife regarding her marital duties and of his own status as a servant. This, I suggest, is an attempt to re-establish their gender positions and their social classes. He describes marriage as the strongest union that no one could ever split, thus alluding to the marital androgyne. The servant also proclaims his loyalty towards the Duke, which will last and even grow stronger, until the end.

The servant's words upset the Duchess and, in an attempt to cover up her own intentions, she accuses him of imagining things of which he is not worthy. As Regosin argues, the beginning of the story develops the characters as psychologically complex. The Duchess "struggles both to reveal and to mask her feelings" and the young courtier seeks for his part to mask his own understanding of these feelings.²⁶⁹ Thus, secrecy is the fuel of the characters' passionate feelings and of the narrative itself. I have already pointed to the intertextual echoes of novella 43, but Jambicque's decision to keep her identity secret and to refuse the truth at the unveiling of it made her successful in her

²⁶⁹ Regosin, "Leaky Vessels".

transgressive actions. The Duchess, who reveals her feelings directly to the young man at this early stage of the narrative, will meet a fate completely the opposite.

Strategic Lies

The Duchess is so upset at this point that she returns to and stays in her chambers. In order to remain there, she develops the plan of a fake pregnancy. This trick allows her to conceal her true feelings, thus she fears they might show if she attends the same gatherings as the young servant. Furthermore, the specific choice of pretending to be pregnant plays heavily on her husband's affection towards her and a possible child. The Duke, in contrast to most husbands in the *Heptaméron*, truly loves his wife and is very attentive and caring towards her. He is deceived by the pretended pregnancy and is happy to be expecting a child.

I suggest that this trick can be interpreted as the first part of the strategic use of the marital androgyne, already alluded to by the young servant, that will follow. Within a Christian marriage, pregnancy is the intended goal of physical desire and the union of bodies, as God commands husband and wife to populate the earth. The re-union of two bodies, the two halves, and reproduction is also the main purpose for Zeus/Jupiter to move the original humans' genitals to the front, as told in Aristophanes' myth. Leone Ebreo is perhaps the strongest voice considering the importance of procreation within the genre of love dialogues, as discussed earlier. He positions women in a prominent role in the philosophy of ideal love. However, allusions to the marital androgyne will be more clearly displayed by the Duchess later in the narrative.

After some time, the Duke finally becomes suspicious and visits his wife's rooms begging her to tell him the truth behind her illness. He also speaks of his love for her, which he says is greater than life itself. The Duchess's love towards the servant has now turned to hate and she fabricates another lie in order to keep the truth concealed and also to launch a plan of vengeance. She accuses

the servant of making advances *towards her*, putting her own, her husbands and their children's (the unborn child's not least) honor at risk.

The Duke, who loves both his wife and his loyal servant, can hardly believe these accusations and needs to retire to his chambers before instructing the young servant to visit him, notably in secret. At this point we can start to trace the evolution of the Duke's love, a movement that, as mentioned earlier, travels from the wife to the servant. The servant asks his master what *man* is accusing him (referring to a solution/revenge by the sword), even if he surely knows that it is the Duchess who lies behind the accusations. The Duke replies: "Vostre accusateur [...] ne porte autre armes que la chasteté" ('Your accuser [...] bears no arms but the armour of chastity') (664; 518). This line remarks on the character trait that the Duchess, as a woman, *should* have, namely chastity, again reminding the reader of the gender transgression involved in her actions and desire. This is also enforced by the servant's question above. He is well aware of that it is the Duchess, but the question is asked to conceal his knowledge and thus uses the masculine form of *accusateur*. Thus, grammatically he implies a man, but is referring to a woman being judged as a man.

In the young nobleman's reply that then follows, made in self-defense, we find a somewhat contradictory statement. Thus, he himself depends on and shows how fundamental secrets are within the courtly code of love, but claims that everyone who has ever been in love can easily recognize the signs of someone who is in love.

Si est-ce ung feu qui ne se peut si longuement couvrir, que quelquefois ne soit
congneu de ceulx qui ont pareille maladye. Vous suppliant, monseigneur, croire
deux choses de moy : l'une que je vous suis si loial, que, quant madame vostre
femme seroit la plus belle creature du monde, si n'auroit amour la puissance de
mectre tache à mon honneur et fidelité ; l'autre est que, quant elle ne seroit point
vostre femme, c'est celle que je veis oncques dont je serois aussy peu amoureux ;
et y en a assez d'aultres, où je mectrois plus tost ma fiance.

(The fire of love cannot for long be hidden before it is recognized by those who have suffered the same disease. I would ask you, my lord, to accept my word concerning two things. The first is that my loyalty to you is so true that even were

Madame your wife the most beautiful creature in the world, still love would never have the power to stain my honour and my faith; and the second is that even were she not your wife, she of all women in the world is the one whose love I least would seek; there are many others to whom [my fancy] would be sooner drawn.) (665; 519)

The reassurance we find at the end of this comment strongly recalls the formulation of the male friend in another story, namely novella 47, where the failure of a male-male androgyne is depicted.²⁷⁰ In 47, a perfect relationship between two men is challenged when one of them decides to get married. A triangular drama progresses and at the end the homosocial bond collapses. In 47 there is, however, an ambiguity embedded in the comment regarding whether the man desires men or women, which we do not find in 70. They also differ in the power relation between the men, which in 47 is one of equality while in 70 it is a master-servant relation.

The servant assures his master of his loyalty and states that he has many other women to choose from rather than the Duchess – a remark that is quite unflattering to her; thus, he indicates that she is not the most beautiful woman in the world. And even if she was, she would still be the last of all women in the world he would approach. At this point, we can recall the note made at the beginning concerning the Neoplatonic idea that physical beauty indicates inner or true beauty. This idea may inform the husband's view of his wife, while the servant, who knows about the Duchess's lies, cannot regard her as the most beautiful. The Duke, however, is satisfied with his servant's answer, since it reassures him of the young man's loyalty. The Duchess, on the other hand, is not content.

Once again, she talks her husband into suspicion and he returns again to the young man, asking him, as a friend, "*comme amy*", and ordering him, as his master, "*comme maistre*", to tell the truth: is he in the service of any lady at all? The young man, who sees the jealousy in his master, reveals the secret of his true love and his relationship with another woman, and the Duke is again

²⁷⁰ Reeser, "Fracturing the Male Androgyne". See also my discussion on the crucial role of the female character in novella 47 in Vernqvist, "Negotiations of Premodern Desire," in *Pangs of Love*.

relieved to hear this. But when it comes to the Duchess's knowledge that the young man actually has another beloved, she convinces her husband, "usant de finesse accoustumée" ([using] her customary cunning), that the young man is obviously lying in an attempt to cover up his love for her (667; 520). If he cannot tell the name of his true love, it is only because he is not able to say the Duchess's name.

We understand that the husband has explained the beauty of the lady whom the servant loves, which in the servant's words makes the Duchess and all ladies in her company look like ugliness ("laydeur") itself. Driven by jealousy and revenge, the Duchess convinces her husband once again through her skillful use of words and he is described as "[l]e pauvre seigneur, duquel la femme tournoit l'opinion comme il luy plaisoit" ([the unhappy Duke, whose mind could be changed just as his wife pleased] (667; 521). The Duchess is thus represented as intelligent, making use of reason even though her intentions are not good; characteristics generally connoting masculinity. The Duke, on the other hand, is easily fooled and naïve, attributes generally viewed as feminine attributes. Even though they are both driven by love and jealousy, the gender roles are destabilized in this relationship too, as we saw at the beginning between the Duchess and the servant.

Of course, it should be pointed out that this is a misogynist trope of a clever woman deceiving, preferably, the men around her, which occurs throughout Western literary history. As mentioned earlier, the novella displays similarities to Phaedra, and later in the story, the Duchess is actually compared to Circe (675; 527). This type-character is also common in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and in the novella genre in general.

Due to the Duchess's ability to persuade, at this point perhaps not surprisingly, the Duke extracts the name of the Lady of Vergy during his next encounter with the servant. By telling the Duke, the servant is furthermore breaking his most important promise to his beloved. He is also well aware of that their noble love will now come to end due to his betrayal. The torment the young man goes through for sharing this secret with the Duke is clearly in line with Dagoucin's views on the concealment of true love for which he argued in

the discussion after novella 8. The love between the young man and the Lady of Vergy is thus to be regarded as true or Platonic, in the mixed courtly manner as propounded by Dagoucin. This will come even clearer in the development of the story and in the discussion that follows the novella.

“Ung coeur, une ame et une chair”

The young man explains to his master how the rendezvous with this noble lady, who is also related to the Duke, being his niece, are arranged. The Duke in turn, now portrayed as the most curious man in the world (“le plus curieux homme du monde”) (670) asks to come along for the next meeting, again pointing out the fact that he is not only his master but also his friend.²⁷¹ Both of these types of relationship are based on the same factors: loyalty, honesty and love.

Thus, the Duke and his servant ride out to the lady’s castle for the purpose of the servant proving his relationship to her. He has to be called into her house in the way he has described in detail to his master. The Duke promises his beloved servant once again that he will keep his secret, because his feelings of love and trust for him are now so great that they cannot be compared to anyone at his court (“fiance et amour en luy, qu’il n’y avoit nul en sa court qui fust plus en sa bonne grace”) (671). The Duchess’s feelings and plan for vengeance are still, however, not clear to the Duke which for the time being result in a continuity of his love for her as well.

The Duchess for her part is angrier than ever because of her husband’s choice to remove his trust and friendship from her to his servant. It is, finally, at this point that allusions to the marital androgyne reappear in her argument.

Je pensois que vous et moy n’eussions que *ung coeur, une ame et une chair*. Mais maintenant je congnois bien que vous me tenez pour une estrangiere, veu que vos

²⁷¹ Curiosity, however, connoting sexuality, as well as knowledge and gossip, was regarded as feminine during the early modern period, and here evokes the Duke’s femininity versus the Duchess’s masculinity. As Glidden also notes, this character trait is also found in Jambicque’s lover in novella 43. Glidden, “Gender, Essence”.

secretz qui ne me doibvent estre cellez, vous les cachez, comme à personne estrange. Helas, monsieur, vous m'avez dict tant de choses grandes et secrettes, desquelles jamais n'avez entendu que j'en aye parlé ; vous avez tant expérimenté ma volonté estre *esgalle* à la vostre, que vous ne povez doubter que *je ne soys plus vous-mesme que moy*. Et, si vous avez juré de ne dire à aultruy le secret du gentilhomme, en le me disant, ne faillez à vostre serment, *car je ne suis ny ne puis estre aultre que vous*.

(Once I used to think that you and I were as *one heart, one soul, one flesh*. But now I know that you regard me as a stranger, for those secrets which you ought not to hide from me you conceal from me as if I were a stranger. Oh, how many times in the past have you confided in me over secret matters of far greater importance! Have you ever heard that I have given them away? You have tried my will and found it so *equal* to your own that you cannot doubt that *I am more yourself than I am myself*. And even if you have sworn to tell this man's secret to no one, yet you can tell it to me without breaking your word, *for I am and cannot be other than you*, my lord) (672; 525 my emphasis)

In marriage, they are united, being one in mind, body and soul. From the perspective of the deceived husband, the Duchess's claim is true and she plays on his affection towards her. She is not only his wife, she is his *other half*, a part of himself or even the very same as him, as we see in the last sentence of this citation. This heterosexualized and also, interestingly, *married* version of Plato's original androgyne is also the figure that Leone Ebreo presents, as shown in previous discussions. As referred to earlier, Rothstein examines this mixing of classical philosophy with Christian and Hebrew tradition in her analysis of the French writers' employment of the androgyne. Furthermore, there is a possibility that Marguerite might have been familiar with Leone Ebreo's dialogue on love, or at least with the ideas he presents in this text. Certainly, she was very familiar with the Christian scriptures upon which Leone Ebreo draws in his explanation of the androgyne, namely Genesis 2:2.

Moreover, this novella is a good example of how fantasy, or fiction, can work according to Butler, in the way in which "it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere

home".²⁷² The vision that Duchess describes of an ideal kind of marriage, which presupposes that man and woman are equals, points to an (at least fictional) reality that could have been possible. In this case, the possibility of a union between equals is shown to fail in the end, or even from the beginning, since the Duchess is not happy in her marriage. Again, the Duchess is described as a negative exemplum, but when we recall the very reason for her desire towards the young servant, "ne se content de l'amour que son mary lui portoit, et du bon traictment qu'elle avoit de luy", it becomes evident that we can interpret the Duchess's actions in line with other attempts at female infidelity in the *Heptaméron*, namely as caused by unhappiness in a marriage about which she probably had no say.

Unhappy Ending

As mentioned, both the possibility and the limits of transgressions of gender are revealed in the destabilization of gender positions. The movements of love and loyalty that parallel these gender positions travel among the relationships between the husband and wife, the Duchess and the servant, and the Duke as feudal lord and friend and the servant. The Duchess's convincing speeches are what drives the narrative forward and also cause the development of the (power) relations involved. The Duke is so moved by her words, tears and kisses, and so terrified of losing both her and their child, that he decides to break his promise to his servant. Thus, the Duke reveals the truth about the relationship between the Lady of Vergy and the servant. However, he declares that he will take the Duchess's life with his own hands if she ever tells this secret to anyone – a sentence that foreshadows the ending of the novella.

During a feast at the Duke's court, the Lady of Vergy understands through clear indications from the Duchess, that the noble love between herself and the servant has been exposed. As she understands that the only person who could have revealed their secret is the servant himself, she dies of heartbreak due to

²⁷² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 29.

this betrayal, but only after giving a long speech on the nobility of her love. In her attempt to understand the reason for her lover's action, she sees no other explanation than that he must have fallen in love with another woman, most likely the Duchess since she is the one who is aware of the secret relationship.

In the lady's words, we now find the aforementioned comparison of the Duchess with Circe. I would suggest that this can also be seen as a comparison of the Duchess to the Lower Venus, a seducing temptress. She says:

La beaulté de la duchesse est-elle si extresme, qu'elle vous a transmué comme
faisoit celle de Circée ? Vous a-elle faict venir de vertueux vicieux, de bon
mauvays, et d'homme beste cruelle ?

(Is the beauty of the Duchess so supreme that like that of Circe it has transmuted
you? Has she turned you from virtue to vice, from goodness to evil, from a man
into a ferocious beast?) (675; 527)

Nevertheless, this is not the case. Instead, as we know, it is the servant's loyalty and love for his master and friend that is the true cause of his betrayal. Unaware of these circumstances, Lady of Vergy dies of grief due to her imagining the servant's desire for the Duchess. Ironically, or significantly, this is an imagination that happens to coincide with the Duchess's wishes from the beginning.

When the servant in his turn realizes that his beloved is dead, he speaks at length of his regrets and his failure as a true lover. The scene depicts the classical trope of the young lovers' tragedy, a theme that many connects with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), but which has a much longer tradition. It is seen in Ovid's "Pyramus and Thisbe" in *Metamorphosis*, later transferred to Bandello's novella *Romeo e Giulietta* (1554), and here in the medieval poem that Marguerite is retelling. What is significant in the servant's speech in Marguerite's version is the connection he makes between his tongue/ability to speak ("O ma langue") and his heart ("O mon cuer") and, furthermore, what he has to say about his actions and the Duke's (677). It is clear that the wrong words uttered by him have led to the failure of noble love. He says:

je devois sçavoir que nul ne pouoit garder mon secret myeulx que moy-mesmes.
Le duc a plus de raison de dire le sien à sa femme que moy à luy. Je n'accuse que
moy seul de la plus grande meschanceté qui oncques fut commise entre amys.²⁷³

I should have known that no one could keep my secret better than myself. The
Duke had more reason to tell his wife than I had to tell him. Myself alone I accuse
of the greatest crime ever committed between lovers and friends!) (678; 529)

Thus, in true relationships, secrets are shared. However, the relationship which the servant puts forward as the highest is notably the one between husband and wife, not between friends or between himself and the Lady of Vergy. His words highlight the values that the Duchess has been playing on throughout the story; namely, the loyalty and honesty that should prevail between husband and wife.

In his despair, the servant draws his knife, pierces his own heart and falls upon his beloved. When the Duke enters the room, he tries to separate the two bodies, which proves to be impossible until no life remains in the man's body. A young girl who has witnessed both Lady of Vergy's and the servant's death and also listened to their speeches, informs the Duke of everything she knows. When the Duke understands his wife's involvement in this tragedy, he acts upon his earlier threat to kill her.

With the same knife with which the servant just took his own life, the Duke runs like a boar, "sanglier", out into the dancing room and cuts the throat of the Duchess (680).²⁷⁴ As pointed out by Ferguson, there is a great significance to this act. While the Duke could have taken her life in many other ways, he chose to cut her throat. This choice clearly symbolizes that the Duke is specifically putting an end to the Duchess's speech, to her lies.²⁷⁵ However, it could also be argued that the silence that falls upon her death is only true within the narrative; hence, the narrative itself as a novella in Marguerite's collection, already a retelling of the Medieval poem, is repeated every time one chooses to write,

²⁷³ Mathieu-Castellani says in her note to this word: "amants ; et, ci-dessous, *vraye amytié* : le veritable amour".

²⁷⁴ This transformation of the Duke into the metaphor of a boar, running mad as though he has been pierced by a spear, again alludes to the comparison of the Duchess to Circe (680; 531).

²⁷⁵ Ferguson, "Paroles d'hommes, de femmes et de Dieu".

retell or read it again.²⁷⁶ The voices of the characters are heard again, here through Oisille, or more correctly, through Marguerite.

The repeated employment of the androgyne, here in a marital version, can be argued for in the same manner; the reappearance points to its significance. The marital androgyne could be thought of as the model for the Duke at the very beginning; thus, he truly loved his wife and believed they had a good marriage. The Duchess, however, repeatedly uses allusions to the figure of the androgyne as a strategy, in order to get her husband to comply and act in accordance with her plan. The effects of this plan are manifested in the step-by-step transfer of the Duke's love and loyalty from his wife to his friend/servant. At the end of the story, he has turned against his wife completely. His loyalty and affection lie with the servant, or perhaps actually with the loving couple as one unity. His reaction of throwing himself upon the two of them as they lie dead together could suggest this.

Thus, we can conclude that the figure of the marital androgyne is shown to be a fantasy in novella 70, a utopian vision of marriage as a possible space for mutual and true love that is not able to become anything but a false truth. This, I suggest, was already a fact at the beginning of the novella when the Duchess is described as not being content with her husband's love, a husband whom she most probably had not chosen herself. The repeated allusions to the androgyne, in this case as a marital version, nevertheless demonstrates the significance of the androgyne as a metaphor for equality between the partners in a love relation. The androgyne and the equality it presupposes functions, as I have shown as a foundation for the discussion on love and gender in the *Heptaméron*.

The Duchess Disappears

In the discussion between the *devisants* following upon novella 70, neither the Duchess's actions nor her character, so clearly introduced as important by Oisille, are touched upon at all. Thus, despite the fact that the Duchess is

²⁷⁶ Regosin, "Leaky Vessels".

presented as the main character in the story, the topic for the discussion is the true love between the Lady of Vergy and the servant, which has moved the *devisants* to tears. Oisille concludes her story by referring to Saint Paul and encourages her fellow *devisants* not to allow themselves to love earthly things too deeply. She specifically turns to the ladies:

Il me semble que vous devez tirer exemple de cecy, pour vous garder de mettre
vostre affection aux hommes, car, quelque honneste ou vertueuse qu'elle soyt, elle
a tousjours à la fin quelque mauvais desboire.

(I think you should let it stand as an example to you not to fix your affection on
men, for, however pure and virtuous your affection may be, it will always lead to
some disastrous conclusion.) (681; 523)

One of the male *devisants*, either Hircan or Geburon depending upon which manuscript we use, nevertheless wonders why the love between Dame du Vergy and the young nobleman, if it was truly so “*honest*”, had to be kept secret.²⁷⁷ While the Platonic ideals of the couple have been noted above, I find it more important to ask why the Duchess’s actions and character are not discussed. Or can we find this discussion articulated implicitly through the very silence of the *devisants*?

Parlamente’s response to Oisille, in which she mentions “une femme”, can be interpreted as speaking about both Lady of Vergy, the Duchess or women in a general sense. Parlamente explains:

Pour ce [...] que la malice des hommes est telle, que jamais ne pensent que grande
amour soyt jointe à honnesteté [...] car l’honneur d’une femme est aussi bien mys
en dispute, pour aymer par vertu, comme par vice, veu que l’on ne se prent que
ad ce que l’ont voyt.

(Because [...] men are so malicious that they can never believe that great love and
virtue can be joined together [...] Whether a lady’s love is virtuous or vicious,

²⁷⁷ Mathieu-Castellani’s edition has Geburon, but explains that this comment is sometimes attributed to Hircan. The Chilton translation uses Hircan.

doubt may be cast on her honour, because people only judge by what they see.)
(682; 532)

At this, Longarine exclaims that it would be better not to love at all, which upsets Dagoucin. He repeats his standpoint as a courtier, holding fast to the belief that love of women is what gives men reason to live, and he draws a parallel between love and war. In his view, men fight in order to achieve honor, and thus to impress and win the fondness of the ladies: “Mais qui penseroit que les dames n’aymassent point, il faudroit, en lieu d’hommes d’armes, faire des marchans; et, en lieu d’acquérir honneur, ne penser que à amasser du bien” (If it were generally believed that ladies were incapable of love, then, instead of following the profession of arms, we should all turn into mere merchants, and instead of winning honour, seek only to pile up wealth) (682; 533). This is a comment presenting the courtly idea that women enhance courage and the will to seek honor in men, which is a view that, unsurprisingly, triggers Hircan and Saffredent to oppose him.

In their view, courage is a masculine trait of which men are only deprived when they fall in love or get married. It is not unexpected that, at this point, these two *devisants* protect their masculinity, which they believe depends on men’s active performance. These comments by Dagoucin, Hircan and Saffredent represent differing views, not only on masculinities, but also on love. While Dagoucin speaks about courtly love, which, as we have repeatedly discussed, contains Neoplatonic ideals of sublimation, Hircan and Saffredent speak about passionate love with physical consummation as its primary purpose. What is interesting, however, is that marriage is taken into consideration in the discussion. Can we assume that Hircan and Saffredent would blame the Duke, as a husband, for the tragic outcome of the story? My answer would be yes. To some extent, he had been deprived of his masculinity in his relation to the Duchess, being convinced over and over again, due to his love for her, to follow her wishes. Gender roles have become displaced, making the husband effeminized, the wife a female courtier and the servant lady-like.

Parlamente intervenes and brings the discussion back to what in her view is the main question: “pourquoy le gentil homme qui estoit cause de tout le mal

ne mourut aussy tost de desplaisir, comme elle qui estoit innocente" (why the gentleman, who was the cause of the whole disaster, did not immediately die of sorrow himself, like the lady, who was completely innocent) (683; 533). Thus, Parlamente clearly accuses the servant, due to his failure as a courtly lover.

But still, not a word on the Duchess. The complete silence regarding her in the discussion can be interpreted, I suggest, as a narratological strategy with ambiguous connotations. It could lead the reader to think that the Duchess is unimportant and unnecessary to discuss. After all, we already know of Oisille's judgement of her from the introduction to the novella. This is the content of Parlamente's comment just mentioned; the main question the *devisants* should discuss is the relationship between the Lady of Vergy and the servant.

On the other hand, the choice not to discuss the Duchess actually brings her into focus; thus, the reader is left with questions and thoughts that remains unanswered. In other words, the silence is speaking. She is on the reader's mind because of her unconventional actions and lack of appearance in the discussion. Her actions are in fact so unconventional and transgresses social agreements about normative gender roles to such a degree that they create a rift, not only in the marital androgyne, but in the very narrative itself.

Thus, Marguerite's appropriation of the androgyne functions in a number of different ways in her collection of novellas. I have demonstrated how the transformation of the couple's desire and their androgynous union depend on the female character's voice and agency in novella 19. It is only through Poline's words and actions that the sublimation is made possible, which also underlines the necessity of reciprocal love in this Neoplatonic vision that Marguerite demonstrates. Novella 43 is not a proper example of Neoplatonic ideals, but more specifically illustrates how the power relations of courtly love are destabilized by Jambicque's transgressive performance. I have argued for her as an androgynous character, who demonstrates how gender is fluid and, thus, criticizing the prevalent norms and regulations for men and women, especially within the discourse of love.

Finally, my last reading, of the Duchess in novella 70, parallels Jambicque to a great extent in concern of her unconventional performance as a female

courtier. In this story, several gender roles and power relations are destabilized and the Duchess employs the marital androgyne strategically. Hence, the Neoplatonic influence on Marguerite's writing proves to be very complex and intertwined with the Christian as well as the courtly discourses. Nevertheless, her literary strategy to enhance women's voice and agency is aided by the figure of the androgyne. Marguerite is repeatedly destabilizing the power relations within the discourses of love and gender or, in other words, she is gendering the debates on early modern love.

Gaspara Stampa's Vision of Love

On a Flyleaf of *Rime* – Gaspara Stampa
bought in the Libreria Serenissima
Venice, June 14, 1949

While the light of Canaletto
And Guardi turns to the light of
Turner, and the domes of the Saluta
Begin to take on the evening,
I drink chocolate and Vecchia
Romagna, that estimable
Brandy, on the terrace of
The Café International,
And read these twisting,
Burning pages. Love was
An agony for you, too, signora,
And came to no good end after
All the terrible price.
Kenneth Rexroth²⁷⁸

Hast du der Gaspara Stampa
Den genügend gedacht, daß irgend ein Mädchen,
Dem der Geliebte entging, am gesteigerten Beispiel
Dieser Liebenden fühlt: daß ich würde wie sie?

(Have you remembered
Gaspara Stampa sufficiently yet, that any girl,
whose lover has gone, might feel from that
intenser example of love: 'Could I only become like her?')
Rainer Maria Rilke, "The First Elegy" in *Duino Elegies*, 1923

²⁷⁸ I am grateful to New Directions Publishing for giving me permission to reproduce lines 1-13 of Rexroth's poem "On a Flyleaf of *Rime* – Gaspara Stampa", copyright 1956 by Kenneth Rexroth. Kenneth Rexroth, *The Collected Shorter Poem*, (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966), 246. I am further grateful to Elin Käck, who made me aware of Rexroth's poem.

It is well-known that Rainer Maria Rilke was inspired to write about Gaspara Stampa. How her *Rime* moved the American poet Kenneth Rexroth to write the poem above, lamenting love's misery has, however, not to my knowledge been noted before. Rexroth's lyrical lines sums up and pinpoints some of the essential notions of Gaspara Stampa's poetics; namely, love as a fire. Like Rexroth, I read the "twisting / Burning pages", in my aim to show how this early modern woman poet appropriated and, indeed, twisted, Neoplatonic understandings of love. Instead of reading Gaspara Stampa's poems as a sad love story, I suggest that her subversive poetics make her rather unique. As modern scholars point out, she not only wrote the largest number of lyrical poems saved to our day among the cinquecento women writers, but she also transgressed established norms in order to create a new ideal of love.²⁷⁹

In this study, I highlight how Gaspara Stampa used and transformed Neoplatonic metaphors and figures, such as the phoenix and the androgyne. Furthermore, I discuss how she created an ideal of love that clearly problematizes, converts and subverts hegemonic concepts as understood within Neoplatonism and Petrarchan love lyrics.²⁸⁰ Through the contexts of Italian salon culture and debates on love, I will make close readings of a number of poems from Gaspara Stampa's collected *Rime* in order to demonstrate how these subversions are part of a poetics that enabled her vision of love.

An important argument I make is to highlight the similarities between Gaspara Stampa's poetics and Tullia d'Aragona's philosophical ideas. Both of these writers claimed that nobility of both body and soul should be enhanced, in opposition to the division of body and soul that was central in traditional Neoplatonism. Furthermore, they both wrote from a female subject position on love's possible eternity and appropriate similar poetical strategies.

²⁷⁹ Mary B. Moore, *Desiring Voices*. In her chapter on Gaspara Stampa, Moore also discusses the phoenix at length.

²⁸⁰ Virginia Cox discusses Neoplatonic love ideology as a form of religious mysticism that attracted Petrarchan poets in her introduction to *Lyric Poetry by Women*, stating that it was "posited on a direct relationship between the love-worshipper and God, outside of any ecclesiastical context. In an age of widespread skepticism about institutional religion, this was a model of spirituality that held undoubtable attractions. It is striking how many prominent early-sixteenth-century Petrarchan poets had connections with the Catholic Reform movement, which like Protestantism, privileged this kind of direct relationship with God. Notable examples are Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, Benedetto Varchi (1503-65), Lodovico Domenichi (1515-64) [...]" 22.

Gaspara Stampa firmly expresses her own self-worth, her loyalty and her ability to love as being supreme in relation both to her beloved and to other women. This role reflects, and in Gaspara Stampa's case is, interchangeable with, her role as a poet. The poetic aesthetics of the early modern period "favored authority, the status quo, and the known rather than the flight of fancy, innovation, or rebellion" and "any innovation took place within the established structures".²⁸¹ In other words, subversion and re-definitions are made possible *within* the discourse, as Gaspara Stampa's lyrical strategy will show. She writes about love within the major genres of love lyric of her time, mainly the Petrarchan sonnet, but she nevertheless subverts the conventions and first and foremost uses the theme of love as a creative force that enables her to aim for the highest fame and appreciation as a poet.

Gaspara Stampa's poetry invites a particular perspective on noble love bound to the body, but also on the self-creation of the poet and of the poetic persona. As Stanley Benfell points out, Gaspara Stampa "begins to portray the development of a more autonomous self, a self that breaks free of its dependency on one individual male beloved in order to define itself more freely".²⁸² Furthermore, Benfell sees her self-creation as connected to her refusal of both Neoplatonic ideals and Augustinian teleology, which Vittoria Colonna contrastively embraced in her poetics.²⁸³ The contrasts with Colonna has also been explored by Ulriche Schneider, who points out that Gaspara Stampa places herself in dialogue with philosophical ideas on writing and on love:

What is most important here is the observation that in Stampa's *Rime* there generally is a stronger, often even explicit, reflection on writing than in Colonna, just as there is a specific analysis not only of prior models but also of the different discourses about love available at the time.²⁸⁴

Building on both Benfell and Schneider, I will further explore the notion of Gaspara Stampa's creation of a unique poetic voice using love as the fuel for her

²⁸¹ Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 53.

²⁸² Benfell, "Translating Petrarchan Desire," 110.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁸⁴ Schneider, "Playing (with) *personae*," 161.

inspiration. However, I suggest that Gaspara Stampa does not simply refuse Neoplatonic and Petrarchan ideals – rather, she uses them strategically, appropriates and negotiates them and, thus, creates her own poetic practice through the theories of love that were familiar to her. I begin my readings with poem 17, which to great extent sets the stage for her vision of love.

Equal to the Angels

The first sonnet by Gaspara Stampa that I consider will function as an introduction to my argument on her idea of love. It is number 17 from her *Rime*, which presents a critical view of Neoplatonic love ideals.²⁸⁵ Already in the very first line of the poem we find a dismissal of the division of earthly and divine love, fundamental within Neoplatonic thinking. Thus, in poem 17, the poet does not seek the Neoplatonic path such as it understood in the traditional approach within this philosophy.²⁸⁶ The first stanza reads:

Io non v'invidio punto Angeli santi
Le vostre tante glorie, e tanti beni,
E que' disir di ciò, che braman, pieni;
Stando voi sempre à l'alto Sire avanti.

(Holy angels, I don't envy you one bit / your many glories and your many gifts, /
and those desires that are granted in full / as you stand, forever, before the great
Lord.)

²⁸⁵ I have acknowledged this particular sonnet in my research on Gaspara Stampa in several academic presentations: “‘Holy angels, I don’t envy you one bit’: Stampa, Ficino, and Renaissance Platonism” at the conference *Gaspara Stampa and Renaissance Literature*, Oslo University, March 15, 2013, and “Gaspara Stampa – Rethinking the Phoenix” at the Renaissance Society of America annual Meeting and Conference, Chicago, 2017. A brief analysis is also made in Vernqvist, “A Female Voice in Early Modern Love Poetry – Gaspara Stampa,” *Trans: Revue de Littérature Générale et Comparée*, Vol. 15, 2013.

²⁸⁶ This is also argued by Liimatta. She does not discuss number 17, but several of other examples, and states that: “Nonostante l’idealizzazione della figura del conte secondo i canoni neoplatonici, l’amore della Stampa si ferma al livello più basso dell’amore, in quanto non avviene l’ascesa dall’amore corporale all’amore spirituale appunto perché la poetessa non riesce a superare la materialità e la corporalità”. Katja Liimatta, “Conflitto tra carne e spirito: ambiguità neoplatonica nella poesia di Gaspara Stampa,” *Italian Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Winter 2001, 7.

Initially, what attracts our attention is that the speaking subject, the poetic I, is addressing the angels. Angels during this period are understood as ideal and immaterial beings in their complete perception of God in Heaven. Notably, they lack bodies and consequently also bodily desires. In Matthew 22:30, a section discussed earlier, Jesus comments on the earthly relation (and religious institution) of marriage, and also on resurrection and the equality between men and women in the afterlife. He says: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven".²⁸⁷ In other words, in life after resurrection, the body and its desires will no longer play any part.

Furthermore, in Ficino's Christianized Neoplatonic ladder of love, in which physical or earthly love functions as an ignition, a spark, for the lover's transcendence, angels are closest to Divine Beauty. Ficino says in Speech VI, chapter XV:

per lo avvenir diremo per che gradi Diotima innalza Socrate da lo infimo grado
per i mezzi al supremo, tirandolo dal corpo a l'Anima : da l'Anima a lo Angelo :
da l'Angelo a Dio.

(Next let us discuss the steps by which Diotima takes Socrates from the lowest things to the highest. She leads him back from the body to the soul, from the soul to the Angel, and from the Angel to God.) (122; 136)

This succession and transformation of love presented by Ficino is echoed, and thus, also explained by Castiglione's character Bembo in *Il Cortegiano*:

Quindi l'anima accesa nel santissimo fuoco del vero amor divino, vola ad unirsi
colla natura Angelica, e non solamente in tutto abbandona il senso, ma più non ha
bisogno del discorso della ragione, che trasformata in Angelo intende tutte le cose
intelligibili.

(And from there, aflame with the sacred fire of true divine love, the soul flies to unite itself with the angelic nature; and it not only abandons the senses, but no

²⁸⁷ Van Den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, 374. Matthew 22:30, cited from King James Bible.

longer has need of reason itself. For, transformed into an angel, it understands all intelligible things.) (293; 340)

Gaspara Stampa begins sonnet 17 with a clarification and exclamation that the poet-lover does not feel envious of the angels. Instead, she is perfectly content with and in *need* of the body for the love she praises and will continue to praise throughout her *Rime*. The poet proclaims how the desires of the angels are not shared by her, which means that she does not care for the delights that heaven can offer. In other words, she uses the celestial figures only to dispute the superiority of their resurrected, non-physical, asexual state.²⁸⁸

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, illustrated by Gustave Doré, 1876

²⁸⁸ Frederico Schneider also comments on poem 17, in regard to his overall argument of Gaspara Stampa as a martyr of love, saying that “[t]his is a far cry from Dante’s celebration of a higher love for a *donna angelicata* (beloved-angel), representative of the stilnovistic sublime. In fact, Stampa here turns that very concept on its head, in a move that would seem iconoclastic, were it not for the recurrent theme of martyrdom Stampa instead describes, suggesting something equally sublime, if also rather different: the celebration of a human lover, who elevates herself to the status of a martyr by means of the love pains she endures”. Schneider, “Sublime Love Pains,” 69.

In lines 5-11, the poet further explains that she finds herself more than content in her earthly position:

Perche i dilette miei son tali, e tanti,
Che non posson capire in cor terreni;
Mentr'ho davanti i lumi almi, e sereni,
Di cui conven, che sempre scriva, e canti.
E come in ciel gran refrigerio, e vita,
Dal volto suo solete voi fruire
Tal'io qua giù da la beltà infinita.

(because my delights are such that by human / hearts they can barely be conceived, / as long as those calm lights are before me / of which it suits me always to write, and sing. / And just as you take solace and life itself / from his gaze in heaven, so do I, / down here below, from that infinite beauty.)

Thus, the poet points out the earthly state of her love, as underlined by the words of her earthly heart (“cor terreni”), and clarified even further as she states that the delight she desires is present down below or down here (“giù”). When other poets, like Vittoria Colonna, with whom Gaspara Stampa is often contrasted, as mentioned earlier, writes about the longing for a deceased and unreachable beloved, an angel like Petrarch’s Laura and Dante’s Beatrice, the poet-lover in Gaspara Stampa’s poems loves and desires a man on earth, who is still alive.

In poem 17, and in the majority of the love poems within the collection, the addressee is Collaltino di Collalto. However, in a number of poems, such as 206 and 207 that I discuss later in this study, we also find a second lover, named Bartolomeo Zen.²⁸⁹ The appearance of more than one love-object is highly unusual within Petrarchan lyric. As Jane Tylus also comments, there is a certain centrality of the sensual in Gaspara Stampa’s poetics, which “particularly for a

²⁸⁹ Recent research has been undertaken on the more sensual, or even sexual, aspects of Colonna’s *Rime Amoroze*. Shannon McHugh presents these arguments in her article “Rethinking Vittoria Colonna: Gender and Desire in the *Rime Amoroze*,” *The Italianist*, Vol. 33, No. 3, October, 2013. McHugh further convincingly shows how Colonna appropriated the Petrarchan style in order to express conjugal love in poetic form; an experience that opposes the traditional Petrarchan love relation, which could never be consummated, between a poet lover and his unreachable beloved.

woman poet, is largely a new phenomenon. Surely it is missing in the poetry of Stampa's contemporary Vittoria Colonna".²⁹⁰ We will have reason to come back to this discussion on the sensual in Gaspara Stampa's poetics, but let us return to the figures of angels. Certainly, the importance of the sensual, and the senses, is highlighted when the poet disputes their superiority.

"Bellezza eterna, angelico costume"

The figure of the angel is not exclusive to poem 17, but later reappears in poems such as 224, in which we interestingly also find the phoenix, which functions as a key metaphor in poems 206 and 207, discussed later in this study. The opening lines of 224, which is a sonnet, reads: "Alma Fenice, che con l'auree piume / Prendi fra l'altre Donne un sì bel volo." (Noble phoenix, who with your golden plumes take flight / soaring beautifully above other women.) The "Alma Fenice" in this poem is another woman poet, whom scholars have not yet been able to identify, who stands for chaste desires and eternal beauty comparable to that of the angels: "Bellezza eterna, angelico costume / Petto d'honeste voglie albergo solo" (eternal beauty, bearing like an angel / breast that harbours only chaste desiring, (lines 5-6)). This woman presented as having angelic, eternal beauty, holds an honest desire, which is a desire the poet-speaker in 224 is unable to transcend as she exclaims: "Poi che lo stil' al desir non risponde" (But my style doesn't answer to my desire) (Line 12).²⁹¹

I suggest that the desire in Gaspara Stampa's case is ambiguous in the sense that can also be accounted for in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and the lyrical tradition. On the one hand, the desire in 224 concerns the poet's wish to compose poetry of the highest quality such as that by Sappho and Corinna who are mentioned by name in the poem, but the poet expresses self-doubt about her talent to do so. On the other hand, we can interpret the lines as representing a desire that is

²⁹⁰ Tylus, "Introduction," in *Collected Poems*, 23.

²⁹¹ This poem is closely examined by both Tylus, "Naming Sappho" and Capodivacca, "*Le amiche carte*". As Capodivacca points out, Gaspara Stampa's "alma fenice" in poem 224 shows a clear intertextual parallel to Michelangelo's poem no. 61 where the same phrasing is used, which I discuss later in this study.

not really compatible with the Petrarchan lyrical form in a traditional sense, since, in contrast to the “Alma Fenice”, she does not seek this “angelico costume”.

Let us connect this to our prior discussion and return to the last lines of sonnet 17, especially to a possible interpretation of the word “può”. We read: “In questo sol vincete il mio gioire, / Che la vostra è eterna, e stabilita, / e la mia gloria può tosto finire.” (Only in this does your joy outpace mine: / your glory is eternal, unchanging, / while mine – too soon will it die). Even if the poet states that the angels outpace her in their eternal state, the choice of the word “può” still leaves the interpretation ambiguous. Certainly, the word “può” fills a metrical as well as a grammatical purpose, enhancing, in one reading, “tosto finire”. But I still want to consider an interpretation of its semantical possibilities; if her love *may* or *can* end, it is also imaginable that it *may not*.

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, illustrated by Gustave Doré, 1876

Certainly, the poet-lover declares her fears of losing her beloved and also strategically thematizes jealousy of other women whom her beloved may fall for or who will outpace her talent as a poet.²⁹² Furthermore, her love for a certain and specific beloved can and will come to an end within her *Rime*. Nevertheless, as we will see, fear of a possible end to love is part of Gaspara Stampa's poetics and proves to be the very fuel of desire and of poetical inspiration. However, as we will see, the ending of affection is due to the beloved's failure. Furthermore, the poet's love will not die, but will be reborn possibly in infinity.

One of many poems that allows us to understand that the love Gaspara Stampa speaks of is of a noble, earthly kind is number 59, a sonnet, reading:

Quelle lagrime calde, e quei sospiri,
 Che vedete, ch'io spargo sì cocenti,
 Da poter' arrestar' il mar co' venti
 Quando avien, ch'ei più frema, e più s'adiri,
 Come potete voi, co i vostri giri
 Rimirar non pur queti, ma contenti?
 O`cor di fere Tigri, e di Serpenti,
 Che vive sol de' duri miei martiri,
 Deh prolungate almen per alcun'hore
 Questa vostra ostinata dipartita,
 Fin, che m'usi à portar tanto dolore;
 Perciò ch'à così subita sparita
 Io potrei de la vita restar fuore,
 Sol, per servir' à voi, da me gradita.

(Those hot tears and those sighs that you see me / expelling so forcefully they could bring / the storm-tossed sea to a sudden halt / when it's at its wildest and most violent: / how can you stand to watch me, with eyes / not merely calm but contented? / you must have a heart of fierce tigers or serpents / to survive on my harsh sufferings alone! / Ah, at least delay by an hour or two / your going forth, on which you so insist, / so I can accustom myself to new heartbreak, / because your sudden disappearance / could take from me my life, which I cherish / only insofar as it can serve you.)

²⁹² See Feng's analysis of female *invidia* in "Desiring Subjects: Mimetic Desire and Female *Invidia* in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*" as well as Jones' "Voi e tu" on Gaspara Stampa's strategic use of jealousy, both in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa*.

In this poem, and in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* collection in general, physical passion is expressed as key, and as a necessity that gives meaning to life. The dualistic view of love as divided between low and high, bad and good, is cast aside. In order to understand love, it has to be experienced through both the senses (the body) and the intellect (the soul).

In 59, we see how the female subject suffers for a love that does not receive the strong response she wishes for and, as we read in the last tercet, that life is not even worth living without the man she desires. While other poets, not only men but also women such as Vittoria Colonna, write about their longing for a deceased love object with whom they wish to reunite with in Heaven, the poet-lover in Gaspara Stampa's lyrical vision loves, longs for, and desires a lover who is very much alive. To her, death will not unite her with her beloved, but will come as a consequence if they fail to unite on earth.

Poem 38 is another good example of the necessity of reciprocated love, which will also be more thoroughly discussed in the following pages. Poem 38 might well have been one of those that influenced Kenneth Rexroth to write his poem on Gaspara Stampa's "burning pages", cited in the introduction:

Qualunque dal mio petto esce sospiro,
Ch'escono adhor adhor' ardenti e spessi
Dal dì, che per mio Sole gli occhi elessi,
Ch'à prima vista à morte mi feriro.
Vanno verso il bel Colle, ove pur miro,
Benche lontana, & vanno anche con essi
I miei pensieri, e tutti i sensi stessi;
Nè val, s'io li ritengo, ò li ritiro.
Perche la propria loro e vera stanza
Son que' begli occhi, e quella alma beltade,
Che prima mi destar la disianza.
O` pur sieno ivi accolti da pietade,
Di che non spero poi, che per usanza
Vi suol sempre haver luogo crudeltade.

(Whenever sighs issue from my heart / as they do so often, now burning, now spent, / ever since the day I chose as my sun those eyes / that at first glance wounded me to the death, / off they go toward the hill on which I gaze – / no matter that it's far away – along / with all my thoughts and feelings; no use / restraining them or calling them back, / because their only true and proper home / is those handsome eyes and that divine beauty / that first awakened my desire. / Oh, if they could just be met with pity! / A thing I don't dare hope for, since I'm used / to finding there only cruelty.)

The “il bel Colle” on which she gazes is, of course, a pun on Collalto’s name in the same fashion as we see Petrarch employing Laura’s name repeatedly in his poems. The co-existing feelings of pain and pleasure brought by earthly love form the core of this poem, as in many others in the collection. The poet-lover finds that it is no use trying to force them away and neither is it in her interest; they are part of the sensual experience of love. Thus, the division of love into one kind that is sinful and another kind that is heavenly is not valid. On the contrary, the love depicted is earthbound in which the body and soul are one. Completion is not found in the union with God and/or the beloved in heaven, but in the union with the man she desires while they are both alive and walking the earth. But how can we connect this kind of love to constancy and eternity?

When Ficino discusses eternity in Speech VI, Chapter viii, he makes it clear that both low and high love are never-ending, but they do not have the same value. Ficino writes:

Certamente nella Mente dell'uomo è uno eterno Amore di vedere la bellezza divina: e per gli stimoli di questo seguitiamo gli studi di Filosofia, e gli offizi della giustizia e della pietà. È ancora nella potenza del generare uno occulto stimolo a generar figliuoli: e questo Amore è perpetuo, dal quale siamo continuamente incitati a scolpire nella effigie de' figliuoli qualche similitudine della superna bellezza. Questi due Amori sono in noi perpetui. Quelli due Demonii, i quali dice Platone alle Anime nostre sempre essere presenti (de' quali uno in su e l'altro in giù ci tira) [...]. Ma la cagione perché il secondo Amore si chiama mal Demonio, è che per il nostro uso disordinato egli spesso ci turba e diverte lo Animo a ministeri vili, ritraendolo dal principale suo bene: il quale nella speculazione della verità consiste.

(Certainly in the intellect of man there is an eternal love of seeing the divine beauty, thanks to which we pursue both the study of philosophy and the practice of justice and piety. There is also in the power of procreation a certain mysterious urge to procreate offspring. This love too is eternal; by it we are continuously driven to create some likeness of that celestial Beauty in the image of a procreated offspring. These two eternal loves in us are daemons which Plato predicts will always be present in our souls, one of which raises us to things above; the other presses us down to things below. [...] [T]he second is called evil because, on account of our abuse, it often disturbs us and powerfully diverts the soul from its chief good, which consists in the contemplation of truth, and twists it to baser purposes.) (102; 118-19)

Both the lower and higher kinds of love are eternal but, according to Ficino, the lower kind is evil and dangerous in its capacity to mislead the soul. In poem 17, and also later in her *Rime*, Gaspara Stampa negotiates the Ficinian view by appropriating the idea of eternity and contradicting the negative connotations of earthly love experienced through both senses and mind. I argue that Gaspara Stampa is about to investigate questions with close parallels to those asked by Tullia d'Aragona in her *Dialogo della Infinità di amore*: whether it is possible to love with an end in sight, and whether love is infinite. ("Se si può amar con termino") (190; 58).²⁹³

Similar to Unn Falkeid's argument in relation to Petrarch's writings, specifically *Secretum*, we find that "[r]ather than corrupting the soul, the bodily senses may ennoble it. It is the passions – the desire and the pain, the hopes and the failures – that lead man to truth, more than his thinking".²⁹⁴ This idea that the senses may ennoble the soul is also present, I argue, in Gaspara Stampa's poetry. I further suggest that the senses even play a crucial role in our understanding of love in the vision she has created, and poem 17 sets the stage for this vision.

²⁹³ Russell and Merry specify "within limits" in their translation, 58.

²⁹⁴ Falkeid, "'Thorn in the Flesh': Pain and Poetry in Petrarch's *Secretum*," in *Pangs of Love*, 84.

The Phoenix

In order to establish Gaspara Stampa as a “commentatore” in the ongoing cultural discussion of love, on the relation between body and soul, and on the infinity of love and of women’s place in these matters, I will now proceed with the analysis of her employment of specific metaphors, such as the phoenix.

As noted earlier, Herodotus was one of the first to describe the phoenix, along with Ovid, Hesiod and Pliny the Elder. During the early modern period, the phoenix had become a symbol within Christianity and symbolized renewal in general, but also of time, Christ, resurrection and more. The connection with Neoplatonic ideology was mainly influenced by Christian and Jewish traditions and, in poetry, the Neoplatonic version of the phoenix is found symbolizing perfect union between two halves, as in, for example, Donne’s poem “The Canonization”.

It is also referred to as androgynous in the sense that it is either sexless or both male and female, which also allowed it symbolize the soul, which is thought of as genderless, and resurrection. The conception of the phoenix as androgynous or hermaphroditic is seen as corresponding to the Primeval Man both in Hellenistic-Jewish and rabbinical literature. These complex and shifting interpretations of the phoenix’s power of resurrection, in which gender and sexuality are sometimes suppressed, sometimes totally lacking, are central to the early modern poets. A common feature is that of the poet who identifies with the phoenix, but the figure also represents love’s resurrection in various ways. Most famous in this context are Petrarch himself and Michelangelo, but also Gaspara Stampa, as will be more thoroughly discussed in the following.

The Poet as a Phoenix

The social and cultural situation of Gaspara Stampa and other female Italian poets during the cinquecento “went from the status of rare and miraculous, ‘phoenix-like’ exceptions to an accepted and expected social subset of literary

practitioners".²⁹⁵ Cox's choice to describe the women Petrarchists initially as phoenixes is elegant, since the phoenix functions in a number of ways, not least as a symbol for poets in honorary poems, during the early modern period. A poem attributed to Ippolita Mirtilla, commemorating Gaspara Stampa, written upon her death and first published in Lodovico Domenichi's anthology of women poets in 1559, employs a praise that points to the remarkable poetic aspirations we find in Gaspara Stampa's oeuvre. Furthermore, it might also inform us of the fame and appreciation the poet enjoyed among the cultural elite of her time.

Before I explore its content, it can be noted that the poem attributed to Mirtilla is actually a case of plagiarism and was originally written, as Capodivacca points out, by Giusto de Conti. It is found in his *La bella mano*, "a well-received *canzoniere* written in 1440 in which Conti sings of his beloved Isabeta".²⁹⁶ Capodivacca further illustrates, by way of a comparison of the Mirtilla poem and that of Conti's, that the changes made are indeed very small. Nevertheless, the very choice of Conti's poem indicates ways to read and understand Gaspara Stampa's own poetry and poetic persona.²⁹⁷ Moreover, Mirtilla is not the only one honoring her through literature, as discussed earlier. For example, we can recall Francesco Sansovino's three dedications and Varchi's praise of her talent. While I will discuss the poet's cultural relations more thoroughly at a later point in this study, they are also important to bear in mind when we read the funeral poem to Gaspara Stampa attributed to Mirtilla. In the very first line, we find the phoenix and in its whole, it reads:

O sola qui tra noi del ciel *fenice*,
 Ch'alzata a volo il secol nostro oscura,
 Et sovra l'ali al ciel passi sicura;
 Si ch'a vederla a pena homai ne lice.

²⁹⁵ Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women*, 2.

²⁹⁶ Capodivacca further informs us that "Conti's work was published for the first time in Bologna by Scipione Malpigli in 1472 and had a discreet fame in the Cinquecento (cited for example in the *Vocabolario della Crusca* as a paragon of style" Capodivacca, "*Le amiche carte*," 122.

²⁹⁷ The choice made by editor Luisa Bergalli to include this poem by Mirtilla (Conti) in her edition of Stampa's *Rime* from 1738 is discussed at length by Capodivacca in "*Le amiche carte*". This choice certainly indicates how the editor understands and wants the readers to receive the poetry and the persona of Stampa.

O sola a gliocchi miei vera *beatrice*,
 In cui si mostra, quanto sa' natura:
 Bellezza immacolata, & vista pura,
Da far con picciol cenno ogni huom felice.
 In Voi si mostra, quel che non comprende
 Altro intelletto al mondo, se no 'l mio,
 Ch' Amor tanto alto il leva, quanto v'ama.
 In voi si mostra, quanto anchor s'accende
L'anima gloriosa nel desio,
 Che per elettione a Dio la chiama.

(O solitary *phoenix* who came to us / from heaven, darkening our age with her flight / as she winged herself surely back to heaven, / so that now we're deprived of her sight / O bearer alone of true *blessings* to my eyes, / in whom nature shows us all she knows, / rendering beauty immaculate; *one glimpse*, / *the slightest sign from her made a man content*. / And what's seen there can't be fathomed / by any intelligence in the world, save mine, / for love raises it as high as my love for you. / In you we see how strongly inflamed / *is that soul made glorious by desire*, / whom God has elected as his own.)²⁹⁸ (my emphasis)

This poem not only evokes the phoenix and directs our attention to Gaspara Stampa's own appropriation of the metaphor in poems 206 and 207. It also contains a representation of Gaspara Stampa's poetic personality as it should be remembered. Thus, the phoenix in this poem represent the resurrection of the poet, a resurrection that will take place every time a reader engages with her lyrical poetry.

Gaspara Stampa's outstanding talent is naturally the theme of the commemorative poem, which is probably the reason why Luisa Bergalli included the poem in her edition. The word *beatrice*, a concrete allusion to Dante's muse, and the *fenice* alluding to Petrarch's lyrical language, identifies Gaspara Stampa's position as an established poet worthy of remembrance. As Capodivacca puts it, the rhyme "is particularly clever in offering a reading of Stampa's poetic influences" because it points both to Petrarch and Dante, "as

²⁹⁸ Tylus, "Appendix B," in *Complete Poems*, 357-358. The poem by Mirtilla has been analyzed by several noted scholars, such as Tylus, "Naming Sappho," and Angela Capodivacca, "*Le amiche carte*".

well as the two traditions of Italian vernacular that were by then very much at odds with each other, while reminding the reader of the resurrection implicit in mutual love".²⁹⁹ The ideas of resurrection and reciprocity are crucial, I suggest, for our understanding of both Gaspara Stampa's poetics and her vision of love. The "implicit mutual love" symbolized by the phoenix would here reflect the female friendship between Mirtilla and Gaspara Stampa, which I discuss more in a later chapter. But, as I suggested above, I would rather argue that the phoenix in this particular poem mainly points to the poet's infinite resurrection through her lyrical poems.

In Mirtilla's poem, Gaspara Stampa's beauty is further underlined through the word *bellezza*, but more interesting is perhaps the effect that her appearance has on any *huom*, man, who ever caught a glimpse of her. Only to see her briefly would be enough to make every man to be content. This "vista pura", pure sight, is very much in line with Neoplatonic understandings of the sense of sight's importance and profound role in the lover's journey towards knowledge of love (beauty). Sight is represented as being enough in Mirtilla's poem, but not always so in Gaspara Stampa's vision of love. However, again I would suggest that the "vista pura" along with "picciol cenno", smallest sign, from her also possibly refers to her poems and poetical talent. Thus, only one of her lyrics would be enough to make anyone content.

Mirtilla's sonnet concludes with a selection of words that declares this beauty, this talent, to be impossible to comprehend, but also moves us closer to Gaspara Stampa's poetics and her ideal of love. Her soul has been made glorious by *desire* – "L'anima gloriosa nel desio / Che per elettione a Dio la chiama", and God has chosen her. In this genre, *Dio* would refer to the Christian God receiving her soul in heaven, but also to the Creator selecting her to receive remarkable talent. However, I suggest that *Dio* could also refer to Amor, the God of Love, who in the same manner would have inspired her talent and singled her out among poets. Furthermore, in my reading I find that Mirtilla's words remind us of a section in Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue on love, in which the character Varchi says that "Amore è dio, e grande dio è Amore; e chi ha piú

²⁹⁹ Capodivacca, "Le amiche carte," 124.

o saputo o potuto, piú gli è stato fedele ed obediante” (Love is god and a great god is Love. Those who are more able, and wiser than others, have always been loyal and obedient to the god) (216; 84). Thus, this poem situates Gaspara Stampa’s poetical aspirations and her *Rime* in relation to the broader early modern discussion on love.

In order to further discuss Gaspara Stampa’s vision of love as a contribution to the ongoing debate, I will turn more specifically to the poet’s employment of the phoenix in her own *Rime*. At the time of her writing, the phoenix had become an established figure in Petrarchan tradition, which had been strongly influenced by Neoplatonic ideals. In the following pages, I will briefly discuss Michelangelo’s poetry addressed to a male beloved; thus, the phoenix reappears in a way that is later echoed by Gaspara Stampa.

Michelangelo’s Employment of the Phoenix

The phoenix appears repeatedly in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* or *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (RVF) and it is he perhaps who establishes it as a common lyrical metaphor. Petrarch employs the phoenix explicitly as a symbol for Laura in five poems, 135, 185, 210, 321, 323, and, as Capodivacca points out, as the reborn “pangs of the lover specifically in 135” in his RVF.³⁰⁰ The relation between these Petrarchan poems and Gaspara Stampa’s re-thinking of the phoenix, and the salamander as well, has been discussed by Andreani. Her close reading of the intertextual levels shows that Gaspara Stampa makes use of these mythical figures to express her affection for a second beloved, while still remaining in the position of the loyal lover.³⁰¹ These aspects are also the focus in my reading of Gaspara Stampa’s phoenix. However, I focus on the subversive aspects of her poetics in relation to Neoplatonic ideals as well as intertextual parallels with other poets and philosophical writers, rather than Petrarch himself. One of these writers is, as mentioned earlier, Michelangelo.

³⁰⁰ Capodivacca, “*Le amiche carte*,” 124-125.

³⁰¹ Andreani, “Gaspara Stampa as Salamander and Phoenix”.

Among Michelangelo's lyrical poetry, consisting of over 300 poems and fragments, we find the phoenix mentioned in at least seven poems. In James Saslow's bilingual edition of Michelangelo's poetry (1991), these are numbered as 43, 52, 61, 62, 100, 108, 217, and among them the phoenix symbolizes various ideas.³⁰² Over 100 of Michelangelo's poems are written to the young man, Tomaso Cavalieri, whom Michelangelo met during his years working in Rome at the Sistine Chapel, and it is among these poems that the phoenix appears. According to Saslow, Michelangelo defines the figure "as a symbol of the transformative power of love, which both obliterates and renews".³⁰³ Furthermore, Capodivacca notes that "Michelangelo twice uses the image of the phoenix's love pangs in his poems to Cavalieri to indicate the death and rebirth occurring in mutual love" and she records how he also uses it "to describe the rebirth of youthful love in his heart upon meeting with Cavalieri".³⁰⁴

In poem 52, however, Michelangelo exclaims that man is not like the phoenix, who can rise again: "l'uom non è come fenice", and in 108 he has no belief in returning, due to man's limited lifetime: "né spero com'al sol nuova fenice/ ritornar più; ché 'l tempo nol concede." (Nor do I hope to come back any more/ like the phoenix renewed in the sun, for time doesn't allow it.) Furthermore, as also noted by Capodivacca, in poems 61 and 62 the poet expresses hope for a resurrection in mutual love, pointing towards Ficino's understanding of reciprocal love in *De amore*. In 61, the beloved is represented as the "alma fenice" that has come to his salvation.

In poem 62, in contrast to 61, the poet seems to identify himself with the "l'unica fenice":

né l'unica fenice sé riprende
se non prim'arsa; ond'io, s'ardendo moro,
spero più chiar resurget tra coloro
che morte accresce e 'l tempo non offende.
Del foco, di ch'io parlo, ho gran ventura

³⁰² Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation*, ed. and trans. James Saslow (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991.) All future references to Michelangelo's poetry and the translations will be to this edition and will be noted in the text by their number.

³⁰³ Saslow in Buonarroti, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 27.

³⁰⁴ Capodivacca, "Le amiche carte," 125.

c' ancor per rinnovarmi abbi in me loco,
sendo già quasi nel numer de' morti.

(nor can the unique phoenix be revived / unless first burned. And so, if I die
burning, / I hope to rise again brighter among those / whom death augments and
time no longer hurts. / I'm fortunate that the fire of which I speak / still finds a
place within me, to renew me, / since already I'm almost numbered among the
dead.)

While these shifting representations in Michelangelo's poems suggest the repeated split between different emotions and beliefs that are represented in his oeuvre in general, there are strong reasons to examine the intertextual echoes in Gaspara Stampa's phoenix poems. Michelangelo's "alma fenice" poem was probably known by Gaspara Stampa since she uses the exact same formulation of "alma fenice" in her poem 224, discussed earlier. It is also highly probable that Gaspara Stampa was familiar with Michelangelo's poetic aspirations through their mutual association with Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565).³⁰⁵

In her introduction to Gaspara Stampa's *Complete Poems*, Tylus comments on the phoenix metaphor and states that "Stampa is the animal who thrives on flame and rises again from the ashes".³⁰⁶ While the poet definitely describes her state in this way, I suggest that the phoenix symbolizes both love itself, as a constantly resurrected emotion, and her poetry's resurrection as it survives through history. Furthermore, I stress that Gaspara Stampa converts the meaning of the metaphor – as a strategic maneuver in Foucault's sense, challenging the discourse from within. The shift in power relations that consequently follows when a female poet takes up the pen is visible in various ways in her *Rime*. The redefinition of the phoenix is one component leading towards a definition of love and desire that problematizes the Neoplatonic

³⁰⁵ Capodivacca states that, even though the relationship between the three writers deserves more attention, it is known that "Plinio Pietrasanta published Stampa's verse in 1554 and Benedetto Varchi's in 1555, and the opening of Stampa's volume with Varchi's poems might serve to alert the reader to the connections between Stampa, Varchi, and Michelangelo". Capodivacca, "Le amiche carte," 128. She refers to Benedetto Varchi, *Due Lezioni di M. Benedetto Varchi, nella prima delle quali si dichiara un sonetto di M. Michelagnolo Buonarroti: nella seconda si disputa quale sia piu nobile arte la scultura, o la pittura, con una lettera d'esso Michelagnolo & piu altri eccellentiss. pittori et scultori sopra la quistione sopradetta*. (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549).

³⁰⁶ Tylus, "Introduction," in *Collected Poems*, 23.

division of body and soul as well as the power relation between the loving subject and the beloved.

Longing for Union

In the middle of Gaspara Stampa's collection in the 1554 edition, we find poems with interesting allusions to the phoenix in terms of living in fire and being reborn when the force is strong enough. These poems, placed close to 206 and 207, where the phoenix is mentioned, are important for our interpretation of Gaspara Stampa's vision of love, as well as this vision's implications and its significance for her poetic strategy.

In poem 184, the flame is trapped, not yet realized in a new fire, while 193 reflects upon a reborn desire that the poet wishes to resist. Poem 184 furthermore enhances a loneliness, a lack of strength and poetical inspiration. The connection between amorous desire and the capacity to write is itself a constant theme in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* and, in this sonnet, we read:

Io non trovo più rime, onde più possa
Lodar vostra beltà, vostro valore;
E contare i tormenti del mio core,
Si cresce à quelli, e à me manca la possa.
E, quasi fiamma, che sia dentro mossa,
E non possa sfogar l'incendio fore,
Questo interno disio cresce'l dolore,
E mi consuma le midolle, e l'ossa.
Sì che fra tutti i beni e tutti i mali
Ch' Amor suol dar', io ho questo vantaggio,
Che quanti sien, ridir non posso, e quali.
Dunque ò tu vivo *mio lucente raggio*
Dammi vigore, ò tu dammi Amor l'ali,
Ch'io saglia à mostrar fuor quel, che'n cor'haggio.

(I've no more rhymes with which to praise / your valor or your beauty anymore;
/ or to tell the torments of my heart: the more / there are, the less I'm prone to

count them. / And like a fire that moves beneath the ashes / but lacks power to unleash itself in flame, / so this desire inside increase my pain / and consumes my bones and very marrow, / so that of all the good and all the bad / love sends our way, I have this advantage: / how much of each and of what kind, I can't say. / Thus either give me strength, my living, lustrous ray, / or you, Love, grant me wings so I might show / without what's there within my heart.) (my emphasis)

In these lines, the lover is expressing how she is consumed by unrequited love, how it fills her with a pain that only seems to increase. She has nothing more to write since her beloved will not grant any response to her desire. The notion of reciprocity is central to this poem, I argue, as well as to our understanding of Gaspara Stampa's general idea of love. As mentioned above, her desire is trapped like a flame that cannot find enough fuel; in other words, reciprocity of her affection, to once again catch fire. This could be interpreted as allusions to a 'weak phoenix' that is unable to find enough power to be reborn. Thus, the lover is not able to burn in her solitary state, but needs her "lucente raggio", as expressed in lines 12-13. Notably, connoting the phoenix, I suggest that she also calls for wings sent by Love himself, in order to resurrect her desire and ability to compose the lyrics for which she is aiming. Paradoxically though, her longing and unrequited love certainly provide a fuel that functions as inspiration too.

The theme of longing and pain caused by abandonment has been thoroughly discussed and related to the tradition of the abandoned woman in Ovid's *Heroids* by Tylus, Andreani and Phillippy. As I suggest, this subject position can also be read against the Neoplatonic idea of reciprocity. There are around twelve sonnets following upon each other that, as Tylus notes, praise the pleasures of mutual passion. The sequence begins with poem 100, "when the poet learns that Collaltino is returning, culminating in 104 with her praise of the night that she wishes would endure forever, and continuing through 111".³⁰⁷ As Tylus further points out, this sequence leads to the poet's relational "crisis" with her beloved, which in traditional Petrarchan style should resolve in the beloved

³⁰⁷ Tylus, "Introduction," in *Collected Poems*, 15. Other scholars discussing the notion of abandonment are Patricia Phillippy, "Gaspara Stampa's *Rime d'amore*: Replication and Retraction", in *Love's Remedies: Recantation and Renaissance Lyric Poetry*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), Andreani, "Gaspara Stampa as Salamander and Phoenix," and Tylus, "Naming Sappho".

becoming infinitely unreachable, like Laura, in death. In Gaspara Stampa's poetry, however, the crisis "is conceived [...] of the count's inevitable departure which one day must be final because of his inability to reciprocate in the ways his beloved demands".³⁰⁸ Reciprocity, as we know from previous discussions, is crucial within Neoplatonic understandings of how lovers could reach the highest state of love in the union of souls. In the Christian version of this philosophy, the souls further unite with God, the highest understanding of beauty. The idea of reciprocity, as I argue, strongly informs Gaspara Stampa's vision of love, but for her the physical return of the beloved is as central as the soul's union.³⁰⁹

As a side-note, it is tempting to read the *Rime* as chronologically structured with a story running throughout the collection. It should be noted, that there is no such chronology to the *Rime* of 1554, but instead a structure building on groups of genres that implies the structure of a songbook. I do not dispute the fact that we cannot establish a consistent timeline for the poems, but I want to suggest that relations between pairs or groups of poems can be found, as Tylus does with poems 100-111. Sonnets 183 and 184 form such a pair, I suggest; thus, the final lines of sonnet 183 presuppose the theme of 184. In the last lines of poem 183, the poet asks:

Che cosa è Conte à la pietate opporsi,
Se non negare à chi dimanda aita,
I suoi pietosi, i suoi dolci soccorsi?

(Count, what could be more opposed to pity / than this, to deny to one who asks
for it / your compassionate and sweet assistance?)

This question, and the criticism of her beloved's lack of "dolci soccorsi" (sweet assistant or help), is then elaborated upon in 184. As we have seen above, she asks her beloved to aid her by returning the same affection. But she also asks Amor, the God of Love, to give her wings, certainly a common Petrarchan

³⁰⁸ Tylus, "Introduction," in *Collected Poems*, 15.

³⁰⁹ This idea of reciprocity's central role is also, as we have seen, the main theme of my analysis of Marguerite's novella 19.

metaphor, but here it is also, I suggest, an expressed hope of a *resurrected* desire through reciprocity, which alludes to the phoenix.

A few poems later, when we reach 193, the situation presented is distinctly different. The flame that was too weak in 184 now has a chance to be rekindled, but the poet-lover refuses. She speaks about a new love, stronger or more cruel, “più crudo”, than the first. But already in the first part of the poem we are informed that, from experience, she has hardened her heart, and it is now “un callo” (a callus). She has also negotiated with her own thoughts with great care, “patteggiato dentro col pensiero”, in order to defend herself from the “despietato arciero” (despicable archer), who wants to draw her in to a new “amoroso ballo” (amorous dance).

Following this poem comes a group of poems lamenting the refusal and non-presence of her beloved, of which I will only briefly cite sonnet 200, since it explores the common metaphor of the “Tortorella”, the turtledove, which to my knowledge only appears twice in Gaspara Stampa’s *Rime*.³¹⁰

The identification the poet feels with the loyal turtledove points, I claim, to her self-fashioning as the most loyal and steadfast of lovers – in comparison to her beloved – a position echoing the Socratic idea that the lover is more noble than the beloved. Thus, another Platonic influence is used strategically in order to establish a noble position both as a female poet and a loving subject. In lines 5-8 of poem 200, we read:

Ricordatevi sol, come rest’io,
Solvinga Tortorella in secca rama
Che senza lui, che sol sospira, e brama
Fugge ogni verde pianta, e chiaro rio.

(remember only this – how I remain / a lonely turtledove on a brittle branch, /
who sighs and longs, alone, for him she loves, / fleeing every sparkling stream
and verdant plant.)

³¹⁰ The turtledove appears in literature as a symbol for loyal love, most famously perhaps in the aforementioned “The Phoenix and the Turtle” by Shakespeare. In Gaspara Stampa’s *Rime*, we find it in poems 200 and 289.

The lonely lover, a repeated motif in Gaspara Stampa's collection, described here as a turtledove enhances the lover's loyalty to the beloved. Turtledoves stay true to their mate throughout life. The ideal picture she portrays, of a woman in constant waiting for her beloved both to return her feelings and return to her physically, continues in the third stanza of 200:

Al mio cor fate cara compagnia,
Il vostro ad altra Donna non donate
Poi che à me sì fedel nol deste pria.

(Be a dear companion for my heart, and don't / give yours to any other woman,
since / you've never granted it to me – faithful as I am.) (Lines 9-11)

However ideal and repeated this picture of a woman constantly awaiting her beloved's return is in Gaspara Stampa's lyrics, we know that the collection also contains poems addressed to at least one other beloved. This may seem paradoxical, but in my view, these positions do not contradict each other.³¹¹ The idea of a reborn love plays a crucial role in her poetic strategy to explore the new ideal of love that she is creating, which is, as we will see in the following pages, close to Aragona's ideas and also, to some extent, to Speroni's.

The representation of the shifting object of the poet-lover's affection has been used historically to establish Gaspara Stampa as a courtesan, downplaying her accomplishments as a skilled poet. However, as Jones and Bianchi respectively point out, the poet's biographical background can be seen in another light, considering Emilia Ceseracciu Veronese's archival find of Cassandra Stampa's testament presenting the surprising fact that Gaspara Stampa had been married and given birth to two daughters, and the fact that she died in the house of Hieronymo Morosini (a Venetian aristocrat). These details prove the multiple friendships and associations she maintained after breaking the relation with Collalto. Thus, she "did not die of a broken heart [...] abandoned by a cruel lord.

³¹¹ This is also one of Andreani's conclusion in "Gaspara Stampa as Salamander and Phoenix," which she bases on Gaspara Stampa's appropriation of Petrarch's lyrics and on the theme of the abandoned woman in Ovid's *Heriodes*.

Rather, she reoriented the language of broken hearts to construct a triumphant identity for herself as lover and poet”.³¹²

These facts indicate the importance of the networks surrounding Gaspara Stampa and aid our understanding of how the different addressees of her *Rime* are used in her poetics. Thus, first of all, her position as a loyal lover is a rhetorical strategy and the poet repeatedly underlines that she did not leave her beloved, *he left her*. As this relationship ended, the poet turned to new poetic strategies where new inspiration, new beloveds and friends, are called upon in order for the poet to, as Jones puts it, “construct a triumphant identity for herself”. Also, I suggest, this allows her to create a new vision of love which enhances women’s positions and voices as loving subjects. Thus, in sonnets 206 and 207, the poet’s love is reborn, directed towards a new beloved; a theme she explores through the phoenix.

Redefining the Phoenix

In the first lines of 206, the poet says that she lives in flames like some new salamander, but also like that one strange animal that lives and dies in the same place, the phoenix:

Amor m’ha fatto tal, ch’io vivo in foco
Qual *nova Salamandra* al mondo, e quale
L’altro di lei non men stranio animale,
Che vive, e spira nel medesimo loco.
Le mie delitie son tutte e’l *mio gioco*
Viver’ ardendo, e non sentire il male

(Love has fashioned me so I live in flame. / I’m some *new salamander* in the world,
/ and like the animal who also lives and dies / in one and the same place, no less
strange. / These are all my delights, and this is *my joy*: / *To live in burning* and
never notice pain.) (Lines 1-6, my emphasis.)

³¹² Jones, “Voi e tu,” 97.

Both the salamander and the mythical bird are fire animals, often described in early modern bestiaries, and function here initially as symbols for the poet-lover's burning desire. She identifies with them, but not in the way Petrarch did in earlier times, like a vanishing creature destroyed by sorrow, or as an impossibility for human to take after. As Andreani shows, Gaspara Stampa follows Petrarch's model poems to some extent, specifically imitating part of *RVF* 135. I would also, however, suggest intertextual parallels to Tullia d'Aragona, both to her poetry and, on a philosophical level, to her vision of love as it is presented in her *Dialogo della infinità di amore*.³¹³ It is worth noticing that Aragona spent some time in Venice during 1535 and that she was a close acquaintance of Benedetto Varchi, who was also familiar with Gaspara Stampa. Furthermore, Speroni's dialogue was based on Aragona's famous Venetian salon, which further establishes the possibility that Gaspara Stampa was familiar with Aragona and her work even before its publication as part of the ongoing debate on love.

As thoroughly discussed by Elisabeth Pallitto, Aragona employs the mythical salamander in her sestina "Ben mi credea fuggendo il mio bel Sole". Gaspara Stampa's poem 206 contains intertextual connotations to this poem, as we read in Aragona's sestina:

Ma non cercherò più fresco, onda, od ombra,
 Che 'l mio così cocente, & fero vampo
 Non ponno ammorzar punto fonti, o boschi:
 Ma ben seguirò sempre il mio bel Sole,
 Poscia che *nuova Salamandra in foco*
Vivo lieta, mercé del divo raggio.

³¹³ For more details on Tullia d'Aragona's life and work, see Hairston's introduction to Tullia d'Aragona, *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and others: a Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Julia Hairston (Toronto: Iter Inc. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014), and Russell, in the introduction to *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 23-26. For discussions on Aragona's love philosophy see Smarr, "A Dialogue of Dialogues", Curtis-Wendlandt, "Conversing on Love: Text and Subtext in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità d'Amore*," *Hypatia*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2004, and Leushuis, "The Infinite Practice of Amorous Speaking: Tullia d'Aragona and the Venetian *poligrafi*," in *Speaking of Love*.

(I no longer seek fresh breezes, waves, or shade / for this, my blazing and fierce flame / cannot be extinguished in stream or wood: / but I will follow always my beloved Sun, / for, as a salamander, who lives anew in fire / I live in joy, thanks to his divine ray) (Lines 13-18, my emphasis).³¹⁴

Pallitto shows that Aragona's poem is "surprisingly free from the 'gender trouble' one might expect" when looking at the modern scholarships on women poets in the Renaissance.³¹⁵ Pallitto only briefly comments on the salamander and makes no reference to Petrarch's poems containing it. It is, however, interesting, as Pallitto notes, that this "nuova/nova salamandra" is employed in a very similar way by Aragona and Gaspara Stampa. For both, it defines love as a constant state, but yet a joyful burning (Stampa's "vivere ardendo e non sentire il male").³¹⁶

When we continue through Gaspara Stampa's poem, she seems to find the phoenix metaphor more useful than the salamander, as she alludes to the mythical bird but not to the lizard again. The poet exclaims how love has lit a new flame just when the first one had faded: "A`pena era anche estinto il primo ardore / Che accese l'altro Amore" (hardly was my first passion spent / when Love lit another) (Lines 9-10). In other words, just as the phoenix dies and is reborn in a constant, never-ending circle, so does her passion, her love. And the poem concludes on a note of reciprocity:

Et io d'arder' amando non mi pento,
Pur che chi m'ha di novo tolto il core
Resti de l'arder mio pago, e contento

(Of this consuming love I won't repent, / as long as he who's newly taken my heart / is satisfied with my burning, and content.) (Lines 12-14)

³¹⁴ Tullia d' Aragona, *Sweet Fire: Tullia d' Aragona's Poetry of Dialogue & Selected Prose*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Pallitto (New York: George Braziller Publisher, 2005), 70-71.

³¹⁵ Elizabeth Pallitto compares Aragona's poem with Petrarch's sestina XXII in "Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis: Chronographia and Topographia in Petrarch's Sestina XXII and Tullia d' Aragona's Sestina LV," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 1, 2002.

³¹⁶ Pallitto, "Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis".

Thus, as I read this, the poet will take pleasure from this new love as long as the beloved receives, or confirms, and, notably, is content with, her love.

In the next poem, 207, the phoenix myth is recycled in an even clearer way that builds on and repeats the argument of its sister poem. Again, the metaphor defines the poet's reborn desire, stating that Love's arrows always fly towards a new object once the old passion has faded. The consuming force of love is now indicated from the beginning and directly points towards the constant resurrection of her desire:

Qual darai fine Amor' à le mie pene,
Se dal cenere estinto d'un' ardore
Rinasce l'altro, tua mercè, maggiore
E sì vivace à consumar mi viene?

(Love, when will you end my sufferings, / if from the cold ashes of one passion /
a greater one's reborn – all thanks to you – / so powerful that it consumes me?
(Lines 1-4))

The ashes from which the new, greater passion arises allude to the phoenix, which then appears in the second stanza. This section of the poem contains a re-telling of the actual myth of the phoenix as presented by Pliny the Elder. This version is also found in some of the Greek novels that had come to be popular reading since their rediscovery in early modern Italy, not least in Venice.³¹⁷ The four lines read:

Qual ne le più felici e calde arene,
Nel nido acceso sol di vario odore
D'una Fenice estinta esce poi fore

³¹⁷ I am grateful to Ingela Jansson for pointing out the possible parallels between Gaspara Stampa's phoenix and that of the Greek novels to me. Heliodorus *Aethiopica* was printed in Italian by Giolito in Venice three times during the 1550s, and it was known earlier from a Greek manuscript that was printed 1534 and from a Latin translation printed 1551. The phoenix is also mentioned in Tatius *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, also printed in Venice by Scotto in the early 1550s. See for example, the editions at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze:
<http://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCf0003200022#page/1/mode/2up> and
<http://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCf0003077156#page/1/mode/2up>

Un verme, che Fenice altra diviene.

(Among these warm and happy desert sands, / in a nest that burns from perfumes alone, / a worm crawls forth from a dead phoenix / and becomes another phoenix in time.) (Lines 5-8)

The choice of retelling the myth in the version where the phoenix is reborn as a worm, and not simply mentioning the bird, may be strategic and it at least guides us towards her familiarity with the myth. To re-tell its history in more detail shows that the poet is well read and proves her literary knowledge and education, which enables her poetical appropriation of it. It becomes clear when we continue through the poem that the poet, similarly to Aragona, primarily employs the bird in order to represent a newborn, or resurrected, love. Nevertheless, the result of this new desire is embodied in her very poems, the literary compositions which also resurrect like phoenixes in the mind of the reader or listener. At this point, we can recall how Gaspara Stampa's employment of the bird is reflected in the commemorative poem attributed to Mirtilla discussed above.

As we continue through poem 207, the poet-lover exclaims that she cannot find another delight more joyful than to burn for the *perfect* beloved, even though she initially complained about love's consuming force. The poet-lover speaks to Love directly and says:

In questo io debbo a' tuoi cortesi strali,
Che *sempre* è degno, & honorato oggetto
Quello onde mi ferisci, onde m' assali.

(Love, your kindly arrows *always* find / for me some worthy, glorious object / by which I'm wounded and assailed.) (Lines 9-11, my emphasis)

At this stage, we might expect that Gaspara Stampa would put forward the phoenix as a symbol for the poet lover's union with the beloved, as we saw for example in Donne's poem cited earlier. Nevertheless, instead, we find a definition reminiscent of the Christian and Neoplatonic idea of the constancy of

Divine love, of its resurrection and eternity. However, this version is transformed in Gaspara Stampa's vision; hence, these traditional contexts speak about God's eternal love or the souls' eternal union and resurrection in Higher Love in heaven, while the subject of Gaspara Stampa's poems speaks to and about an *earthly* love that has successfully awakened in her anew.

As many scholars argue, Gaspara Stampa uses Collaltino in the same manner as Petrarch uses Laura; namely, as a poet character against whom to build her poet-self. As shown in sonnets 206 and 207, she has left the thought that her identity as a loyal lover relies on her relationship to Collaltino, or any other beloved. The poet "moves beyond him altogether so that her identity depends only upon her relation to love."³¹⁸ I build on Benfell's as well as Andreani's conclusions when I further suggest that the love ideology that is created through these poems also rests upon a vision informed by Neoplatonic ideals which Gaspara Stampa redefines. Her vision propounds an earthly love that is the equal of Divine love in terms of the joy it brings and, more strikingly, in its proposed constancy.

This conclusion echoes Aragona's in her *Dialogo*, in which she speaks about love's potential infinity. As Campbell sums it up, in Aragona's vision "love itself is eternal and infinite, but human desires concerning love are inconstant and, thus, finite".³¹⁹ Gaspara Stampa's vision is clearly a parallel to this argument. The object of her love is changeable which corresponds to Aragona's view on human desire as finite. Love itself, on the other hand, is reborn in Gaspara Stampa's vision and, thus, corresponds to Aragona's philosophy of love's infinity. Sonnet 17 opened up space for this negotiation of the traditional suppression of earthly love and its temporality, exclaiming how the poet lover is not envious of the angels, and with the last line's word "può". The argument is realized in 206 and 207 through the strategic use and definition of the phoenix. The parallels to Aragona are not restricted to these poems but are visible, as I suggest in the following discussion, throughout Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*.

³¹⁸ Benfell, "Translating Petrarchan Desire," 125.

³¹⁹ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 46.

Cultural Networks and Literary Circles

The importance of both real-life and fictional networks, like those created within literary works, for early modern women writers was established by Diana Robin's study *Publishing Women* (2007) and has since then been an important research perspective on early modern women writers. In Gaspara Stampa's case, we know that her salon was attended by several prominent intellectuals and that a number of them wrote in her praise. Through her cultural networks, in Venice primarily but also beyond the city's borders, Gaspara Stampa were acquainted with a number of poets and writers of love dialogues, such as Francesco Sansovino, Benedetto Varchi and Sperone Speroni. I further argue that she most probably was familiar with Tullia d'Aragona, not on a personal level, but as a virtuosa, poet and writer of a dialogue. Furthermore, the publication of her *Rime* was a collaboration between her sister and Giorgio Benzoni, with a dedication to della Casa in his role as patron. As for the fictional salon, in addition to the addressees populating her own *Rime*, we can recall that she was included in Domenichi's women poets' anthology, *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime, et virtuosissime donne* published 1559. The linkage to literary circles expands even more when we consider that Gaspara Stampa, along with both Tullia d'Aragona and Veronica Franco, was associated with members of the Venetian *Accademia della Fama* and also with the salon of Domenico Venier.³²⁰

I underline the importance of collaborations and influences within these cultural networks and will focus especially on the parallels between Gaspara Stampa, Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni. In the following pages, I trace intertextual echoes concerning their visions of love and their use of the androgyne figure. I will also discuss the poems directly addressed to Speroni at length. Thus, the associations with other writers and poets resulted in Gaspara Stampa's highly skilled poetical work. As Kennedy points out, "[m]ore than any poet of her time, and better than any poet whom she addresses in her *Rime*, Stampa calibrates her many talents and coordinates them in meaningful verse".³²¹

³²⁰ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 27.

³²¹ Kennedy, "Writing as a Pro," 154.

In other words, the cultural circles with which Gaspara Stampa was involved function in several prolific ways both in her poetical vision of love and in supporting her aspirations to build a reputation and career as a poet.

Concerning Gaspara Stampa's own ideas on the publication and structure of her *Rime*, we can only speculate. But, when studying the 1554 edition, Cox notes that the occasional poetry, beginning with the poems addressing the French king and queen, are typographically marked, possibly indicating that the edition was actually compiled out of more than one manuscript. Cox writes:

If my conjecture is correct, it may be that this largely encomiastic sequence constitutes the nucleus of a courtly and "honest" volume of poetry that Stampa was putting together toward the end of her life as part of a process of poetic "rebranding" also attested by her appearance, with a sonnet, in Ruscelli's Tempio alla divina signora donna Giovanna d'Aragona. Indeed, it is not inconceivable that, had she lived, Stampa would have taken the option of presenting herself in a published context in this more "unobjectionable" guise, keeping her dazzling but highly unconventional love poetry for Collalto for an understanding coterie audience in Venice.³²²

Certainly, we still do not know of any manuscript(s), but Cox's suggestion about how Gaspara Stampa herself might have chosen to publish her work(s) is well worth more attention. The occasional poetry functions to a great extent as a set of literary bridges between the poet herself and the cultural figures she addresses and, thus, places her among these figures whom she aspires to equal, or triumph over, in terms of literary composition and fame.

Building on the previous studies by Campbell, Robin, Cox and Kennedy, I aim to argue for the specific relations between Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona. Furthermore, Sperone Speroni connects the two women writers, being part of both of their cultural networks as well as their fictional salons in their literary texts.³²³ The parallels and intertextual echoes will be thoroughly discussed in my aim to show how Gaspara Stampa's subversive poetics and

³²² Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 110.

³²³ Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 27.

vision of love embodied in her collection *Rime* are situated within the broader debate about love and literature of the early modern period.

Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona

One of the most repeated citations from Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore* is a passage in which she discusses the lack of female representation within the lyrical genres following Petrarch. In the dispute between the two main characters of her dialogue, Varchi and Tullia, the former reminds the latter of Petrarch's own words regarding women's capacity to love: "Ond'io so ben ch'un amoroso stato / In cor di donna picciol tempo dura" (Whence I know full well that the state of love / Lasts but a short time in a woman's heart), to which Tullia quickly answers:

Ma bisognava che madonna Laura avesse avuto a scrivere ella altrettanto di lui quanto egli scrisse di lei, ed avereste veduto come fosse ita la bisogna.

(Just think what would have happened if Madonna Laura had gotten around to writing as much about Petrarch as he wrote about her: you'd have seen things turn out quite differently then!) (201; 69)

The interpretation of this as a meta-poetical comment on Aragona's own presence as a female poet, but also on other women's writing within the Petrarchan context, is obvious. There is a strong critique against the Petrarch's words about the nature of women's love as unstable and that women are unable to understand constant, eternal love. This view of women and love had also become a central question in *la querelle des femmes*, the literary quarrels initiated by Christine de Pizan, in which a number of writers, both male and female, discussed the question of love and of women. Very often the pro-women writers aimed to dispute this view and instead show how women were capable of understanding love at an intellectual level and prove that they could be as constant as men, or even more so, in their love.

Gaspara Stampa is one of the women who could be said to give voice to Laura, just like Aragona, in her role as a female poet. Speaking from a female subject position, Gaspara Stampa does not explore an experience of sublimated love as generally understood within the tradition of Petrarch and Ficino; namely, the repression of earthly love in favor of divine. Nor does she represent a chaste female love where bodily desire is suppressed. On the contrary, as I have argued above, the separation of body and soul is consistently criticized in her *Rime*.

Tullia d'Aragona as Salome by Moretto da Brescia c. 1537

Body and Soul

Instead, as I suggest, we find a contemplation of the necessity of the body and of the sensual experience of love as a centrality, primarily expressed as a longing for physical reunion with her beloved.³²⁴ Furthermore, in contrast to more traditional Petrarchan poets, who remain constant in their love for one beloved, Gaspara Stampa creates an ideology in which a lover does not owe constancy or faithfulness to a beloved who is no longer present, but a constancy concerning only her own experience of and relation to Love itself.

Sperone Speroni's use of Tullia d'Aragona's persona as inspiration for his female character in his dialogue on love is often explained as having encouraged Aragona's own philosophical achievement.³²⁵ I will return to Speroni in the section below, but first we shall turn to the discussion on the parallels between Gaspara Stampa's and Aragona's arguments and representations of love. Early in Aragona's *Dialogo*, we can recall that Tullia asks:

Chi non sa che tutto il composto, cioè l'anima e il corpo insieme, è più nobile e più perfetto che l'anima sola?

(Is anyone ignorant of the fact that the whole, body and soul taken together, is more noble and more perfect than the soul by itself?) (197; 65)

Even though Aragona's character Varchi opposes the statement above, the conclusion we reach when reading the *Dialogo* is that the ideal she praises involves the body to a much greater extent than in Ficinian Platonism. As Curtis-Wendlandt explains:

Since human bodies cannot fully merge into one another, the lover will never be able to satisfy his desire to become the object of his love and thus "he cannot love

³²⁴ Influences employing a more 'body friendly' love from the ancient poets such as Sappho play an important role for Gaspara Stampa, as Tylus has convincingly proven in her "Naming Sappho".

³²⁵ See for example Campbell *Literary Circles*, Janet L. Smarr's "A Dialogue of Dialogues," and Russell's introduction to the translation of Aragona's dialogue.

with a limit" (1997, 90). Physical love is here an integrated part of even the virtuous kind of love, and necessary for Tullia's conception of it as infinite.³²⁶

This primary aspect can be brought into relation with Gaspara Stampa's poetry and view of love that I insist upon in this study, in which a union of body and soul is praised. As I have shown, she repeatedly argues that her life is not worth living if her beloved fails to reciprocate her affection and to come back to her physically. We can also recall poem 17 in which she expresses her earthly love as comparable to the angels' delights in heaven. In this poem, she emphasizes that she has a "cor terreni", an earthly heart, and also that she enjoys her love "giù", down here (on earth). This enhancement of the body destabilizes the discourse of love which traditionally excludes women from an understanding of the highest kind of love, due to misogynist traditions presenting women as connected to the body and earthly desires. I suggest that Gaspara Stampa and Tullia d'Aragona both turn this misogynist idea into their own benefit and, consequently, prove the idea of women as unable wrong. Thus, by drawing on the necessity of both body and soul in a full conception of noble love, they are re-writing women into the discourse of love. Furthermore, their conception of physical love's integration in the most noble kind of love, so often disputed in the dialogues on love, is also of necessity for their vision of love's infinity, which I now will turn to.

A New Vision of Love and Poetic Strategies

We understand already, from the title of *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore*, that the primary question debated is the notion of love's infinity. In this rather lengthy citation, we find these ideas presented:

TULLIA: *Che Amore è infinito non in atto, ma in potenza, e che non si può amar con termine: cioè che i disidèri degli amanti sono infiniti e mai non si acquetano a cosa niuna;*

³²⁶ Curtis-Wendlandt, "Conversing on Love," 79.

perchè, dopo questo, vogliono qualche altra cosa, e, dopo quella altra, una altra, e così di mano in mano successivamente; e mai non si contengono, come testimonia il Boccaccio di se medesimo nel principio delle sue Cento novella. E quindi è che gli amanti or piangono, or ridono; anzi (il che è non solo più meraviglioso, ma del tutto impossibile agli altri uomini) piangono e ridono in un medesimo tempo, hanno speranza e timore, sentono gran caldo e gran freddo, vogliono e disvogliono parimente, abbracciando sempre ogni cosa e non istringendo mai nulla, veggono senza occhi, non hanno orecchie ed odono, gridano senza lingua, volano senza moversi, vivono morendo, e finalmente dicono e fanno tutte quelle cose che di loro scrivono tutti i poeti, e massimamente il Petrarca, al quale niuno si può comparare, né si dee, negli affetti amorosi.

VARCHI: Bene è vero. Ma chi non gli ha provati o pruova, come ho fatto e fo io e farò oggimai sempre [...] non solo non può credergli, ma se ne ride. [...] Amore è dio, e grande dio è Amore; e chi ha più o saputo o potuto, più gli è stato fedele ed obbediente.

(TULLIA: *Love is infinite potentially – not in actuality – for it is impossible to love with an end in sight. In other words, the desires of people in love are infinite, and they can never settle down after achieving something. This is because after obtaining it, they long for something else, and something else again, and something more after that. And so it goes on, one thing after the other. They can never be satisfied, as Boccaccio bears witness about himself in the introduction to his Decameron. This is the reason why people who are in love can be crying one minute and laughing the next. They can even be found laughing and crying at the same time. This phenomenon is amazing in itself and quite impossible for mere normal mortals! Lovers entertain both hope and fear. Simultaneously, they feel great heat and excessive cold. They want and reject in equal measure, constantly grasping things but retaining nothing in their grip. They can see without eyes. They have no ears but can hear. They shout without tongue. They fly without moving. They are alive while dying. They say and do the myriad strange things that the poets write about, especially Petrarch, who towers incomparably over all others in the description of the pangs of love.*

Varchi: It is indeed true. But those people who do not have, and never had, experienced of the effects of love, as I have and always shall [...] will never believe it and will make fun of it. [...] Love is god and a great god is Love. Those who are more able, and wiser than others, have always been loyal and obedient to the god.) (216; 84)

Drawing both on Boccaccio and Petrarch, d'Aragona places her discussion among the writers and poets of the early modern period. The list of 'name-dropping' continues in the discussion that follows between Tullia and Varchi, with Plato, Aristotle and Ficino all being mentioned and alluded to repeatedly. Strategic mentions of contemporary writers are also subsequently made by Gaspara Stampa throughout the *Rime*. She addresses a number of poets of mediocre status, but also more prominent people like Speroni and Domenico Venier. Furthermore, she alludes to Neoplatonic ideals in order to appropriate and redefine them in her own vision.

A consideration of the "affetti amorosi", as explained by Aragona in the citation, is constantly employed in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*. Several of her poems contains the antithetical pairs recounted by Aragona, such as joy-pain, war-peace, heat-cold, to which I will also return in the following. Most significant at this point however, is Gaspara Stampa's ideological similarity to Aragona's explanation of love as an infinite desire. As Aragona explains, it proves impossible for someone in love, such as the poetical subject in Gaspara Stampa's poems, to love with an end in sight. The poet-lover fears to lose her beloved, but she never explores any doubt about her own constancy.

As I have shown with my readings, her vision of love evolves throughout the *Rime*. Poem 184, and indeed many others, criticizes the beloved for his lack of reciprocity, which will ultimately lead to their love's termination. This importance of reciprocal love is further enhanced within Neoplatonic ideals, where the perfect union between lovers builds on reciprocity. Gaspara Stampa also explores this idea in her appropriation of the androgyne figure, to which I will return. Love awakening anew is thematized in poem 193, but with hesitation and resistance, while poems 206 and 207 portray love's infinite resurrection as a phoenix. Thus, Gaspara Stampa aligns herself with Aragona's conclusion that human love for a specific beloved may be finite, but love itself is always reborn.

Furthermore, I have underlined that they both argue for a philosophy of love that considers both body and soul; thus, the sensual plays a crucial role in an understanding of love. By enhancing the importance of the body, they

consequently enhance the female position in their vision of ideal love. Furthermore, in order to create this vision, they both draw upon a number of authorities within the discourse of love and literature, both explicitly and implicitly. In Gaspara Stampa's case, one of these implicit authorities might well have been Tullia d'Aragona, which is especially significant since she was the only woman to write a dialogue on love during this period and was therefore a unique source for Gaspara Stampa to build upon.

In order to further discuss the importance of cultural networks and gatherings, such as the salons where the philosophical ideas on love were debated, I will turn to one of the intellectuals who is, in contrast to Aragona, directly addressed in Gaspara Stampa's poems, namely Sperone Speroni. I suggest that the parallels between Speroni and Gaspara Stampa further reinforce how her *Rime* can be viewed as a dialogical contribution within the ongoing debate on love and gender.

Gaspara Stampa and Sperone Speroni

As is common within the cultural and poetical codes of her time, Gaspara Stampa addresses honorary poems to a number of famous contemporary poets and intellectuals. In poem 228, and possibly also 269, she addresses Sperone Speroni, one of the composers of a love dialogue, as mentioned earlier, and also a prominent figure in the literary circles of Venice. While it is possible that the context behind writing an honorary poem to Speroni relates to his general role and fame as a literary critic, I will nevertheless expand my reading and argue for other parallels to his dialogue on love as a background source for Gaspara Stampa's choice to address him.

As in the case of Tullia d'Aragona, there is no certainty concerning the personal relations between Speroni and Gaspara Stampa. As William Kennedy argues, the:

paucity of biographical information about Stampa limits us from documenting her connections with these literary personalities, or even from certifying whether she

dealt directly with each of them. Their designation does, however, work to certify that Stampa was a professional. [...] [I]n the company of male writers named in her *Rime*—most of them amateur poets at best—Stampa comes to represent a precocious professionalism all her own, disowning their amateur status and reinforcing the seriousness of her career aspirations.³²⁷

Nevertheless, there are some indications that Gaspara Stampa and Speroni were acquainted with each other and, to me, it is clear that they were familiar with each other's work. Certainly, Gaspara Stampa's poems addressed to him are one example. A proof of Speroni's knowledge about her is found in an epigram, although Speroni did not return Gaspara Stampa's praise. In the epigram, written after her death, as Bianchi argues, Speroni aligns with those spreading a negative reputation about her, as well as her sister, as prostitutes.³²⁸ However, we do not have any indications, to my knowledge, that this kind of judgement was made by Speroni at the time Gaspara Stampa was writing her poems and attending the salons of Venice.

In Praise of Herself

Poem 228 is addressed directly to Speroni; thus, he is not alluded to, but his name is written out as the very first word. This ensures the reader or listener of the poem is aware from the very beginning of its famous addressee and calls for attention. In this sonnet, Gaspara Stampa praises Speroni's talent and she expresses a strong wish to follow in his footsteps with his helping hand. The poem reads:

SPERON, ch' à l'opre chiare, et honorate
Spronate ogn'un col vostro vivo esempio,
Mentre d'ogni atto vile illustre scempio,

³²⁷ William Kennedy discusses Gaspara Stampa's aim to establish her role as a professional poet through poems addressed to for example Giovanni della Casa in his article "Writing as a Pro," 186.

³²⁸ Bianchi, *La Scrittura Poetica*, 35–6. Bianchi also cites the epigram: "(Dimmi, qual è più divina, / Cassandra o Gasparina? / Dimmi, qual è più landra [sgualdrina], / Gasparina o Cassandra?)".

Con l'arme del valor vincendo fate,
 Poi che di seguir' io vostre pedate,
 Per me l'ardente mio desir non empio,
 Voi, d'ogni cortesia ricetta, e tempio,
 A` venir dopo voi la man mi date.
 Sì che, come ambe due produsse un nido,
 Ambe due alzi un vol, vostra mercede,
 E venga in parte anch'io del vostro grido.
 Così d' Antenor quell' antica sede,
 E questo d' Adria fortunato lido,
 Faccian de' vostri honor mai sempre fede.

(Speroni, with your living example / you spur us on to bright and honorable
 deeds, / while with your arms of valor you make all / other illustrious acts foolish
 and lowly. / Alone, my burning desire to follow / your footsteps does not suffice
 – please, / give me your hand so I may come after you, / temple and vessel of all
 gentility. / So just as one nest gave birth to us both, / may one flight exalt us two
 with your grace, / and let me share (in part) in your acclaim. / Thus may that
 ancient site of Antenor / and Adria's fortunate shores / forever keep faith with
 your honorable name.)

Both Gaspara Stampa and Sperone Speroni were born in Padua, but mainly
 lived and worked in Venice. At the end of poem 228, lines 9-14, this common
 native heritage of the writers is evoked. It is used as a justification for Gaspara
 Stampa's request for help on her way and for their mutual interest in placing
 Padua on the map as a birthplace of famous poets.³²⁹ Furthermore, as is common
 in this genre, the poet shows her inferiority in comparison to the dedicatee,
 while at the same time expressing a wish for association. By repeating the
 "due/un" in lines 9 and 10 of poem 228, said in a humble tone by the adding of
 "in parte" in line 11, the poet establishes herself alongside the famous Speroni.
 In other words, she praises him in his role of addressee and herself as a poet at
 the same time. A similar conclusion can be drawn from poem 269, as will soon
 be discussed.

³²⁹ Also noted by Tylus, "Introduction," in *Complete Poems*, 19.

Thus, Gaspara Stampa aims, as Courtney Quaintance puts it, to write lyrical poetry, with “Speroni’s support and counsel, [...] that will ensure lasting fame both for her mentor and herself”.³³⁰ I agree that the act of writing honorary poems to notable figures within the circles of Venice is a strategy with the purpose of increasing Gaspara Stampa’s own reputation as a poet. As I read this poem, she accomplishes exactly that, to ensure their fame, especially her own. Actual support from Speroni is unnecessary, thus Gaspara Stampa’s strategic employment of him as a poetic character establishes their relation.

Sperone Speroni by Tizian Vecellio, 1544, Treviso Museo Civico Luigi Baldin

There are two more poems that scholars have suggested address Speroni: 269 and 239, of which 269 is more probable than the other. In poem 269, we find an allusion to Speroni through the word *sprona* in line 9. This is also a common Petrarchan verb, *spronare*, but Gaspara Stampa’s use of it here is possibly also a pun on Speroni’s name, especially as she had already employed the same verb

³³⁰ Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity*, 150.

in poem 228, line 2 (*spronate*).³³¹ Poem 239, addressed to a “Chiaro Signor” has been suggested to be a ‘Speroni poem’ due to the line “Come poss’io quando desio mi sprona”. However, I consider this allusion to be too uncertain and will therefore focus on 269 in the following.

Poem 269 is a sonnet like 228 and again expresses admiration for the addressee, this “Signor”. These lines guide us towards the relation the poet wishes to have to him, and is thus similar to 228. Poem 269 reads:

Signor, ‘ à quei lodati, e chiari segni
Il vostro ingegno, i vostri studi, e l’arte:
V’hanno alzato, e’l vergar di tante carte,
A` quai s’alzaro i più chiari, e più degni,
Come poss’io come i maggiori ingegni,
Entrando in tanto mar con poche sarte,
Quanto si vuol, quanto si dè lodarte,
Sì che di nostro dir tu non ti sdegni?
Certo il disire, e debito mi sprona,
E via più la vostr’ alta cortesia,
Che tal volta di me pensa, e ragiona.
Ma l’opra è tal, tal’ è la pena mia,
Tal di voi parla, e sente ogni persona,
Che credend’ io d’alzar v’abbasseria.

(Lord, if your native talents, your studies, / and your art have with all you’ve written raised you / to those famous and praiseworthy heights / which only the best and most deserving gain, / how then can I become like these greater wits, / if I enter on the sea so ill equipped, / and praise you as I’d like and you deserve, / so that my words won’t meet with your disdain? / Desire and indebtedness spur me on, / and even more so, your great kindness / that makes you talk and think of me at times. / But the work’s one thing, my efforts are another; / so much are you the talk of all / that, thinking to promote you, I’d abase you.)

³³¹ Tylus explains in *Complete Poems*, note 523 to poem 228: “With the ‘spronate’ of the second line, Stampa is punning on the root of the dedicatee’s name”, 389, and directs us to another note on Gaspara Stampa’s poem 10. In this note Tylus states: “The verb *spronare*, especially governed by *Amore*, is quite common in Petrarch; for writing as the result of such ‘spurring,’” 367.

In this poem, Speroni is raised to the highest among poets, is a position for which the poet-speaker is also aiming. While diminishing herself, she courteously praises his talents and her wish to be as accomplished as him. Connected to the allusion to Speroni, this *sprona*, are the words “disir”, “debito” and also “cortesia”. Thus, the poet expresses a desire to portray the addressee in a manner worthy of his talent. Furthermore, the “cortesia” that he has shown implies that he thinks and talks about her, a line that exemplifies the strategic creation of a kind of virtual dialogue between herself and the addressee. Thus, I argue that these dedicatory poems to Speroni also point to the relevance of his participation in the debate on love and to the possible parallels to Gaspara Stampa’s vision of love.

The Senses, Women and Lovers’ Union

Generally, as discussed earlier, Speroni’s *Dialogo d’amore* is not viewed as purely Neoplatonic, but as influenced more by the Aristotelian tradition. The character of Grazia celebrates the dual nature of man and of love, probably inspired by the teachings of the Aristotelian philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi.³³² As Russell argues, the main idea of the Aristotelians stands in opposition to that of the Platonists. In Aristotelian understanding, the human mind is in constant need of *all* the senses, not only hearing and sight as the Platonist hold, in order to understand perfect love. Speroni’s character Grazia is the main speaker for this view and interestingly also draws upon the union of the lovers as “perfetto l’ermafrodito amoroso”. Russell paraphrases Grazia’s argument, who states that Love is born in the senses and shaped by reason”. Furthermore, lovers, are not satisfied with only seeing and hearing their beloveds, and, thus, “endeavor as much as they can to pleasure the other senses too. And when the pleasure of the mind is added to those of senses, the ‘amorous hermaphrodite’, this is, the perfect union between man and woman, is truly achieved”.³³³

³³² Russell, “Introduction,” in Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 30.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 31. Speroni, “perfetto l’ermafrodito amoroso,” 517.

To draw upon my earlier discussion, the very choice that Speroni makes when he names his united lovers as an amorous hermaphrodite points to the centrality of the body in his version of the myth. In contrast to Ficino's interpretation of Aristophanes' myth, Speroni's hermaphrodite reminds us of the physical aspect, the blending of the bodies, taking place in the union of the lovers. We can remind ourselves of the depiction of this blending in the picture of "Matrimonii typus" by Aneau.³³⁴ Of course, we also find Hermaphroditus in the Ovidian myth, which is directly referenced in Speroni's dialogue. While Aneau's figure suggests equality (in marriage, union), the Ovidian myth focuses on the male character and his effort to resist the amorous approaches of a boundless woman. In Ovid, the union of their bodies is forced upon the male beloved. Thus, Speroni's hermaphrodite and references to the myth's characters of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus might well be a mixture of the Platonic androgyne and the Ovidian myth. On the other hand, I suggest, it might be a strategic choice that underlines Speroni's critique of the spiritual union Ficino prescribes.

Furthermore, women in Speroni's dialogue, as exemplified through his characterization of Tullia d'Aragona, are treated much in accordance with the contemporary misogynist view as inferior human beings without the capacity to understand perfect love. On the other hand, the female character in Speroni's dialogue can be seen in light of a more accepted position for women within the cultural and philosophical elite, as Pablo Maurette argues for.³³⁵

Thus, Speroni's philosophical dialogue promotes an Aristotelean view and highlights the importance of bodily senses in the understanding of true love. Considering this aspect, I argue for parallels to Gaspara Stampa's ideas of the importance of the body. However, her interests as a woman poet certainly align more with those of Tullia Aragona; namely, to give a female voice and

³³⁴ See Aneau's emblem on page 119 in this study.

³³⁵ Pablo Maurette, "Plato's Hermaphrodite and a Vindication of the Senses of Touch in the Sixteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3, 2015, 886.

perspective in the debate on love.³³⁶ As I will show in my reading of Gaspara Stampa's appropriation of the androgyne, there are also, significantly, intertextual relations to the critique made by Speroni's Tullia character in their discussion of the figure.

To reconnect to the poems dedicated to Speroni, poems in which the poet cordially yet strategically asks for his helping hand in her desire to follow in his footsteps, I suggest that they do not only refer to poetical talent. Hence, Speroni's dialogue was most probably discussed in the cultural gatherings that Gaspara Stampa attended, and both her poems to him and as his degrading comments made after Gaspara Stampa's death about her and her sister Cassandra mentioned earlier, proves that they were familiar with each other. These various arguments give us reasons to at least suggest that she could have had his *Dialogo d'amore* in mind when she created her own vision of love. Thus, I suggest that Gaspara Stampa wishes to follow Speroni as a poet, but also as a writer and thinker on love. Her *Rime* should consequently be viewed as a contribution to the ongoing discussion.

Poetry, Performance, Philosophy

In this study, I repeatedly argue that Gaspara Stampa's *Rime* should be viewed as a contribution to the ongoing discussion on love. Gaspara Stampa did not write a dialogue, as did Speroni and Aragona, but she wrote and performed an extensive number of poems in several genres within the same courtly circles. The performative aspect should not be underestimated, as many scholars have discussed. We have to take the possible interactions during these performances into consideration, and be open to the idea that Gaspara Stampa discussed her poems with guests at the salon she attended.

³³⁶ Furthermore, Speroni's dialogue presents the character of Tullia as a courtesan representing views on bodily passion, or as Russell puts it: "The prominent placement of a courtesan is surely a sign that a discussion on natural love and sexuality was understood to fall within the purview of a specific category of femininity. And this category was conceived, and its representative – Speroni's Tullia – described, in line with the accepted view of womanhood and of love," in Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 32.

As already mentioned, she was very familiar with the discussions on love, she was also acquainted with some of the writers of the dialogues and even more of them might have moved in the same circles. She shares this dialogical background for her writings and thoughts with many other women writers of the time, such as Marguerite and Tullia d'Aragona. Gaspara Stampa's aspiration to create a new ideal of love is not formulated in a philosophical genre but in the lyrical genres, in which she excelled as a virtuosa. Nevertheless, I argue that to some extent she also makes use of the rhetoric of the dialogue when she addresses people like Speroni.

Furthermore, Tullia d'Aragona defended poetry in her dialogue "as a worthy and noble discipline". As Curtis-Wendlandt points out, it is "[t]hrough Varchi's words, she announces that writing sonnets 'is not something for everyone to do—for it requires the knowledge of many subjects, besides intelligence and good judgment'".³³⁷ And, while Aragona frequently mentions philosophers by name and discusses their ideas,

the only direct quotations included in the text are taken from the poetic works of Petrarch and Dante, rather than from philosophical authors. By this strategy of quotation, d'Aragona secures an accentuated place for poetry in her dialogue: poets and poetry, she seems to suggest, deserve a prominent role in the discourse on love.³³⁸

The influence of the dialogue on poetry and other genres, considering both theme and rhetoric, are evident according to Leushuis as well.³³⁹ Speroni, for his part, did not write a classical love dialogue. He used the form, and the title to name his text, but used this rhetoric to subvert established metaphors and ideas on love as well as on the literary genre. So, when Gaspara Stampa addresses Speroni, or other poets, it is in the same manner as Tullia d'Aragona – to go into dialogue with the addressee, with the result that she both participates in the

³³⁷ Curtis-Wendlandt, "Conversing on Love," 87. Citation reference Russell and Merry's translation of Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 86.

³³⁸ Curtis-Wendlandt, "Conversing on Love," 87.

³³⁹ Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, see in particular the chapter "Conclusion".

discussion on love and at the same time establishes herself as a poet among the elite.

Love, War and a Female Knight

The echoes of philosophical influences on Gaspara Stampa's poetics that have so far been discussed in this study mainly concern the question of the division or unity of body and soul. As we have seen, she echoes Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni to various extents and presents a vision of love that is moving away from the Platonic division of vulgar and heavenly. In her vision, the female position is enhanced, which consequently destabilizes the power relation usually seen in Petrarchan lyric poetry. In order to deepen this discussion even further, I will show how Gaspara Stampa appropriates the classical metaphors of war and battles for love and as a woman takes on the role of a knight.

The conflicting effects of love are described in poem 163 by the common use of opposite pairs; the poet accuses Amor's hands of causing both war and peace, life and death, fear and trust, and joy and pain. It reads:

Quando mostra à quest' occhi Amor le porte
De l'immensa bellezza, & infinita,
De l'unico mio Sol, l'alma invaghita
De le sue glorie par, che si conforte.
Quando poi mostra à la memoria à sorte,
Quelle di crudeltà mai non udità;
Tutta à l'incontro afflitta, e sbigottita
Resta preda, & imagine di Morte.
*E così vita, e morte, e gioie, e pene,
E temenza, e fidanza, e guerra, e pace,
Per le tue mani Amor d'un luogo viene.*
Nè questo vario stato mi dispiace,
Sì son dolci i martiri, e le catene,
Ma temo, che sarà breve, e fugace.

(When Love shows these eyes the portals to / what's immense and infinite – the beauty / of the only sun I have – my hungry soul / seems to find some comfort in its glories; / when then it shows my memory by chance / the gates to cruelties never told before, / afflicted and dismayed by the encounter, it falls prey to death, becoming its pale image. / *So life and death, and joys and pain, / and fear and trust, and war and peace / come from a single place: Love's hands.* / Nor does this variable state displease – / these tortures and these chains are sweet; / I only fear they will be fleeting.) (my emphasis)

The Petrarchan vocabulary is a rich source regarding love's contrasts and the "conflictual nature of love". Gaspara Stampa "took full advantage" of the traditional Petrarchan technique of antithesis, as Bassanese points out.³⁴⁰ Foregrounding the ability to take advantage of this technique are Gaspara Stampa's education and talent. Knowledge is a source of power, which she uses through her skillful employment of lyrical form and technique in order to destabilize the traditional power relations of an active, male lover and a passive, female beloved.

Poem 163 can be seen as one example of this strategy; thus, it begins with Love's ennobling power in a Neoplatonic and Petrarchan mode, but it ends on a rather different note. In the last tercet, the poet-lover addresses a fear that the love will diminish or endure but a short time, and then disappear. Clearly, this poem is reminiscent of poem 17 in the Neoplatonic tone of the first lines, of the eternal beauty that Love makes her experience, and in the acknowledgement of her fear of love's possible finality at the end. In the lines between, she primarily explores the many effects that love causes. These effects are both pleasurable and torturing, but the poet-lover does not complain about the chains or the sweet martyrs. The old idea of love *as* war, or *causing* war, is mentioned as one of the pairs of opposites. This battle of love is a battle between rationality and emotions, between reason and the desire caused by the blind dart shot by the God of Love.³⁴¹ But can these two conflicting aspects ever reach peace or co-exist? Is it possible to love in a rational way?

³⁴⁰ Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 69.

³⁴¹ The list in this poem of the effects of Love can be compared to the statements made by Parmentier and Longarine in the *Heptaméron*, when they call upon Love's power to turn things completely upside-down, make the wise foolish and the strong weak. See the section on novella 43 in this study.

In 213, the metaphorical battle is elaborated upon much more fully than in 163. When reading the two quatrains of poem 213, a sonnet, it might seem that the poet advises herself (her soul) to *flee* love's temptations. She wonders which way her soul will go; will it follow the path along which Love tries to draw her or will it attempt to resist?

Che farai alma? Ove volgerai il piede,
Qual sentier prenderai, che più ti vaglia?
Tornerai à seguir' Amor, che smaglia
Ogni lorica, quando irato fiede?
O` stanca, e satia de le tante prede,
Fatte di te ne l'aspra sua battaglia;
T' armerai sì che perch'ei pur t'assaglia,
Non ti vincerà più qual suole, e crede.

(What will you do, soul? Which way will you turn? / Which path will you take, which one best suits / you? Are you off to follow Love, who, / when anger overtakes him, shatters all defense? / Or exhausted by the concessions / you've made in this pitiless battle, will you / arm yourself so no matter how he attacks, / he won't defeat you as he thinks he can?)

It is a common Petrarchan stylistic fashion to talk to one's own soul when torn between the desires of the body and the mind. In this poem, however, we should specifically note the poet's playing with gender roles and the idea that her soul is threatened by the implications Love could bear if the soul would choose to follow him. The war references *battaglia*, *armerai*, *assaglia* and *vincerà* which connote masculinity are often used in relation to Collaltino throughout the collection, are here used with reference to the female poet-lover.

The second quatrain ends with the question of whether the soul is about to arm itself against the attacks of Love. This poem is, in similarity to the phoenix poems, about the new love the poet finds herself inflamed with. In this specific poem, Bassense interprets Amor to be a "belligerent warrior in the battlefield of love, penetrating any armor (resistance)".³⁴² From my perspective, however,

³⁴² Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 118.

what is of specific interest is the play with these war metaphors from a female perspective. Love is a warrior, but his opponent is not a male knight but a female.³⁴³ Nevertheless, the poet refers to how *huom*, men, cannot win the battle if they do not enter the fight, as the two tercets read:

Il ritirarsi è sicuro, e'l contrastare
E` glorioso; e l'esca che ci mostra,
E` tal, che può nocendo anco giovare.
Non perde e non vince anco huom, che non giostra,
In queste imprese perigliose, e fiere
Sì potria far maggior la gloria nostra.

(It's safe to retreat, but in fighting / there's glory, and the bait that he shows us / can harm while it brings pleasure. / Unless he jousts, a man can't win or lose; / these fierce and dangerous exploits / could make our glory even greater.)

In the first tercet, the poet-speaker refers to the soul and herself as us, pointing to the unity between body and soul that is at stake in this poem. However, when we reach the second tercet, the masculine connotations that we see in the war metaphors are embodied in this *huom*, mentioned above, to whom the poet-speaker compares her strivings. As a knight can win by participating in jousting (one of the games within tournaments), so can the lover, in this case a female lover, reach glory in the game of Love.³⁴⁴

The poem ends with *gloria nostra*, our glory, which will be even greater if they, as a knight, choose to fight the battle of love. This *nostra* refers not to the union of lover and beloved, but to the union of the lover's own body and soul in the experience of love. The battle is solely between the poet and Amor himself, which makes the actual object of her love irrelevant.

Furthermore, the poet creates this space for a female knight in the war of love. Early modern tournaments and duels, and actual war, signified

³⁴³ Women as warriors had begun to be popularized during this time with Aristo's *Orlando furioso*, Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* and an increasing fascination with the Amazons.

³⁴⁴ Lines 7-8 and 12 "T' armerai sì che perch'ei pur t'assaglia, / Non ti vincerà più qual suole, e crede" and "Non perde e non vince anco huom, che non giostra", might be playing on Virgil's famous "Amor vincit omnia".

masculinity and masculine identity and excluded women. Participation in battles and tournaments could bring a man honor and chivalric status, by which he would prove himself worthy of being in a Lady's service. In medieval literature, we find this in Chrétien de Troyes's chivalric romances and in courtly poetry, in which women had "a central, but mediatory role".³⁴⁵ As Neoplatonic ideals developed and influenced Petrarchan lyrics and love dialogues during the early modern period, the idealization of the Lady further reduced her to a silent object of adoration and the means by which the male poet could reach perfection and, ultimately, God. Also, the majority of literary defenses and dialogues on the worth of women in the *querelle des femmes* were penned by male authors. Thus, women were "the object under examination, but they were denied agency. Speech, such as war and love, remained an elite masculine privilege, whereas women were cast in the role of the spectators in a game which had them as objects".³⁴⁶

Seen through these cultural and literary contexts and traditions, Gaspara Stampa's subversive ideas on love and gender become clear. In poem 213, she neither criticizes nor praises her beloved's skills as a soldier. Instead, she gives the role of the knight to her female poetic voice. Without any hesitation, she has claimed space in arenas in which women were originally denied agency and pre-given the role of a spectator and object.

Gaspara Stampa's Androgyne

The androgyne was briefly discussed earlier in connection with Sperone Speroni's use of the myth in his dialogue. I will now return to the androgyne and argue for the significance of Gaspara Stampa's appropriation of this figure, so central to the early modern idea of perfect love and union. I have further argued that at the core of Tullia Aragona's dialogue is an ideal in which the body plays a central role and women are included in understandings of love to

³⁴⁵ Dialetti, "Defending Women," 13.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

a much greater extent than in any other philosophical dialogue of the period. By drawing extensively on references to classical texts on the subject of love, like Plato, Aristotle, Marsilio Ficino and Leone Ebreo, Aragona places her discussion among the writers and poets of the early modern period and skillfully makes use of the rhetoric of the genre in order to discuss, criticize and transgress existing configurations of love and gender. As Rinaldina Russell, translator and scholar of Aragona's work, states: "Aragona is able to call the bluff of Platonic theories and contest the Aristotelian notion of women's inferiority. The equality of the sexes is implied throughout the dialogue and is upheld by Tullia [the character in the dialogue bearing the same name as the writer] at crucial points".³⁴⁷

I argue that Gaspara Stampa, in the same fashion, calls the bluff of Platonic ideas and specifically of the idea of the androgyne as a symbol for perfect union between man and woman. However, her employment of the figure is not as one solid understanding of it throughout the poems that I have identified as alluding to it, but it is used in different ways depending on the addressee of the poem in question.

Throughout the collection, we have seen the poet's longing for union with her beloved represented in many ways. As I have shown, the phoenix bird can be interpreted as an androgynous symbol as well as one of love's resurrection. Scholars, such as Hope Glidden, have further argued that the very act of writing as a woman during this time can be seen as androgynous, which certainly is a notion to consider in the context of both Gaspara Stampa and Marguerite de Navarre.³⁴⁸ Writing within a male context, in genres created by male predecessors and contemporaries, women poets and writers of the early modern period do have to navigate within norms outlined by men in order to represent their experience. It is precisely within these male discourses that women writers find ways to create subversive expressions.

³⁴⁷ The citation is from Rinalda Russell's comment on Tullia d'Aragona's strategy in her dialogue on love, in Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, 38.

³⁴⁸ Glidden, "Gender, Essence".

Imagining Equality

I will only be briefly commented upon the very famous poem 216, but it is relevant in our discussion of equality – a notion that further informs our understanding of the concept of the androgyne. In this poem, Bartholomeo Zen, the second lover in Gaspara Stampa' lyrical collection, is addressed through the initial letter of every line:

Ben si convien Signor, che l' aureo dardo
Amor v'habbia aventato in mezo il petto,
Rotto quel duro, e quel gelato affetto
Tanto à le fiamme sue ritroso, e tardo.
Havendo à me col vostro dolce sguardo,
Onde piove disir, gioia, e diletto;
L'alma impiagata, e'l cor legato, e stretto
Oltra misura, onde mi struggo & ardo.
Men dunque acerbo dè parer' à vui
Esser nel laccio aviluppato, e preso,
Ov'io sì stretta ancor legata fui.
Zelo d' ardente caritate acceso
Esser conviene eguale homai fra nui
Nel nostro dolce, & amoroso peso.

(Buried in your breast, lord, the gold arrow / Amorous Love let fly, and it suits you – / Reluctant and slow to take in its flames, / That chill reserve now melts, frozen no more, / Has you turn toward me your lovely gaze / On which desire rains with joyous delight, / Leaving souls bound, the heart constrained, / Oh, to bursting – so I'm destroyed and burn. / Maybe it seems to you less harsh now, / Entering within a noose known before / Only by me, so tightly I've been tied. / Zealous to treat our neighbor as ourselves, / Equally we burn, fired by charity: / Neither knows more, or less, of love's sweet burden.)

This poem's most interesting lines are found in its conclusion in the last tercet, "Zelo d' ardente caritate acceso / Esser conviene eguale homai fra nui / Nel nostro dolce, & amoroso peso". The Christian notion of charity is here appropriated in order to establish the lovers' equality in their knowledge and

experience of love, which is also a highly relevant idea within Platonic philosophies on love. As Bassanese points out, “[r]eligion is used in the attempt to convince the beloved to reciprocate her love”.³⁴⁹ In his discussion on religion in Gaspara Stampa’s *Rime*, Bianchi concludes that it has only a peripheral role.³⁵⁰ Bassanese comes to the same conclusion, arguing that her “attempt to spiritualize is ambiguous and therefore unsuccessful. Amor is the sole victor in this poetic world where Christ plays Cupid, men become gods, and love’s hell is the lover’s chosen paradise”.³⁵¹

Even though I agree that Amor is the most powerful God in her lyrical collection, I would not call Gaspara Stampa’s religious attempts unsuccessful. I would rather say that the appropriation of Christian love ideals is in line with her poetics; to strategically make use of traditional discourses in order to express her own ideas on love. In this particular case, *caritas* enforces and grants the poet-lover’s wish for reciprocal love. In order to further discuss the importance of reciprocity in Gaspara Stampa’s vision of love, I will now assess her appropriation of the androgyne, a figure based on reciprocal love.

The Bluff of the Androgyne

Towards the end of the 1554 edition of Gaspara Stampa’s lyrical collection, we find poems 291, 293, 308 and 309, which all allude to the androgyne myth. The notion of equality is of course key when imagining the androgyne, it being a united figure of two equal halves. Poem 293 is a madrigal, in which we find a concrete description of the perfect union of lovers, strongly alluding to the mythical figure, but also to the death and resurrection of the lovers in their mutual state of love which, within Neoplatonic ideas, is said to happen when love is reciprocated. The words in Gaspara Stampa’s poem very much echo

³⁴⁹ Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 119.

³⁵⁰ Bianchi compares Gaspara Stampa to Colonna saying that “le preoccupazioni religiose che si erano poste al centro del discorso lirico della Colonna assunsero nella Stampa un rilievo indiscutibilmente marginale; le ambizioni di Gaspara furono piuttosto quelle di legare l’enunciato poetico ai dati concreti e immanenti di un’appassionata quanto tormentata esperienza amorosa,” in *La Scrittura Poetica*, 51–52.

³⁵¹ Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa*, 120.

what we have seen in the dialogues on love and in the various uses of the lovers' union. She is also appropriating a trope from Petrarch and *il dolce stil nuovo*, namely the idea of the beloved's picture imprinted on the lover's heart. In the picture below, we can see that it is the second of the madrigals in the 1554 edition. Since it is written in this lyrical form, it was also probably intended to be performed, perhaps sung by the poet herself in the social circles that she attended. It reads and translates as follows:

"Così m'impreffe al core" in the 1554's edition

Così m'impreffe al core
 La beltà vostra Amor co' raggi suoi
 Che di me fuor mi trasse, e pose in voi;
 Hor, che son voi fatt' io,
 Voi meco una medesima cosa sete;
 Onde al ben', al mal mio,
 Come al vostro pensar sempre deuete;
 Ma pur, se al fin uolete,

Che'l vostro orgoglio la mia vita uccida,
Pensate, che di voi sete homicida.

(Love has so impressed / onto my heart your beauty with his rays, / he's drawn me from myself and placed / me in you: thus I have / become you, and you and I are one and the same. / Whatever good is mine, or bad, / think of it always as your own – / yet if that at the end you'll claim / to use your pride to destroy my life, / just realize you've committed suicide.)

The first two lines draw on the aforementioned idea within *il dolce stil nuovo*, and Platonism: the picture of the beloved as imprinted on the lover's heart.³⁵² When she first sees her beloved, his shining rays, his beauty, travels from the lover's eyes down to the heart (or soul) and finds its fixed place. In Gaspara Stampa's words, "Così m'impresse al core / La beltà vostra Amor co' raggi suoi". This strong, physical, impression of the beloved ignites the movement of the lover's soul to leave the body and seek its other half in order to become one. This movement is described in lines 3–5 of the poem and echoes several texts; from Dante and Petrarch, to Achilles Tatius's Greek novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*, popularized in Venice during the sixteenth century, and further to Ficino's *De amore* and Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.³⁵³ In Tatius's Greek novel, we read how a male character is struck by the beauty of Leukippe like a flash of lightning and how his soul is transported to her. Castiglione's character Bembo also speaks about the image of the beloved and how it impresses itself on the lover's heart in his long speech that ends *Il Cortegiano*. He explains that:

quando qualche grazioso aspetto di bella donna lor s'appresenta, compagnato da leggiadri costumi, e gentil maniere, tale, che esso come esperto in amore conosca, il sangue suo aver conformità con quello, subito che s'accorge che gli occhi suoi

³⁵² See for example Petrarch's poem 94, the first quatrain: "Quando giugne per gli occhi al cor profondo / l'imagin donna, ogni altra indi si parte, / et le virtù che l'anima comparte / lascian le membra, quasi immobil pondo (When through my eyes the image of my lady / enters my heart's depths, she banishes all others, / and the power my spirit radiates / leaves my limbs, leaves them inert weights). This translation is by A. S. Kline, *The Complete Canzoniere* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015). Mark Musa's translation reads: "When through my eyes to my heart's depths there comes / the master image, all the rest depart / and all the powers that the soul distributes / leave all the body's members like dead weight".

³⁵³ As mentioned in an earlier note, the popularity of the ancient Greek novels had increased in Italy during the sixteenth century, not least in Venice where translations and editions were printed by famous printing houses.

rapiscano quella immagine, e la portino al cuore; e che l'anima cominci con piacere a contemplarla, e sentir in sè quello influsso che la commove, e a poco a poco la riscalda.

when he [the courtier] sets eyes in some beautiful and attractive woman, with charming ways and gentle manner, and being skilled in love recognizes that his spirit responds to hers, as soon as he notices that his eyes fasten on her image and carry it to his heart and his soul begins to take pleasure in contemplating her and feels an influx that gradually arouses and warms it. (287; 334, my addition to trans.)

Castiglione's version is echoing *il dolce stil nuovo* and Platonic as well as the courtly ideals, were the lover should hold fast to his love and contemplate beauty with his sight and his hearing. Thus, Bembo, both as the writer of *Gli Asolani* and as he is represented here by Castiglione, focuses on ascetism and views reciprocity as unnecessary for ideal love, even though he strongly emphasizes the importance of the kiss, as we discussed in the chapter on Marguerite's novella 19.³⁵⁴

Ficino, just as Gaspara Stampa, instead emphasizes the importance of reciprocity. The mutual affection between lover and beloved is necessary in order for their souls to mix. Ficino comments on the lovers' death and resurrection; hence, even though the lover is dead in himself, having lost his own soul, he is reborn within the beloved in the mixing of their new, united soul. In Speech II, Chapter viii, he says:

Una solamente è la morte nell'Amore reciproco: le resurrezioni sono due, perché chi ama, muore una volta in sé, quando si lascia: risuscita subito nell'Amato quando l'amato lo riceve con ardente pensiero: risuscita ancora quando egli nell'Amato finalmente si riconosce, e non dubita sé esser amato.

(But in reciprocal love there is only one death, a double resurrection. For he who loves dies in himself once, when he neglects himself. He revives immediately in the beloved when the beloved receives him in loving thought. He revives again when he finally recognizes himself in the beloved, and does not doubt that he is loved) (42; 56)

³⁵⁴ For a discussion of Bembo's praise of ascetic love guided strictly by reason, see Crawford, "Marsilio Ficino," 14-18.

This idea of death and resurrection certainly draws our attention back to the phoenix discussed earlier in this study, but it also connects to the significance of Gaspara Stampa's "homicida" in poem 293. I will return to this shortly, but first let me point out that this kind of union is not possible between men and women in Ficino's treatise, while later writers like Leone Ebreo present only heterosexual unions. He too describes how the lover and beloved leave themselves in order to mix and be reborn into one. Leone Ebreo's Filone also explains how the image of Sofia is formed like a sculpture in his heart and mind:

ché, se la splendida bellezza tua non mi fusse intrata per gli occhi, non me arebbe possuto trapassar tanto, come fece, il senso e la fantasia, e penetrando sino al cuore non aia pigliata per eterna abitazione (come pigliò) la menta mia, impiendola di scultura di tua immagine; ché così presto non trapassano i raggi del Sole i corpi celesti o gli elementi che li son di sotto fino a la Terra, quanto in me fece l'effigie di tua bellezza, fin a pondersi nel centro del cuore e nel cuore de la mente.

(Because if your radiant beauty had not entered through my eyes it would not have perforated my perception and imagination as deeply as it did. It couldn't either have penetrated my heart, or have thus chosen my mind for eternal habitation, forming your image like a sculpture upon every part of it. The rays of the sun do not pass through the heavenly bodies and the element beneath them on the earth more quickly than the effigy of your beauty passed into the center of my heart and into the core of my mind.) (164; 171)

Leone Ebreo's description of the beloved's image imprinted in the lover's heart is, like Castiglione's, in line with that presented by Petrarch, mentioned earlier, in for example *RVF* 94 and 96. However, it should be noted that this particular implication of love does not depend upon reciprocity, but happens simply as a reaction within the lover when encountering the beauty of the beloved. The idea of how the lover and beloved desiring to become one is, however, also founded on reciprocity in Leone Ebreo's dialogue.

Gaspara Stampa's poem 293 thus echoes Ficino's view that there is a need for the beloved's response, with the contrast that her vision of love is between a woman and a man. The sign of her true love lies in heart, as the image of her

beloved, which is also the case in Leone Ebreo's and in Castiglione's versions. However, she has turned the gender roles around. She, as a woman poet, shifts the positions of subject-male and object-female into subject-female and object-male. However, since the whole point of this poem is the equality between the lovers in their new state as one soul in two bodies, these positions should not imply a superior-inferior relation, but this is problematized when we continue through the poem.³⁵⁵ The following lines 6–7, “Onde al ben’, al mal mio, / Come al vostro pensar sempre devete” alludes to the shared state of the lovers; they are one. And certainly, these lines are reminiscent of the formulations used in a marriage ceremony, also discussed earlier in the chapter on Marguerite's novella 19. In other words, throughout two thirds of the poem, Gaspara Stampa alludes to strong Neoplatonic understandings of the lovers' souls' movement and mixing, merging into the figure of the androgyne.

When we reach the last three lines of the poem, however, Gaspara Stampa challenges this idea of perfect love. She warns, or threatens the beloved, of the consequences to come if he fails to stay true to, or reciprocate, her love due to his own pride: “Ma pur, se al fin volete, / Che'l vostro orgoglio la mia vita uccida, / Pensate, che di voi sete homicida”. These lines suggest that the perfect union, promoted as stable due to the fixed state of the soul (in contrast to the body), is not stable at all. The union could last, if both parties continue to reciprocate the other's love, but if one of them turns away it will consequently lead to the splitting of the androgynous, perfect state. Ficino stated in the citation above that there is only one death in mutual love, but, notably, he continues immediately afterwards by explaining the justice of love:

L'uno e l'altro amando dà la sua: e riamando, per la sua restituisce l'Anima d'altri!
 Per la qual cosa per ragione debbe riamare qualunque è amato. E chi non ama
 l'Amante è in colpa di omicidio.

³⁵⁵ The discussion on who is to be regarded as more noble, the lover or the beloved, is a hot topic in Leone Ebreo's dialogue, as discussed in the chapter on dialogues in this thesis, and also by Maurette, “Plato's Hermaphrodite”. For Plato, and later Ficino, it is the lover in the dyadic relation whom they praise and who is undoubtedly regarded as the more noble. For Leone Ebreo, the roles are reversed: the beloved is more noble than the lover.

Each man by loving gives up his own soul, and by loving in return restores the foreign soul through his own. Therefore, out of justice itself, whoever is loved ought to love the love in return. But he who does not love his lover must be held answerable for murder. (43; 56)

Thus, Gaspara Stampa's choice of words may seem strong: *uccida* and *homicida*, but they make perfect sense. She is following the justice that is consequent upon unreciprocated love as Ficino presented it. Due to the insistence on their previous union, that in their roles as lover and beloved they are one and the same, we could also suggest that she adds to Ficino's judgement. The abandonment of the other will, as seen in Tylus translation of the poem, lead to the death of the beloved as well as a suicide. Regardless, the intertextual parallel to Ficino is striking.

Certainly, this poem recalls the same symbolism as the phoenix; hence, as I have argued, the bird is a version of this perfect union of lovers, and the death and rebirth of the lover in the beloved. However, in this poem, in contrast to the phoenix poems, or number 17 for that matter, we sense a more ambiguous tone. On the one hand, we can read it as serious, but on the other hand we can imagine it to be written, and even performed, in a mocking or provocative way.³⁵⁶ The latter could thus be seen as a response within a dialogue with her lover, who believes in Neoplatonic ideals. She repeats the argument from her perspective and calls the bluff of the utopian idea of perfect union with an intertextual reference to a short passage in Ficino's dialogue, that is not very often brought up for discussion, since he mainly focuses on the kind of love that is reciprocated and leads man towards true Beauty.

What is also striking is the similarity to some lines in Speroni's *Dialogo d'amore*, both in the sense of its ironic tone and in its content. In this scene, Speroni's character Grazia has described the relation between the characters Tullia and Tasso to be a perfect union but, as Leushuis points out, Tullia reveals to the reader "the emptiness of Neoplatonic terms such as perfect love".³⁵⁷ She says:

³⁵⁶ Bianchi also notes Gaspara Stampa's occasionally ironic tone: "agisce nelle *Rime* il ricorso dell'autrice agli strumenti dell'ironia," *La Scrittura Poetica*, 62.

³⁵⁷ Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, 60.

Ma come è vero, o signor Grazia divino (quel che dianzi accennaste) che 'l nostro amore sia perfetto in maniera che 'l Tasso e io siamo quasi uno ermafrodito, sviando lui dalla mia presenza la gentilezza del Prence e la servitù sua verso lui? (518-519)

(But how is it true, o divine lord Grazia, that our love is perfect, as you alluded to before, in the sense that Tasso and I almost form a hermaphrodite, while he is diverting away from my presence in favor of the kindness of the Prince and his sense of servitude toward him?)³⁵⁸

Gaspara Stampa's argument is indeed very close to that of Speroni's Tullia in this dispute over the metaphor of the androgyne as a symbol for perfect love. They both reveal the utopian and unrealistic characteristics of the figure, which is an impossibility since male beloveds depart from their loyal female lovers. Thus, Gaspara Stampa shows great awareness of the configurations of love of her time and she benefits from this discourse in her creation of her poetical self as the most loyal lover.

Female Friendship

Another poem alluding to the myth of the androgyne is placed just before 293, namely the capitolo 291. This letter poem is written to a female friend, Mirtilla, possibly the same who later writes the memorial poem, discussed earlier, describing Gaspara Stampa as a phoenix. Regardless of the biographical facts or reality behind 291, it is intriguing that Gaspara Stampa expresses desire and love, and furthermore, alludes to the union of two female individuals. As Capodivacca notes, "the poem is built around a series of contrasting analogies that hyperbolically stage how Gaspara's desire for correspondence with her friend Mirtilla far exceeds any other wish on Gaspara's part".³⁵⁹ The influence of the poem has also been established. The repeated "Non aspettò giamai"

³⁵⁸ Translation by Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, 60–61, note 28.

³⁵⁹ Capodivacca, "Le amiche carte," 119.

alternated with "Non disio giamai" echoes the trope "Non aspettò giamai con tal desio", used by Aretino, Francesco Berni and Tebaldeo.³⁶⁰ Throughout the poem, the superiority of their friendship is enhanced and the poet's desire for correspondence or reciprocity is strongly emphasized.³⁶¹

For our purpose, the most interesting lines appear in the penultimate stanza where we read:

Perch'un sol duol due corpi insieme punge,
Si come un solo amor', & una fede,
Et una volontà due cor congiunge.

(For a single sorrow strikes two bodies, / just as a single love, one faith, / a single will conjoins two hearts.)

Just as in 293, these lines recall, the figure of the androgyne and the perfect union of reciprocated love. In 293, the metaphorical allusions to Ficino's platonic ideas are applied to a heterosexual relation, while here it seems either to hark back to Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* where we find same-sex female desire as one of the "original" desires, or to be a reversed version of Ficino's preference for same-sex male friendships.

Furthermore, homosocial bonds have traditionally been viewed as the worthiest of bonds, from Achilles and Patroclus to the medieval Kings and their knights. Capodivacca also discusses these lines, even though she does not specifically identify the androgyne metaphor; but for a perfect union, she argues for the Platonic allusions as well as the intertextual correspondence to Michelangelo's poem 89. Capodivacca states that Gaspara Stampa's poem "enlists the conventional poetic language of erotic love to express the perfect union and correspondence envisioned between Stampa and Mirtilla".³⁶² If we also recall the commemorative poem for Gaspara Stampa attributed to Mirtilla,

³⁶⁰ Capodivacca argues that Tebaldeo is the probable source for Stampa's employment of the trope. "Le amiche carte," 120.

³⁶¹ This wish for remembrance and honoring by another woman is also expressed in Stampa's poem 86 and the desire for correspondence with a female friend is later fulfilled by the editor Luisa Bergalli, as stated by Capodivacca, when she included Mirtilla's commemorative phoenix poem in her edition of 1738. Ibid., 124.

³⁶² Ibid., 127.

it becomes clear how central the phoenix and androgyne metaphors are, not only in her idea of reciprocal love with her male beloved but in her idea of love in general, which also includes same-sex affection. The phoenix is employed as a more positive metaphor for love's resurrection, while the androgyne figure is more ambiguous, depicted on a positive note regarding female friendship but as more or less a bluff regarding her relation to a male beloved.

The Lover's/Poet's Superiority

As we reach the very end of Gaspara Stampa's lyrical collection, the poet-lover's superior position to her beloved is notably depicted, along with allusions to the phoenix. In poem 308, the idea of the picture of the beloved imprinted on the lover's heart is also repeated. It reads:

Con quai segni Signor, volete ch'io
Vi mostri l'amor mio,
Se amando, e morendo adhora adhora
No si crede per voi, lassa, ch'io mora?
Aprite lo mio cor, c'havete in mano,
E, se l'imagin vostra non v'è impressa,
Dite, ch'io non sia d'essa,
E, s'ella v'è, à che pungermi in vano,
L'alma di sì crudi hami,
Con dir pur, ch'io non v'ami?
Io v'amo, & amerò fin che le ruote
Girin del Sol, e più, se più si puote.
E, se voi nol credete,
E`perche crudo sete.

(With what signs, lord, do you think I / should show you my love, / if my loving
and dying each hour – alas – / aren't enough to convince you that I die? / Open
my heart that you hold in your hand, / and if your own image there isn't
impressed, / say that I'm no longer mine; / and if it is, then why pierce my heart
in vain / with such cruel wounds / by saying I no longer love you? / I do love

you, and will love as long as the sun / turns its wheels, and longer, if permitted
one. / And if you don't believe me / it's thanks to your cruelty.)

There is a certain morbid physicality in this poem, perhaps reminiscent of 293's "homicida", when the beloved is described as actually holding the poet's heart in his hands, with the poet encouraging him to "aprite", open it.³⁶³ In doing so, he will find his own picture, and no one else's, imprinted upon it, the poet exclaims. Lines 11-14 are powerful despite their conventionality, both proclaiming the intense affection for the beloved and enforcing the fact that she, in her position of speaker and lover, is not to be blamed if the beloved refuses to see the truth in her words. She has been, and always will be, the most faithful lover – a role that is further enhanced when notoriously contrasted to the beloved's cruelty.³⁶⁴

Moreover, the idea of love's possible eternity, as discussed in depth earlier, is also appropriated in this poem, in lines 11-12: "Io v'amo, & amerò fin che le ruote / Girin del Sol, e più, se più si puote". The parallel with Tullia d'Aragona's idea of the impossibility for a lover to love with an end in sight is thus relevant once again. The poet-lover is convinced herself, and is trying to convince her beloved, of the never-ending state of her love. And, as the poem concludes, the onus is upon him to believe her or to remain steadfast in his cruelty towards her.

Poem 309 recalls the phoenix, living in the flame or burning, but here at the end of the collection as it was structured in the 1554 edition, it does not symbolize the rebirth of love for a specific beloved. The wonderful thing that is reborn, as Tylus also discusses, is the flame of lyrical inspiration:

Dal mio vivace foco
Nasce un' effetto raro,
Che non ha forse in altra Donna paro.
Che quando allenta un poco,
Egli par, che m'incresca,

³⁶³ The idea of presenting the lover's heart to a cruel or unfaithful beloved is not new. In *Decameron* Boccaccio includes a novella on the theme, in which the heart is prepared as a meal and eaten by the person who has committed crimes of love.

³⁶⁴ Bianchi, *La Scrittura Poetica*, 58.

Sì chiaro è chi l'accende, e dolce l'esca.
 E, dove per costume,
 Par chel foco consume,
 Me nutre il foco, e consuma il pensare,
 Che'l foco habbia à mancare.

(From my living flame, / something wonderful is born / that may have no equal
 in another woman: / for when it dies down / I feel that it grows, so great is he
 who lights it and so sweet the bait. / And whereas it's the custom / that fire
 consumes, / I'm fed by my flame: what consumes is the thought / that one day
 the fire will be naught.)

As Tylus comments, "[t]he flame that bears something new evokes the salamander as well as the phoenix from *Rime* 206 and 207 where Stampa writes about creating herself anew in love".³⁶⁵ However, like 224, this poem appears to be about both the rebirth of love and the birth of her collection of poetry. The flame that feeds her is sublime inspiration, which is lit by the desire for a beloved. It is clear, however, that she does not express a desire to be equal, "a paro", with the beloved at this point.³⁶⁶ In fact, the poet specifically points out that no other woman is her equal. In other words, as a poet, she does not seek equality at all, but a place among the most notable poets, a place that no other woman has reached before but one – Sappho. Tylus suggests that:

Stampa may also be attempting to construe a new way of thinking about 'parity', in which the only kind of equality available to her is one that replaces and effectively silences the very subject with whom she seeks to be equal.³⁶⁷

Tylus continues that the "affetto raro" in poem 309 refers to the rare object of Gaspara Stampa's own poetry book, of which she urges us to take a part. "As Stampa invites others to walk with her 'a paro' and so eventually take her place, she writes into her poetry a means of our sublimely making ourselves the author

³⁶⁵ Tylus, "Naming Sappho," 31.

³⁶⁶ "A paro" is also employed in poem 1, a poem imitating Petrarch's first poem in *Canzoniere*. "A paro", however, intertextually draws on Petrarch's *Triumphs* where Sappho is walking "a paro", as extensively discussed by Tylus. The fact that it is repeated in this poem directs our attention to Sappho and Gaspara Stampa's poetic aspirations. Tylus, "Naming Sappho".

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

of her poems.”³⁶⁸ This statement, I argue, is also valid in regard to for example the Speroni poems, in which she claims space as a poet while simultaneously praising him in the way that she herself wants to be praised. In the same way as Collalto, Speroni is not talking in Gaspara Stampa’s poems, *she is*. The dedicative poems to Speroni, Venier and others all function in the same way.

The networks and literary circles are thus, as I have shown, central to this discourse of love and love poetry. Virginia Cox gives weight to the impact that Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara had on later women poets during the sixteenth century because they were “in a position to legitimize their writing more directly.”³⁶⁹ Certainly, women poets are still often discussed in relation to male figures such as Petrarch or Bembo, while the influence of other women seems to have been forgotten. Gaspara Stampa’s style and poetic oeuvre reveals intertextual relations to a number of key figures in the literary and philosophical context and tradition. She imitates Petrarch but, furthermore, she uses the lyrical form subversively in order to rethink commonly employed metaphors such as the phoenix and the androgyne. Most of the women poets of the time wrote poetry in a highly spiritual tone more in accordance with Neoplatonic ideals, with a few exceptions such as Tullia d’Aragona and Veronica Franco. As I have shown, Gaspara Stampa presents a complex appropriation of different sources to enable her own vision of love. She has more in common with Michelangelo and Tullia d’Aragona than with Colonna, and she was clearly aiming for the highest summits of poetry; a goal only reachable through the powerful fuel of love. Hence, I dispute the conclusion “that her love came to no good” found in Kenneth Rexroth’s elegiac poem about Gaspara Stampa cited at the very beginning. I suggest the very opposite; through her creation of a lyrical work on love with such a depth and complexity, she made herself immortal.

³⁶⁸ Tylus, “Naming Sappho,” 32.

³⁶⁹ Cox, “Sixteenth-Century Women Petrarchists and the Legacy of Laura,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2005, 602.

Concluding Remarks

This study has explored Marguerite de Navarre's and Gaspara Stampa's literary strategies through a close examination of their appropriation of Neoplatonic ideals of love and gender. Against a backdrop of the cultural and literary canon of the sixteenth century, and through a theoretical framework building on Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, I have demonstrated that Marguerite and Gaspara Stampa destabilize power relations within the discourses of love and gender, thus gendering early modern debates on love.

Although we are dealing with two rather different writers, one being a queen and the other a *virtuosa*, their literary works *Heptaméron* and *Rime* correspond in terms of the literary strategies they employ in order to give women a voice within a male-dominated culture, but also in the way they criticize and subvert prevailing norms within the discourses of gender and love.

The debates on love concerned various ways of how to understand classical and early modern treatises on love and it was often presented in the genre of the dialogue, such as in the works of Plato, Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo and Tullia d'Aragona. The philosophical ideas on love as presented within these works are interpreted, employed and redefined in Marguerite's collection of novellas and Gaspara Stampa's poems – not least when it comes to their use of the figures of the androgyne and the phoenix. The former figure mainly appears in Marguerite's work and the latter in Gaspara Stampa's; however, not exclusively since they both employ both figures.

In novella 19 of the *Heptaméron*, the phoenix appears in a poem written by the male character in his bid to convince the female protagonist, Poline, of their noble love. In the same novella, which is often described as the most Neoplatonic within the collection, repeated allusions to the androgyne are made by Poline with the same intent – to describe the noble and, more importantly, unifying effect of their love. I argue that the female character, Poline, is an illustrative example of Marguerite's literary strategy; thus, she proves capable of understanding and reciprocating intellectual and noble love. Furthermore, she is in control of the sublimating union with her beloved. In other words, this

novella is an example of how Neoplatonic ideas in a broader sense, and the figure of the androgyne specifically, are used strategically to rewrite the discourse on love and gender in order to create space for female voices within the narrative.

In Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*, the reader encounters the female voice from the very first poem, in which she imitates Petrarch's introductory poem of his *Canzoniere*. But, while Petrarch urges the reader to excuse his scattered poems of youth, she seeks glory. This poetic aspiration aligns with and depends upon her vision of love, and they come together in her subversive poetics. Poem 17 is a proclamation of this idea of love and of her skilled employment of symbolic figures, which are evoked to illustrate her own ideals. In this poem, she presents the idea of earthly love as ennobling and as a constant emotion of human life comparable to the angels' Godly love in heaven. The very first verse strongly declares her message: that she does not "envy the angels one bit" their closeness to the divine beauty of God. Thus, she experiences the very same beauty and love down on earth in the presence of her beloved. The sonnet ends "pù tosto finire", indicating the advantage the angels have in their form of love; it lasts for all eternity. However, I discuss this *pù* as a possible ambiguity and claim that the poet opens up the possibility of a reading in which earthly love may also constantly continue. This vision disputes the Neoplatonic division of love into two, one of the bodies fixed on earthly matters and one of the souls striving for the divine. Thus, in her *Rime*, Gaspara Stampa gives voice to a noble love in which both body and soul are important, but also as an emotion that is constantly reborn.

Poems 206 and 207, the 'Phoenix sonnets', also articulate these aspects, and especially the latter idea, of love as constantly reborn. The phoenix symbolizes the poet's reborn love, from fire, to ashes, into a new fire. Furthermore, these poems illustrate the poet's love for a new beloved, proving that Gaspara Stampa's poetics transcend traditional Petrarchan ideals, in which the poet worships one sole beloved who is unattainable, in her vision of love. Moreover, her employment of the phoenix yet again reveals Gaspara Stampa's skillful technique of redefining established tropes. Her version is not symbolizing a

union of Neoplatonic lovers or a resurrection in Heaven in God's eternal love, but it incorporates these traditional understandings to illustrate her ideal of the constant revival of human, earthly love.

An important aspect that follows from Gaspara Stampa's vision of love and poetics is a destabilization of power relations within a discourse where traditionally men are privileged. This is emphasized in, for example, poem 213, in which the female poet-lover speaks to her soul about the war-game that the God of Love has invited her into. I argue that, by assuming the role of a knight of love, she subverts in an intricate way both poetical and social norms of gender. Being a knight, both in actual war and in love, is a male enterprise during the sixteenth century, which is also alluded to in her poem. The relation between love and war is also a matter of discussion in the *Heptaméron*, when the male *devisants* dispute whether a man becomes more courageous and noble if he is in love or married when he goes out to war, or whether the affection for a beloved will make him weaker. Nevertheless, Gaspara Stampa continues, throughout poem 213, to embody this exact role, which, in my view, strategically underlines her appropriation of the role as a superior lover and as a female poet on the same level as male poets. Thus, she undermines misogynist ideas of women's inferiority and disproves the relations of power shaped within the male-dominated culture of the time.

Jambicque, the main character of novella 43 in Marguerite's collection, can be viewed in the same light as the poet-lover in Gaspara Stampa's poems; as acting in opposition to prevailing gender norms. Thus, when she acts upon her amorous desire for a young gentleman at court, her unconventional behavior destabilizes gendered power relations within courtly love, in which the male courtier should approach the lady. Her actions are in fact so transgressive that the gentleman worries that she is not even human. Thus, as I show, the story reveals the boundaries of gender, and even of what it is to be viewed as human – norms that Jambicque contravenes. Furthermore, I read the gentleman's chalk-mark on Jambicque's shoulder as an action with linguistic implications; he is signing her, trying to write her, although unsuccessfully, to write her back into the gender role of woman as established by a patriarchal discourse and,

subsequently, to re-establish a normative power relation. The *devisants* might call Jambicque a hypocrite, but when we consider that she is described as being more like a man than a woman, along with the actual narrative and discussion about her, it becomes clear that Marguerite is actually presenting a critique of prevailing hypocritical norms of love that are gender dependent.

I read novella 70, the story of the Duchess of Burgundy, in a similar light. While many before me have studied this story by focusing on the Duchess' malicious behavior, I suggest that the story illustrates gender fluidity as well as Marguerite's strategic employment of the androgyne. The amorous relationship that the Duchess desires leads her to act in the role of a courtier; a shift in gender roles that also forces her husband and the servant she desires to assume more feminine attributes and performances. While I propose that Neoplatonic ideals are employed at several levels in this story, the discussion of the novella only focuses on the servant and his true beloved as the most perfect lovers, and the Duchess completely disappears. This narratological strategy, to first introduce her as the main character of the story, and specifically as someone who forgets that she is a woman, and then to silence her completely, proves, in my view, both the significance and the degree of her gender-transgressive behavior.

Gaspara Stampa's employment of the androgyne appears in a poem written to a female friend, symbolizing the union they find in their friendship. Furthermore, as I have shown, it is employed in a similar manner as the angels are called upon in poem 17; namely, in order to allude to the ideals they traditionally symbolize in order to redefine them. Thus, the androgyne that symbolizes the union of a man and a woman, about which the poet-lover speaks in poem 293, is a utopian vision. As I discuss, her remark that the union would fail if the male beloved leaves her, echoes both Sperone Speroni's and Tullia d'Aragona's discussions of the mythical figure. However, in Gaspara Stampa's poem, the criticism of the idea of a lover's perfect union is presented as a warning to the male beloved, an illustration that has its source in Ficino's formulation "*chi non ama l'Amante è in colpa di omicidio*" in *De amore*. Thus, the poet-lover reminds the beloved of the inevitable justice that follows upon unreciprocated love: if he, due to his pride, leaves her, he ends her life, and is to

be accused of murder. In Gaspara Stampa's words: "Ma pur, se al fin volete, / Che'l vostro orgoglio la mia vita uccida, / Pensate, che di voi sete homicida".

In order to better assess the two writers' literary strategies, it has been necessary to consider the discourses surrounding their cultural circles and networks. People like Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna loosely connect Marguerite de Navarre and Gaspara Stampa, not least when we consider their literary production and the intertextual relations that exist between their works. While this thesis has neither deeply investigated such issues as Marguerite's extensive correspondence, nor established Gaspara Stampa's movements in the salons of Venice from archival findings, I contribute specifically with close readings with the purpose of finding intertextual parallels between the two writers and other contributors to the debates on love. However, my point is that these intertextual relations are not simply employed as part of the literary code of imitation, but are part of Marguerite's and Gaspara Stampa's strategies to subvert traditional ideas of love and gender. Many of the ideas presented in the *Heptaméron* echo, build upon or redefine dialogues, poems and other writings on love that were produced and debated within Marguerite's circles and cultural networks. Antoine Héroët's poem, *L'Androgyne*, Ficino's *De amore*, and, at least the ideas presented in, Leone Ebreo's dialogue are just a few examples of the queen's interest in Neoplatonic love philosophy.

Finally, I underline that Gaspara Stampa's networks among the cultural elite have great relevance for the vision of love that is presented in her *Rime*. I have argued for the close parallels that we can find between Gaspara Stampa, Tullia d'Aragona and Sperone Speroni. I suggest that Aragona, as the only woman writer of a philosophical dialogue on love, in particular inspired Gaspara Stampa to create her vision of earthly love's possible infinity. She also appropriates important elements from Ficino's *De amore*, but in many cases only employs these elements in order to subvert his Neoplatonic ideals of love. These relations call for further investigation and exploration, which is also a future aim.

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