

Virtuous Ladies and Melancholic "Geniuses": A Study of Gender-Based
Creativity In Italy During the Early Modern Period

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines expressions of self-identity used by creative men and women in early modern Italy (ca. 1450-1650). Self-fashioning strategies were based upon contested notions of melancholy, genius, virtue and decorum which were profoundly influenced by ancient and medieval intellectual traditions. Chapter One explores European beliefs about male artists, melancholy, and genius and examines the self-fashioning strategies of Michelangelo. As argued in Chapter Two, Christine de Pizan deployed a shifting concept of essentialism to underpin her claim for the authority of women's experience, thereby creating a space for the female author. In Chapter Three, the roles of melancholy and virtue are examined in relation to three Italian artists, Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana. Chapter Three also examines the self-portraits of Anguissola and Fontana, demonstrating how their works suggest the mutability of human identity, as these women struggled to carve out a niche for themselves as creative individuals.

Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	ii
<u>Table of Contents</u>	iii
<u>List of Illustrations</u>	v
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	vii
<u>Dedication</u>	viii
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter One - Male Creativity and Self-Fashioning During the Early Modern Period</u>	17
I. Man's Bodies and The Humours.....	21
II. Components of Creativity: Melancholy.....	23
III. Components of Creativity: Genius.....	36
IV. Components of Creativity: <i>Virtù</i>	39
V. Biography and the Male Artist.....	41
VI. The Literary Construction of Michelangelo: Problems and Perspectives.....	48
VII. Michelangelo's Self-Fashioning.....	65
<u>Chapter Two - Female Creativity and Self-Fashioning During the Early Modern Period</u>	71
I. Women's Natures, Women's Bodies.....	72
II. Women and Melancholy.....	77
III. Women and Genius.....	86
V. Women, Virtue and Creativity.....	87

	iv
V. The Third Sex.....	92
VI. Women and Education	96
VII. Women’s Biography and Christine de Pizan	106
VIII. Christine de Pizan, Worldly Prudence and “Writing like a Man”.....	109
<u>Chapter Three - Reconstructing the Woman Artist in the Early Modern Period.....</u>	<u>118</u>
I. Female Art Production During the Early Modern Period.....	122
II. The Art Historical Record: Problems and Perspectives.....	137
III. Self-Fashioning/Self-Portraits.....	158
Bibliography.....	185
Appendix:(1)Illustrations.....	198
(2) Roster of Women Artists.....	218

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1. Properzia de' Rossi, The Crest of the Grassi Family, ca. 1520. Carved peach stones, Museo Civico, Bologna.
- Fig. 2. Properzia de' Rossi, Carved Cherry Stone, ca. 1520. Carved cherry stone, Museo degli Argenti, Florence.
- Fig. 3. Properzia de' Rossi, Portal Reliefs, ca. 1525. Church of San Petronio, Bologna.
- Fig. 4. Properzia de' Rossi, The Chastity of Joseph, ca. 1526. Marble relief, Museo di San Petronio, Bologna.
- Fig. 5. Properzia de' Rossi, The Wife of Potiphar Accuses Joseph, ca. 1526, Marble relief, Museo di San Petronio, Bologna.
- Fig. 6. Sofonisba Anguissola, Boy Bitten by Crayfish, ca. 1559. Sketch. Gabinetto dei Disegni, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.
- Fig. 7. Lavinia Fontana, Noli Me Tangere, 1581. Oil on Canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
- Fig. 8. Lavinia Fontana, Portrait of a Noblewoman, ca. 1584. Oil on Canvas, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
- Fig. 9. Marietta Robusti, Self-Portrait, ca. 1580. Oil on Canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Corridoio Vasariano, Florence.
- Fig. 10. Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting, 1630. Oil on Canvas, The Royal Collection, St. James Palace, London.
- Fig. 11. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait At Easel, ca. 1556. Oil on Canvas. Museum Zamek, Lancut, Poland.
- Fig. 12. Caterina Van Hemessen, Self-Portrait, 1548. Oil on Panel, Offentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel, Switzerland.
- Fig. 13. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, 1554. Oil on Panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
- Fig. 14. Sofonisba Anguissola, Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, ca. 1550. Oil on Canvas, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena.

- Fig. 15. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait at the Clavichord, ca. 1555-6. Oil on Canvas, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.
- Fig. 16. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, 1561. Oil on canvas, Earl Spencer Collection, Althorp.
- Fig. 17. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, 1552. Oil on Canvas, Uffizi Gallery, Florence
- Fig. 18. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, No date. Private Collection.
- Fig. 19. Lavinia Fontana, Self-Portrait, 1577. Oil on Canvas, Galleria dell' Accademia di San Luca, Rome.
- Fig. 20. Lavinia Fontana, Self-Portrait, 1579. Oil on Canvas, Galleria dell' Accademia di San Luca, Rome.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father
and was written in memory of Adele Eamer-Gault Lewis

(1929-1997)

Carpe Diem

Introduction

In this thesis I examine the dialectical relationship that existed between expressions of self-identity used by creative men and women in early modern Italy,¹ and the socially-sanctioned patterns of behaviour open to individuals. This process of reciprocity is usually described in English Renaissance studies as “self-fashioning.”² Since, as attested to by Stephen Greenblatt, “the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity,” I propose that the way in which women and men viewed and presented themselves during the early modern period was dependent upon the negotiation of diverse social constraints, limitations and possibilities.³ Indeed, in many cases, particularly for women artists, they appear to have had to learn to tread with caution, negotiating their various desires and impulses within the context of socially constructed beliefs, limitations and expectations. The difficulty lies in assessing how individuals might use these constructions to increase his or her sense of power in different situations, or in more general terms, to ensure their success within a particular society. I have chosen to

¹ It is necessary at this point to explain my usage of the terms “Renaissance” and “early modern period” throughout this thesis. In recent years there has been considerable debate concerning the traditional notions of historical periodization, in particular, the use of “Renaissance” to describe Italian culture between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. While it is still used, “Renaissance” has come of late to designate a chronological period only, and not, as in the past, a distinctive era of “rebirth” or “the flowering of knowledge.” Many recent scholars, particularly feminist art historians, now utilise “early modern period” to demarcate these years because of the seeming neutrality of the term. Throughout this thesis I have employed the term “Renaissance” in accordance with the usage of a particular scholar or source or if it seemed more appropriate to do so; in most instances, however, I have adopted my preferred term, “early modern period.”

² Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago, 1980), 2.

³ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self Fashioning, 1.

focus on the shifting meanings ascribed to the concepts of melancholy, genius, *virtù*, feminine virtue and decorum, because of their importance for the understanding of self-fashioning as practised by artists during the early modern period.

In a general sense, then, this thesis examines the “traditions of creativity” that shaped male and female artists in Italy during the Cinquecento and the early Seicento. Christine Battersby’s study of gender and genius, although focused primarily on creativity during the Romantic period (ca. 1750-1850) in Europe, is of fundamental importance for understanding the effect that past artistic traditions had upon the lives of early modern artists.⁴ Her work acknowledges the importance of genius within the construction of artistic selfhood, yet demarcates the unequal social, cultural and institutional frameworks that existed for female artists. Like Battersby, my work explores how artistic creativity has been determined by an overarching concept of gender that informed so much of cultural, social and political traditions in the early modern period. For the purposes of this study, the term “gender” refers to the behaviours, attitudes, and demeanours culturally attributed to, and expected of, each sex.⁵

Renaissance humanists were drawn to texts that established fashionable “ways of being” for the elite. Translations and interpretations of newly-discovered and previously-known ancient texts provided new terms of reference with which to address an increasingly secularised society. Among these translated works were the life stories or biographies of

⁴ Christine Battersby, Gender and Genius: Towards a New Feminist Aesthetics, (Bloomington, 1990).

⁵ As discussed in Merry E. Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, (Cambridge, U.K., 1993), 3.

eminent citizens from antiquity. By implementing specific literary archetypes constructed within anecdotes, biography was instrumental in shaping perceptions of these individuals' lives. Mainly interested in types, biography served a didactic, moralising function, placing either praise or blame upon its subjects and delineating acceptable and antisocial behaviour. From these classical stories, archetypes concerning the character of prominent individuals were established and their exploits were lauded as worthy of emulation by their readers. As my work proceeded on this thesis, I became aware of the importance of understanding how biographical traditions influenced art practice in the Renaissance/early modern period.

Fifteenth-and sixteenth-century writers recognised that many of the poets of antiquity were able to create because of their state of melancholia, with all its positive and negative qualities. The concept of melancholy was initially introduced to society in the work of the Neoplatonist philosopher, doctor of medicine, musician and magician Marsilio Ficino (1433-99).⁶ Male scholars, academics, and creative people in general laid claim to the condition of melancholia, in varying degrees, to promote their intellectual prowess; male artists in particular used the idea to enhance their technical abilities as craftsmen.⁷

The almost indefinable ability to create, therefore, usually lay exclusively within the province of men. While melancholy was principally connected with the arts, the concept of genius, a term normally associated with artistic creativity in twentieth-century thought, was usefully employed in other areas of male endeavour. In antiquity, military leaders and rulers

⁶ Juliana Schiesari, The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature (London, 1992), 114.

⁷ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art (London, 1964), 242.

were believed to possess genius. At that time the word *genius*, from Latin origin, referred to an individuals' lifelong guardian spirit.⁸ It was first connected to the arts in the realm of poetry; the ancients identified its seemingly spontaneous creation as divinely-inspired. This meaning was transmuted in the early modern period to become the god-given capacity to create. The way in which genius is termed today, as an extraordinarily-creative spirit manifesting itself in super-human achievement, and superior as to talent, belongs in the main to the eighteenth century, when it became “the prerogative of a highly selected and privileged few.”⁹ During that period, genius was supposedly given by the divine powers to men only. It was not used to define the creative woman because of her supposed emotional and physical natures. According to Aristotelian theory, neither the female body nor mind could manifest or support such a gift.

By the early modern period the meaning of the word *genius* had shifted to embrace yet another connotation which also stemmed from the Latin, *ingenium*, meaning “natural disposition” or “innate ability,” thereby connecting artistic talent with the concept of *virtù* which, as shall be seen, united both a man's intellect and his imagination. However, while the use of the word “genius” as we define it today was not used in early modern texts, “the Renaissance image of the *divino artista* clearly prefigures the genius of later ages.”¹⁰ In fact, as we shall see below, to be historically accurate, contemporary art historians should

⁸ Penelope Murray, ed, introduction to *Genius: The History of An Idea*, (Oxford, U.K., 1989), 2 ; Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 53, states that after Augustus was proclaimed Emperor in 27 BCE, worship of [his] *genius* became part of institutionalised state religion.

⁹ Murray, *Genius*, 3.

¹⁰ Murray, *Genius*, 5.

converse instead about art works displaying an artist's capacity for *virtù*; to define the early modern artist they should more properly refer to individuals as *virtuoso* and *virtuosa*.¹¹ Indeed, the Italian painter, architect, biographer and first European art historian, Giorgio Vasari (1511-74), stated that the best Renaissance masters were those who had mastered *regole*, *misura* and *disegno*; he rarely or never uses the word "genius," which is the result of later translators' misconceptions.¹²

In the past few decades, studies of female creativity in the arts during the early modern period have flourished.¹³ Juliana Schiesari has written a key text concerning female creativity in literary criticism.¹⁴ Using Freudian terms of analysis, she establishes that, while women writers in this period were described as being more prone to depressive states that inhibited creativity and productivity, melancholy for men was seen as a vital, enabling component of their literary creativity. The work of Teresa Soufas, on Spanish women writers in the Golden Age, suggests that these authors sought to redirect the negative

¹¹ Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style, (Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 1988), was one of the first art historians to identify the very different vocabulary of art used by fifteenth-century Italian Florentine theorists. For the meanings given to *virtuoso*, *virtuosa* and *genius* in Italy during the early modern period see, Martin Kemp, "The 'Super-artist' as Genius: The Sixteenth-Century View," in Genius 34-36; Fredrika H. Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola," Renaissance Quarterly, 47/1, (Spring 1994), 74-101 and Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists And The Language of Art History and Criticism (Cambridge, U.K., 1997).

¹² Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 21. See below, Chapter One.

¹³ In art history see the important overviews of: Paola Tinagli, Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity (New York, 1997); and Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa.

¹⁴ Schiesari, The Gendering of Melancholia.

connotations of the humoral and literary traditions for female writers and their readers, in order to enhance the creative power inherent in melancholia and create new outlets for female scholarly creativity.¹⁵ As shall be seen in this study, since the sixteenth century, melancholy has been considered to play a shaping role in the life of the Bolognese sculptor, Properzia de' Rossi; Chapter Three presents some of the dilemmas and difficulties inherent in such an interpretation.

Virtue for men was crucial in determining the development and status of the “gentleman” within the urban or regional courts of Renaissance Italy. Courage and talent in the arts of war were the two most desirable virtues for the male courtier to possess along with, “wisdom, courtesy, justice and liberality.”¹⁶ The Italian writer, poet, and humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), associated male virtue with his idea of “discretion.” Honesty (*onestà*) tempered with *discrezione* “resulted in operative wisdom (*senno*), an inward virtuous habit allied with an outward decorous personality.”¹⁷ As well, he defined *virtù* as being associated with “virile determination and capability to effect what was good and right.”¹⁸

While the practising male artist was likely concerned with displaying any or all of these traits, virtue or *virtù* held yet another meaning for him. *Virtù* was an indication of his “special [artistic] talents,” which were considered “God-given” and could not be properly

¹⁵ Teresa S. Soufas, “The Gendered Context of Melancholy For Spanish Golden Age Women Writers,” Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities, eds, Magdalena S. Sánchez and Alain Saint-Saëns, (Westport CT/London, 1996): 171-184.

¹⁶ Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, trans, Thomas Hoby, (London, 1907), 4.

¹⁷ Aldo D. Scaglione, Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages, (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1963), 85.

¹⁸ Scaglione, Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages, 85.

compensated with money, only recognition. The identification of the artist as possessing *virtù*, which combined both intellectual and imaginative abilities (*ingegno* and *invenzione*) usually led to his acceptance as *familiaris* in the inner circle of a court household. Some artists were even granted knighthoods.¹⁹

Conversely, decorum and not *virtù* was deemed an essential component of female creativity during the early modern period.²⁰ The qualities touted in classical biographies of women were their physical beauty, selfless nature, and multifaceted domestic and artistic skills. Virtue, decorum, chastity and other “appropriate” maidenly qualities, were therefore the constructs used in association with female artistic ability. At first glance, it appears that the self-portraits of Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana are straight-forward examples of their modesty, chastity, decorum and virtue, which reinforce the dominant constructions used by women to fashion a place for themselves in the Renaissance; my thesis will suggest that such readings do not present the complete picture of what it meant to create as a female artist (painter, sculptor, writer, musician) in this period.

Virtue then, along with melancholy, genius and *virtù* were culturally manufactured elements (a form of mythologizing) used to define the artist, male and female, during the early modern period. Their utilisation maintained certain ancient myths and perpetuated new ones

¹⁹ Alison Cole, Art of the Italian Renaissance Court: Virtue and Magnificence, (London, 1995), 36-43. See below, Chapter One, Components of Creativity: *Virtù*.

²⁰ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance *Virtuosa*, 118. Boccaccio had praised the ancient painter Marcia by stating that she had the choice to either, “make men imperfect, or, by making them perfect, forget her maidenly modesty.” Decorum, that is, the type of behaviour required by politeness or decency, was seen as a necessary consideration and practice for the woman artist in order that she not risk her reputation as a virtuous woman. In this regard see below Chapter Three.

regarding the artist's personality. Thus, another crucial component of this thesis is an investigation of the ahistorical myths that informed (and continue to inform) Renaissance religious, cultural, social and political traditions. As suggested by Peter Burke, myths were used to justify certain institutions or customs and to maintain their viability over long periods.²¹ This thesis will approach these ideas as stereotypes in need of analysis, deconstruction and destabilisation. With reference to the latter, as shall be seen in the case of Properzia de Rossi, this artist appears to have resisted conformity with prevalent notions of social behaviour. In my thesis, I argue that more work is required on the problem of analysing the complex relationship between social norms, deviance, and the propensity of writers to mythologize artists. Destabilisation is a critical component of historical analysis due to its constant questioning of the ways in which the past is viewed and its recognition that all views are ultimately constructions and more indicative of the historian than of the period under scrutiny.

Chapter One, "Male Creativity and Self-Fashioning During the Early Modern Period," explores European beliefs about male artists, melancholy and genius. I will discuss male virtue and *virtù* as defined in the Renaissance in order to set the stage for Chapters Two and Three, which focus on creative women during this period. A short survey of the literary tradition of biography will trace its origins from antiquity to the mid-sixteenth century publication of Giorgio Vasari's Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori

²¹ Peter Burke, History and Social Theory, (New York, 1992), 103-104.

italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri: Descritte in lingua Toscana, da Giorgio Vasari Pittore Aretino.²²

Vasari's Le Vite, initially published in Italy in 1550, was the first early modern biography in Europe dedicated exclusively to the practitioners of the visual arts. Within his work Vasari used both the traditional archetypes and literary forms of ancient sacred and secular biographies to describe the Renaissance artist, thus maintaining a number of the myths concerning types which had been formulated in the classical period. His work continues to influence the way in which artists are perceived in the textual record.

The formal elements of biography, along with the archetypes and conventions of the stories of artists, will be discussed in order to outline the contribution they have made to the constructions of myths and stereotypes concerning the early modern artist.

This chapter focuses also on a case study of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) who is perhaps the most studied and analysed artist in history.²³ Michelangelo himself, (as

²² Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568, eds, Rosanna Bettarini and Paolo Barocchi, 6 Vol. (Florence, 1987) was the Italian text used for reference in this work. Ascanio Condivi, The Life of Michelangelo, trans. Alice Sedgewick Wohl, ed. Hellmut Wohl (Baton Rouge, 1976), 123, note 1, contends that Vasari's first edition has been, for the most part, neglected after the publication of the second edition (1568) and has never been translated into English. According to Patricia Rubin, Giorgio Vasari: Art and History, (New Haven/London, 1995), 416, "there is at present no complete critical edition of The Lives in English, and not even a very reliable translation."

²³ Works on Michelangelo include a number of psychoanalytic studies i.e., Robert S. Liebert, Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images, (New Haven, 1983); Howard Hibbard, Michelangelo, (New York, 1974). The construction of Michelangelo as a person and an artist has also been the subject of numerous works e.g. Paul Barolsky, Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and Its Maker, (London, 1990) and "The Metamorphoses of Michelangelo," Virginia Quarterly Review, 68, 1 (Winter, 1992), 208-217. Michelangelo's theory of art has also been a popular topic of discussion, i.e., David Summers, Michelangelo and the

well as biographers and art historians over the years), participated in self-fashioning through his poetry, his correspondence and his artwork. He did so in order to cultivate for himself a spectrum of desired and exclusive images, from the melancholic eccentric, to the learned and sensitive Neoplatonic thinker and poet.²⁴ These layers of persona are summarised here, based on the work of Giorgio Vasari, Raymond Klibansky and Erwin Panofsky, Margot and Rudolf Wittkower, and more recently Robert Clements, James Saslow and Paul Barolsky.

Chapter Two, “Female Creativity and Self-Fashioning During the Early Modern Period,” begins with a brief examination of classical and patristic texts which fostered beliefs concerning the inherent mental and physical nature of women. Influential writers within the disciplines of philosophy, medicine, religion and literature will be briefly discussed to emphasise the way in which the teachings in these disciplines were conjoined, both before and during the Renaissance, to institute a philosophical and societal place of difference for woman within society.

The nature of virtue and decorum and their impact upon the lives of women during the early modern period will also be discussed. For example, the evidence of contemporary conduct literature provides valuable insights into the types of behaviour expected of and praised in women.²⁵ It advised those of the upper-class to be prudent, chaste, obedient and

Language of Art, (New Jersey, 1981). The question of the historical location of the artist within the definition of melancholy has been investigated in such works as Kristen Lippincott, “When was Michelangelo Born?” Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institute, 52, (1989), 228-232 and Don Riggs, “Was Michelangelo Born Under Saturn?” Sixteenth Century Journal, XXVI, 1 (1995), 99-121.

²⁴ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose.

²⁵ See, in particular: Castiglione, The Courtier; Christine de Pizan, The Book of the City of Ladies, trans, Earl Jeffrey Richards, (New York, 1982); Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of

modest. The idealisation of these characteristics, along with the requisite filial obligations, led to the construction of a myriad of self-imposed and socially-generated boundaries for all women.

As Chapter One demonstrates, masculine virtue brought with it greater societal freedom, while adherence to virtue for women potentially led to their invisibility and self-effacement within early modern society. Such constructs of virtue meant that creative women, in order to produce, had to approach and negotiate their situation in a way that sanctioned their virtue as well as their desire to create and to be visible within society.

Chapter Two examines key trends in women's secular and sacred biography that support these contradictory ideas of self-effacement, invisibility and self-expression. For creative women, these aspirations presented an interesting dilemma. Although they were to observe the strict guidelines of private chastity, modesty and decorum, they were simultaneously involved in activities which often ensured that the eyes of the public would be upon them and the results of their labours. Despite these contradictory desires, and the dynamic that pulled them in multiple directions, a number of female visual artists, along with women writers and musicians in the early modern period *did* create meaningful and popular works, and achieve considerable fame and renown.²⁶

One creative woman who was both famous and financially successful during her life time has garnered enormous scholarly interest in recent years. The Franco-Italian writer

the Renaissance (Urbana, Illinois, 1956) and Luis de Leon, Poesias; El Cantar de los Cantares; La perfecta Casada, (Madrid, 1970).

²⁶ See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed, A History of Women in the West, Vol. 2-3, (Cambridge, Mass, 1992).

Christine de Pizan (1365-1430) challenged traditional notions surrounding women's position and role in early modern European society. Her prose and poetry gave authority to the female experience by celebrating the nature and accomplishments of women, offering practical advice by which contemporary females could live virtuous lives, and by proclaiming herself as both author and subject within these works. As will be discussed below, Pizan often referred to herself as a man in order to justify and explain her involvement in public life and her role as the family breadwinner, demonstrating her awareness of the societal constructs surrounding gender. Overall, Pizan's work deployed a concept of biological essentialism, constructing women's nature as positive and virtuous. She was one of the first early modern authors to provide an alternative to the customary discourse which posited all things female as negative and inferior.²⁷

In Chapter Three, "Reconstructing the Woman Artist in the Early Modern Period," I will analyse how the constructions of virtue and melancholy played a role in the self-fashioning strategies of three Italian female artists: the sculptor Properzia de' Rossi, (1490-1530) and painters, Sofonisba Anguissola (1532/35-1625) and Lavinia Fontana, (1552-1614). These women lead creative lives of considerable renown within sixteenth-century Italian

²⁷ Throughout the early modern period there were two trends in literature concerning the nature of women: one was misogynistic, the other apologist. Pamela Joseph Benson, The Invention of the Renaissance Woman :The Challenge of Female Independent Thought in the Literature of Italy and England, (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992) identifies the best-known defences of women written in Italy as: Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris (1355-1359); Antonio Cornazzano's De mulieribus admirandis (1467); Vespasiano da Bisticci's Il Libro delle lode e commendazione delle donne (ca. 1480); Giovanni Sabadion degli Arienti's Gynevera de la clare donne (1483); Bartolomeo Goggio's De laudibus mulierum (1487); Agostino Strozzi's Defensio mulierum (ca. 1501); Galeazzo Flavio Capella's Della Eccellenza et dignità della donna (1525); Baldesar Castiglione's Il Libro del Cortegiano (ca. 1528) and Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando furioso (1516 & 1532).

society. The archival research and interpretative writings concerning Rossi, Anguissola and Fontana, in relation to other women artists of the time, are the most extensive to date. There has been a substantial number of scholarly articles published about their lives and work, resulting from the study of extant primary sources such as letters, account books, legal proceedings, and biographies. These women passed their individual lives in different ways but were shaped and limited by similar societal constructs and attitudes.

My concentration on these three specific female artists in no way infers that they were the only ones active in the visual arts in the early modern period or whose lives and work are worth considering. As indicated in Appendix II, there were a number of practising women artists in the Renaissance. Some are probably lost forever because of the dearth of documentation concerning their lives or because of the misattribution of their work. It is obvious that future scholars need to engage in further archival research, so that the presently unknown or little known early modern woman artist can become part of the art historical record.²⁸

Chapter Three concludes with a discussion of the self-portraits of Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana. Battersby states that, “[t]he work of women writers and artists has to be...situated in traditions of female creativity.”²⁹ Their self-portraits present some fascinating questions about the mutability of human identity, as well as highlighting the dialectical process involved in self-fashioning for the creative woman. In accordance with a recent work of Valerie Traub, I contend that the emergence of the woman artist in the early

²⁸ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 165-68.

²⁹ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 10.

modern period takes place “within highly-contested terms of cultural struggle.” As women they are “marked differently than men and [while] they may or may not be accorded [an interior reflective life], agency, and status, they can [and do] make claims for cultural recognition only through available means.”³⁰ As Whitney Chadwick says of the self-portraits by Anguissola, “[they] return the focus of painting to the personal, which cannot be read as heroic, or larger than life, or divine.”³¹ Despite the apparent limitations, it seems clear that the painter may have embraced these qualities as necessary enabling strategies. It has been said, for instance, that, “she *needed* to present herself in her portraits as sufficiently feminine and lady-like to convince the viewer that she could be a socially safe member of a court [italics mine].”³²

As I worked on my thesis, I became aware that some modern art historians assumed that these female artists were “proto-feminists.” Wanting their subjects to challenge somehow Renaissance patrilineal beliefs and practices, they imbue them with a dubious feminist profile that is unlikely given the constraints of early modern European society.³³ Such work is ahistorical and continues to uphold the importance of male attributes, i.e., the

³⁰ Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplin and Dymphna Callighan eds, Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects, (Cambridge, U.K., 1996), 2.

³¹ Whitney Chadwick, Women, Art and Society (London, 1990), 76.

³² Catherine King, “Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 58/3, (1995), 387.

³³ Mary D. Garrard, “Here’s Looking At Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist,” Renaissance Quarterly, 47/3, (Autumn 1994): 556-622; and Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance, (New York, 1992). For a fuller discussion of the critical problems surrounding these artists see below, Chapter Three “The Art Historical Record: Problems and Perspectives.”

avenging hero(ine) who possesses “masculine” qualities. As Janet Wolff says, “women’s writing and women’s art, like women’s knowledge, begins to articulate the silenced voice of women, but it is obliged to do so in the context of a dominant, alien, but ultimately enabling culture.”³⁴

Like Wolff, I contend that both history and gender relations are more complex than Garrard, Perlingieri and others suggest. As we shall see, their accounts either erase any sense of the real differences that existed between male and female artists, or their analysis fails to consider the ways in which individuals negotiate that difference, and their place in society in a particular time or space. As a result, their work falls short of the recommendations put forth by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, namely, that historians should, “restore conflict, ambiguity and tragedy to the centre of the historical process...” and, “explore the varied and unequal terms upon which genders, classes and races participate in...”³⁵ In order to achieve this in my own work, I undertake a double-reading and double-writing of how artists participated in the process of self-fashioning. Pioneered by Joan Kelly-Gadol, the concept of double-reading, “acknowledge[s] the structuring role of contradictions and conflicts...” and “requires a fundamental dislodging of the opposition as such, which relinquishes valuing one term against another and instead promotes a questioning of the entire system of terms.”³⁶ Instead of regarding male and female self-fashioning as polar, as the positive/negative of each other,

³⁴ Janet Wolff, “Women’s Knowledge and Women’s Art,” in Feminist Sentences, (Oxford, U.K., 1990), 82.

³⁵ Griselda Pollock, ed, introduction to Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings, (New York, 1996), 19.

³⁶ Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, eds, introduction to Refiguring Woman: Perspective on Gender and the Italian Renaissance, (London, 1991), 13.

with women as lacking, my writing relates to that of Rosi Braidotti whose work addresses the concept of women not as “different from but [as] different so as to bring about alternative values.”³⁷ By double-reading and double-writing about the shifting terms of melancholy, genius, virtue and decorum, in relation to artistic self-fashioning, I recognise some of the unresolved dilemmas inherent in reconstructing the lives of early modern artists.

³⁷ Rosi Braidotti, “The Subject in Feminism,” in Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory, (New York, 1994), 238-39.

Chapter One

Male Creativity and Self-fashioning During the Early Modern Period

“Melancholy is my joy; and discomfort is my rest”
-Michelangelo Buonarroti¹

The early modern artistic community, situated within a society which systematically looked to the past in order to direct the present, reused and reconstructed ancient beliefs to inform its definition of creativity, which in turn, determined its self-fashioning. This chapter examines how definitions and expectations of creativity for male artists were largely determined by early modern interpretations of ancient concepts surrounding melancholy, *ingenium* and *virtù*. Stephen Greenblatt has examined the process of self-fashioning, the “expression of identity” in the lives of four prominent men in British sixteenth-century society: Thomas More, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare.² He identifies a number of “governing conditions common in these particular instances of [Renaissance] self-fashioning.” Those most pertinent to the purposes of my study have to do with issues surrounding authority and alienation. While the early modern period, in particular the sixteenth century, has been commonly viewed by traditional historians as a time of intellectual growth and freedom, it was also a time which experienced a shift towards absolutism and a narrowing of options for the individual. Monarchs and rulers across Europe were claiming and exercising greater powers over their public. The family, considered to be

¹ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 74, “*La mia allegrezza e’ la maniconia; E’ l mio riposo son questi disagi.*”

² Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning.

a reflection of the state, tightened control over its members. As Greenblatt says, there was a “new dedication to the imposition of control upon [society, politics and religion] and ultimately to the destruction of alternatives.”³ Greenblatt views self-fashioning as the submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside of the self. He argues further that self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something alien, strange or hostile. This “threatening other” must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed. Lastly, the power generated to attack the alien [or other] in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend: “[h]ence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self.”⁴ Greenblatt argues that citizens of the Renaissance state were therefore not totally autonomous, as has been previously assumed; rather, he asserts that individuals engaged in a more dialectic reaction to current social, religious and political circumstances. The relationship between Thomas More and Henry VIII is a powerful example of what Greenblatt calls “the complex interplay ...of self-fashioning and self-cancelling, the crafting of a public role and the profound desire to escape from the identity so-crafted.”⁵

Since the Renaissance viewed creativity as a divine gift, inherent within the nature of the male artist, there has been little acknowledgement of the role played by societal or cultural constructs in the production of art, or how those constructs differed according to the sex of the producer. While melancholy, genius and *virtù* were the three major theoretical

³ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 2.

⁴ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 8-9.

⁵ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 13.

elements of male creativity in the Renaissance, other more practical and tangible conventions were needed to sustain them. These conventions constituted the practice and production of art, and included a community of artists and patrons; a recognised regime of artistic and formal training and the establishment of a hierarchy of subject matter and medium. As Gerda Lerner reminds us, “all intellectual work is fostered and encouraged by institutional support and, despite the appearance of talented persons of genius of both sexes in a random scattering across the historical time lines...there is a notable clustering of male intellectuals around certain institutions and places.”⁶ A similar development in art making may be seen in the Italian Renaissance.

In response to this notion, Chapter One looks firstly at how the history of biological difference between men and women, in antiquity and the early modern period is constructed, as well as the perceived male capacity for exercising intelligence, logic, judgement et cetera, and the resulting impact of these ideas or themes of creativity in the Renaissance. Secondly, three key components of creativity are discussed: melancholy, genius and *virtù*/ virtue. In my test case of Michelangelo’s self-fashioning, I review the construction of biography in general, to ascertain better how many of the assumptions adopted by Renaissance biographers (and even some modern art historians) were based on ideas from antiquity with a long pedigree. As shall be seen in the subsequent section, Vasari takes many of these motives and uses them to shape his writing of The Lives.

⁶ Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy, (New York/Oxford, 1993), 222.

Thirdly, due to his prominent position in the world of Renaissance art and the art-historical tradition in general, I look at the methods of self-fashioning undertaken by Michelangelo. Considered by his contemporaries and himself as a melancholic genius who possessed both virtue and *virtù*, Michelangelo also participated within the world of art production, both as a workshop apprentice and an artist who received patronage from many quarters. In addition, he is of particular interest to this thesis because of his proficient and acknowledged self-fashioning. Paul Barolsky claims that Michelangelo, was, “far more than has been recognised, responsible for his own myth.”⁷ He contends that the artist orchestrated his public image through the written word in the biographies of Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi, and within his own letters and poetry. Although there are no clear self-portraits amongst his extant works, scholars have identified Michelangelo’s image in a number of his artworks.⁸ In order to understand how Renaissance creativity and Michelangelo’s self-fashioning came to be, this chapter begins with an exploration of the ancient beliefs regarding the inherent nature of the male body, notions which had a decisive impact on early modern thought.

⁷ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, XVII.

⁸ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, states that the artist identified with and portrayed himself as a variety of historical and mythological figures, i.e., Socrates, Plato, Saint Bartholomew, Nicodemus and Saint Paul; Robert J. Clements, The Poetry of Michelangelo, (New York, 1965), 178, claims that, “while Michelangelo was reticent about rendering self-portraits proper, he probably did project and identify himself in almost a dozen works of arts;” Jerome D. Oremland, Michelangelo’s Sistine Ceiling: A Psychoanalytic Study of Creativity, (Connecticut, 1989), 103 and 110, identifies the prophets on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, in particular Jeremiah, as used by Michelangelo to “capture his turmoil as a man burdened by the divine gift,” and the elderly man in his 1527-30, Victory, conquered by the handsome youth standing above as a symbol of humiliation in the sculptors’ personal life ;

Men's Bodies and The Humours

The ancients believed that the human body contained four principal temperaments, distinct human natures or characteristics. Individuals could possess and display some combination of sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic natures. By 200 CE in Greece, these natures were perceived as critical in the determination of an individuals' personality and physique.⁹ Approximately 200 years later, it was believed that these temperaments or natures existed and reacted in the body as "humours" or fluids and that in various quantities they determined the character and physical appearance of an individual. These humours were believed to comprise nearly all the fluid content in the body. Ideally, the body would maintain equal and moderate amounts of all the humours. The predominance of one over the others meant bodily imbalance and resulting illness.

The Greeks considered blood the most desirable humour to possess, phlegm the next, then black bile and finally, yellow bile.¹⁰ Each humour had two of four possible characteristics: warmth, coldness, moistness or dryness. Warmth and moistness were deemed the most desirable humoral traits to possess, while coldness and dryness were the least. Blood was the warm and moist humour of the sanguine temperament or personality. Individuals with an adequate amount of blood were considered courageous, hopeful and amorous and were believed to possess a pleasing appearance and ruddy complexion. Phlegm

Liebert, Michelangelo, 87-89, 244, believes that the artist represented himself as Saint John in the 1503-04, Tondi Doni and as General Holofernes on the Sistine ceiling;

⁹ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy. 14, note 39 .

¹⁰ Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642, (East Lansing, Michigan, 1951), 9.

was the cold and moist humour of the calm, unexcitable and unemotional person. Warmth and dryness characterised the yellow bile of the quick-to-anger and volatile choleric individual. Lastly, the black bile or, *melainhn cholhs* of the melancholic, the sad, gloomy, despairing and mournful individual, was cold and dry.

While individual bodies contained humours in a variety of combinations, for the ancients, the sex of those bodies determined the types and amounts of humours lodged within them. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was the first to use the humours to define the nature of the sexes. He also concocted a theory of opposites and dichotomies which informed much of Greek thought.¹¹ Within these dichotomies, there was a hierarchical structure in which one element was superior and one inferior to the other. Aristotle structured the sexes as opposites. Men inherently possessed the most desirable warm and moist constitution. It was Aristotle's use of polarity, and the hierarchical ranking of related opposites, such as, man/woman, light/dark, good/evil, that profoundly influenced how the western world has historically viewed the sexes.¹² Aristotle believed that males were nature's greatest creation, and that they played the dominant role in the procreative process because their sperm held, "the spark of life." It was a foregone assumption within classical writings that men were both different than and superior to women.¹³ Due to a man's warm nature, he was better able to modify any of the humours that vied for dominance in his body. He was able to "heat up"

¹¹ Ian MacLean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study of the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life, (Cambridge, 1980), 2-3.

¹² MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 2.

¹³ Vern L. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, eds. Clare A. Lees et al, (Minneapolis, 1994), 31.

the cold and dry black bile his body contained so that, in excess, its effects would not be so devastating upon his constitution. As we shall see, in some cases, melancholy could be a benefit to a man's creativity.

Components of Creativity: Melancholy

Studies of creativity in an historical context have tended to focus on either ancient Greece, or the Romantic period in Great Britain and the United States.¹⁴ Renaissance creativity, if discussed at all, has been primarily used to connect these two time periods. The origin of the current definitions of creativity can be found in classical Greek philosophy.¹⁵ Early modern scholars and thinkers adopted the philosophies of either Plato (ca. 429-ca. 347 BCE) or those of his pupil Aristotle, regarding creativity. Plato believed that the extraordinarily ingenious person had the creative ability to manufacture something out of nothing, prompted by a flash of divine inspiration.¹⁶ Aristotle, on the other hand, viewed

¹⁴ Michael Greenhalgh and Paul Duro, Essential Art History, (London, 1992), 257-58, defines Romanticism as a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century literary and artistic movement which emphasised the imagination, the expression of emotion and the relationship of the individual to nature. Romanticism identified with the "wilder manifestations of nature" and natural disasters. It promoted itself and is still considered an era of the mad, tormented, solitary male genius personified by such individuals as composers Franz Schubert and Robert Schuman, writers Lord Byron and John Keats and artists William Blake and Eugene Delacroix.

¹⁵ Greenhalgh and Duro, Essential Art History, 95, define creativity before the eighteenth century as "the principal attribute separating the intellectual...from the imitative and the mechanical," and that of the post-Romantic era as "the essence of artistic activity."

¹⁶ Babb, Elizabethan Malady, 59; Murray, in introduction, Genius, 4.

creativity more as the product of suffering souls who gained some release from their mental torment by writing, playing instruments or painting.¹⁷

This study of artistic creativity in the early modern period begins with a historical examination of one of its most basic components, namely melancholy. The word itself is a Latin translation from the Greek meaning black bile or *atra bilis*. Each of the four humours were thought to be located in two bodily organs; black bile, “a noxious degeneration of yellow bile or blood,” settled into either the liver or the spleen and exited through the eyes, perhaps as tears of sadness or despair.¹⁸ Aristotle in Problems XXX, was the first to make a distinction between those individuals who were melancholic by temperament or *per natura*, that is, those in whom black bile had always been predominant, and those for whom melancholy was a disease or *per infermita*, a result of the physical imbalance of humours.¹⁹

The first-known reference to melancholy as a disease appeared in the Hippocratic writings of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE where it was associated with “aversion to food, despondency, sleeplessness, irritability [and] restlessness.”²⁰ Melancholy was thought to originate in a body containing an excess of black bile. Like all the humours, black bile was capable of changing temperature, thus determining individual personality. If the bile was

¹⁷ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 39 and 42, state that while the “notions of creative frenzy ... were not unacceptable to ... Aristotle, ... they were not always explicitly stated.”

¹⁸ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 4 and 58.

¹⁹ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholia, 102-3; Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 42.

²⁰ Stanley W. Jackson, Melancholia and Depression From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times, (New Haven/London, 1986), 30.

cold, the individual tended to be sluggish, dull, and depressed, if hot, one was excitable, lively, or overly amorous. Moderation in temperature as well as amount was necessary in order that “natural” melancholy not become melancholic illness. Only then could it be instrumental in the creative process.²¹ However, due to the possibility of temperature fluctuations, the gifted melancholic was in constant danger of becoming ill and had to be always on guard against depression and sadness. While it was believed that the amount and temperature of black bile was influenced by outside stimuli and could be held in check or aggravated by individual actions regarding diet, bodily evacuation, exercise, strong feelings or scholarly endeavours, it could also be influenced by those forces beyond human control, such as the movement of the celestial bodies.

Although well known to scholars, the complicated history of how the four temperaments and the planets were linked in antiquity is worth recounting. The planet Saturn became associated with the condition of melancholy early in antiquity. Saturn was named for the mythological Roman god Saturn who had been derived from the Greek god Kronos, an ancient deity of seeds and sowing, worshipped as the creator of agriculture. He was the father of many gods, including Zeus. Aware of the prophesy that he was fated to be usurped by one of his male children, Kronos would swallow them at birth. However his wife/sister Rhea hid the new-born Zeus from his father. After growing to manhood, Zeus castrated and dethroned Kronos as ruler of the universe. Despite his family problems, Kronos’ reign was regarded as a “Golden Age” by the Greeks. They commonly associated

²¹ Babb, Elizabethan Malady, 60; Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 31-32.

him with the origins of humankind and pastoral tranquillity, while Zeus was blamed for introducing culture and thus its inherent problems into the world.²² Perceptions of Kronos as either benign or sinister played a role in the formation of his legend. The ancients attempted to come to terms with Kronos' less attractive qualities in order to claim him as a defining figure in their own origins.²³ The personality, attributes and image of Kronos was adopted ca. 217 BCE by the Romans for the persona of their god Saturn.²⁴ The origins of Saturn were obscure and he too was refashioned, rendering him more palatable to the general public.²⁵ Kronos/Saturn represented a study of opposites for those identifying with his personality.

In the fourth century science began to associate individual human and godly character traits with the celestial bodies.²⁶ Saturn was viewed as the coldest and slowest of the planets due to its distance from the sun and because it required thirty years to complete its orbit. Since it was named for Kronos/Saturn, the planet began to represent those

²² Gianni Guastalla, "Saturn, Lord of the Golden Age," Saturn From Antiquity to The Renaissance, eds., Massimo Ciavolella and Amilcare A. Iannucci, (Ottawa, 1992), 7-8.

²³ Guastalla, "Saturn, Lord of the Golden Age," 9.

²⁴ Caroline Thomas Harnsberger, Gods and Heroes: A Quick Guide to the Occupations, Associations and Experience of the Greek and Roman Gods and Heroes. (New York, 1977), 343.

²⁵ Giuseppe Pucci, "Roman Saturn: The Shady Side," Saturn from Antiquity to the Renaissance, 38, claims that Saturn's origins can be traced back to the Etruscan god Satre, Lord of the Underworld associated with death and funerals.

²⁶ Pucci, "Roman Saturn: The Shady Side," 37 states that, "This identification [between God and planet] had its origins in the Hellenistic period through the influence of astrological doctrines...and was completed in the Late Empire with the development of astrology as a religion."

characteristics identified with his personality. It was associated with poverty, old age, death, violence, sadness, cruelty and solitude. Those born “under Saturn,” upon days in the year over which the planet was deemed to rule, were considered by the ancients to occupy the lowest levels of society, such as beggars, grave diggers, peasants, cripples and criminals.²⁷

During antiquity, it was the planet Mercury that was believed to rule over and determine the personality of the visual artist and other “cheerful, lively men of action.”²⁸ Those born under its sign were believed, like its namesake the Roman God Mercury, to possess eloquence and skill and to be adept in both trading and thievery. Mercury was named for the Greek God Hermes, the clever and devious son of Zeus, who, as an infant, was reputed to have invented the lyre, pan pipes and footwear.²⁹ He was also credited with the discovery of fire and with the theft of Apollo’s cattle. As a youth, Zeus gave him the right to barter with humankind. Mercury/Hermes’ predisposition towards quickness of mind and body, learning and invention meant that visual artists, artisans, inventors, travellers, traders and thieves were thought to be influenced and protected by his planet.

While “ordinary people” such as merchants, artisans, peasants or slaves could be either championed or afflicted by the personality of the gods and their planets, and were susceptible to both pleasure or suffering due to the bodily presence of humours, the Greeks did not consider them capable of possessing the “temperamental disposition [capable of]

²⁷ Amilcare Iannucci, “Saturn in Dante”, Saturn from Antiquity to the Renaissance, 53.

²⁸ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, xiii-xiv.

²⁹ Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, Classical Mythology, ((New York,, 1991), 221-237.

outstanding accomplishment.”³⁰ Melancholic illnesses, which could afflict the masses and take on many forms, ranged from mental and physical immobility to love-melancholy, and lycanthropy, (the belief that one was a wolf). They were viewed as “common,” relegated to the lower classes and not states associated with creativity. While melancholy appeared to strike both upper and lower classes, male and female, there existed strict demarcations between and within these groups.³¹

Melancholy as a temperament, in which the black bile remained relatively stable and manifested itself in accomplishment, was reserved for a chosen few. Evidence of such segregation can be seen in Aristotle’s query as to why “all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of the atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?” This remark clearly defined melancholy as a condition of the accomplished and creative, a category in which no lower class men and no women were ever included.³²

After Aristotle’s famous question, the temperature of black bile also became an important consideration in the designation of individual creative ability. The heated bile produced moments of ecstatic inspiration in which poetry or art could be produced. While this state of inspiration was not considered to be in indication of insanity, the creative melancholic was perceived as being constantly in danger of crossing the blurred border

³⁰ Jackson, Melancholia and Depression, 31-2.

³¹ The causes and types of melancholy historically assigned to women will be discussed in Chapter Two.

³² Jackson, Melancholia and Depression, 31.

between derangement and divine inspiration. While Aristotle had articulated his idea that the creative individual was essentially melancholic, temperament had been earlier linked to “the notion of madness in the great tragedies and [to] frenzy in Platonic philosophy.”³³

Poetry was considered the most important of all the creative expressions and the poet was esteemed as the most important of the artists and the first thought capable of being both creative and mad. Madness was believed to manifest itself through manic upset, anger and activity. Plato had been the first to see it as the basis of creativity.³⁴ He acknowledged four types of divine madness and defined the *furor poeticus* as follows:

Third is the possession and madness which comes from the muses. It takes hold of the tender and untouched, rousing it up and exciting it to a frenzy in lyric and other kinds of poetry...[b]ut whoever comes to the gates of poetry without the Muse’s madness, persuaded that art will make him a good poet, is ineffectual himself, and the poetry of the sane man is eclipsed by that of the mad.³⁵

Plato believed that poetic madness was divine in nature, likely inspired by the gods and not caused by disease. Further, this inspiration was not due to the learnedness or effort of the poets, indeed, they were viewed as little more than conduits between the muses and the page.³⁶ The idea that poets could become possessed by “divine inspiration” originated in religious practice with the predictions and portents of soothsayers and sibyls who were believed to be divinely inspired.

³³ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 15.

³⁴ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 41.

³⁵ Hans Eysenck, Genius: The Natural History of Creativity, (London, 1995), 17.

³⁶ Murray, Genius, 17-18.

However, according to Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, “[t]his divine ecstasy [was] ascribed to the poet and the rhapsodist, but denied to the painter or sculptor.”³⁷ Any type of skill in which manual labour was involved was considered the work of slaves or the lower class. Since the formation of art (particularly sculpting) necessitated working with one’s hands, artists were traditionally associated with “barbers, cooks, blacksmiths and shoemakers,” individuals who were valued for their technical abilities rather than their intellect.³⁸ The Greeks “could not reconcile the idea of creation under the auspices of divine inspiration with monetary reward for the work created.”³⁹ Issues surrounding money were likely the reasons that the painter, sculptor and architect was relegated for so long to the category of artisan. While the results of their work might be admired, their work process was not, and by extension, their personalities were deemed to be of little interest.

However, after the fourth century BCE, an important shift took place. There grew an enthusiasm for artworks, and art collecting began to be seen as a sign of an educated individual. As the intrinsic value of art increased, there arose an interest in the personality of visual artists and a heightening of their social status. This change in status, along with, “[t]he turn to subjectivity in ancient, particularly Stoic, philosophy caused society to regard works of art as the result of individual, inspired creation. This interest in artists and their creative

³⁷ Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist, A Historical Experiment, (New Haven/London, 1979), 42.

³⁸ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 4.

³⁹ Kris and Kurz, Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist, 113.

process led to the labelling of them as [finally] capable of both divine inspiration and ecstasy.”⁴⁰

Once visual artists were considered to be “divinely inspired” individuals, they could claim the influence of melancholy in their lives, along with its accompanying eccentricities, such as an obsession with work, lack of concern for sustenance, personal hygiene and personal relationships. Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) in his work, Natural History, recounts several examples of such behaviour. The Greek sculptor Apollodoros (fifth to fourth century BCE) was called a madman because he would violently destroy any of his own work that did not please him. Similarly, the late fourth century BCE painter, Propogenes, was said to consume only water and lupin blossoms when he was engaged in the act of creation, and the mosaicist, Famulus, who worked on Nero’s Golden House, “painted only a few hours a day and was always wearing the toga, even when he mounted a scaffolding.”⁴¹ By the beginning of the Common Era, the habits, dress and general activity of the visual artist, were considered to be an indication of their melancholic and artistic natures.

One important link between notions of melancholy in antiquity and how it came to be defined in the early modern period can be found in Medieval literature. The influence of the Italian poet and humanist Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) on ideas surrounding attitudes to both classical antiquity and notion of melancholy is of note here. Besides being an important figure in the revival of classical literature, Petrarch was perhaps the first to express himself in terms which defined and led to the development of the melancholic lover as a

⁴⁰ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born under Saturn, 5.

⁴¹ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 5.

literary type.⁴² Petrarch wrote a number of autobiographical poems in which he expressed his sadness and misery caused chiefly by his unrequited feelings for his beloved Laura.⁴³ Petrarch's poetry, treatises and letters, in which he examined his life and self-consciously fashioned himself, were well known to the intelligentsia in the early modern period. His intimate association with both antiquity and the expression of grief was an inspiration to his early modern audiences as they were striving to strengthen their connection with the antique past. Poet, scholar and cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) was an ardent follower of Petrarch and his many works, in particular Gli Asolani and Prose della lingua volgare, were instrumental in spreading "European Petrarchism" and "establishing Petrarch as the canon of classic taste."⁴⁴

⁴² Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 248-49, state that while Petrarch was "perhaps the first of a type of men who are conscious of [there] being men of genius, [and] had himself experienced the contrast between exultation and despair," he did not use the word "melancholy" to describe his condition nor connect it with "poetic furor." "Rather he calls it by the medieval name of *acedia*." This word is commonly translated by modern historians as "spiritual sloth."

⁴³ Mark Musa ed, Petrarch: The Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta, (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1996).

⁴⁴ Christine Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione: Philosophical, Aesthetic, and Political Approaches in Renaissance Platonism, (New York, 1998), 68 and 74. According to Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style," The Art Bulletin, LVIII/III, (September, 1976), 390 and note 92, Gli Asolani was inspired by Lucrezia Borgia and probably composed between 1497 and 1502. In this work Bembo established the "conciliation of vernacular and humanist traditions that is at the core of speculation concerning love and beauty in the sixteen century" and "elevated Petrarch ... as the model for a classical vernacular style." See also "Self-Fashioning/Self-Portraits" in Chapter Three concerning of influence of Petrarch and Bembo on conventions of beauty for female portraiture during the early modern period

Marsilio Ficino is generally credited with igniting Renaissance interest in melancholy with the publication of De Amore or, On Love, in 1469 and the controversial De Vita Libri Tres or, The Three Books of Life, in 1489. In the former, Ficino links the contemplative life with poetic frenzy.⁴⁵ In the latter, he discusses the influence of the celestial realm upon human actions and explored elements of early modern medicine and psychology.⁴⁶ Through these works, he reintroduced Aristotle's concept of melancholy to a humanist audience eager to explore and explain human earthly existence.⁴⁷ If we look closely at the ideological underpinnings surrounding the concept of melancholy, Italian humanists desired to use it for the glorification of both the individual and the national personality alike.⁴⁸ Their goal was to find an earthly, human element that celebrated the mind as well as the salvation of the soul. They believed that they had found it all in the concept of melancholy.⁴⁹

At the same time, Ficino established an hierarchical order of melancholy based on the ancient definition of it as either *per natura* or *per infermita*. The natural melancholy of those ruled by the planet Saturn, specifically the scholar, was seen as different and controllable as

⁴⁵ Raffini, Marsilio Ficino. Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione, 29-30.

⁴⁶ Raffini, Marsilio Ficino. Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione, 46-50.

⁴⁷ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 255 state that it was Ficino who "really gave shape to the idea of the melancholy man of genius and revealed it to the rest of Europe..."

⁴⁸ Babb, Elizabethan Malady, 66 and 184, asserts that "if there had been no Aristotelian problem, the melancholic attitude would never have won the popularity which it enjoyed during the Renaissance... Aristotle lent melancholia a philosophic and artistic glamour, and many men were more than willing to declare themselves affected."

⁴⁹ Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, 242.

compared to those influenced by too much hot black bile who were considered sick. Ficino's work was designed to assist the scholar in managing his condition, thereby establishing an hierarchical system for melancholics. He popularised the concept, making it an attractive social condition from which to suffer, even though the symptoms were not deemed enjoyable.

With the increased knowledge and popularity of melancholy, its ruling planet Saturn came to be associated more and more with creativity and cleverness. During the Renaissance Saturn became the popular planet of the educated elite and the designated overseer of artists, poets, writers, and philosophers. Mercury, the planet of the cheerful and active, which represented watchmakers and organ-builders in the celestial realm, could not hold the same mystique for those individuals in society who were intent upon fashioning themselves as tormented and cerebral.⁵⁰

Melancholy in the Renaissance was believed to manifest itself in a number of ways. Robert Burton in The Anatomy of Melancholy, states that "fear and sorrow [without cause] are the true characters and inseparable companion of most [melancholics]..."⁵¹ Other symptoms included being "sluggish, dull and blackish" having, "terrifying and ridiculous hallucinations."⁵² Melancholic individuals were also "very austere, sullen, churlish, always silent, solitary, delighting in husbandry, in woods, orchards, rivers, dark walks and close."⁵³

⁵⁰ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 73, Fig. 19.

⁵¹ Robert Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, (London, 1924), 109.

⁵² Babb, Elizabethan Malady, 58.

⁵³ Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 252.

There was also a litany of physical symptoms attributed to the melancholic condition.” If the heart, brain, liver [and/or] spleen, be misaffected, as usually they are, many inconveniences proceed from them, “apoplexy, epilepsy, vertigo, intempestive (sic) laughing, weeping, signing, sobbing, bashfulness, blushing, trembling, sweating, swooning et cetera.”

Nonetheless, there were a number of early modern intellectuals, aristocrats and social elite who described themselves and wished to be known as melancholic; as some attest, the accompanying symptoms were but a small price to pay, “for entrance into the immortal pantheon of heroes, philosophers or artists.”⁵⁴ Ficino himself was a self-proclaimed melancholic, as was Robert Burton.

The artistic were believed to be mad or melancholic if they displayed any types of obsessive behaviour, preoccupation with work or an overfondness of solitude. Obsession with their work could progress to the point of ignoring food, drink, personal relationships, personal hygiene and physical danger. Melancholic artists were supposedly extremely preoccupied with the smallest detail of their creations and conscious of little else. They craved solitude, were often sullen and moody and capable of volatile behaviour. Early modern male artists described as displaying such behaviour included : Paolo Uccello (ca. 1397-1475), who became obsessed with rendering his “sweet” perspective; Luca della Robbia (1400-82), who often ignored the discomfort of frozen feet in order to keep working; and Cristofano Gherardi (1508-66), who in his haste to get to work would wear unmatched shoes and his cloak inside out.⁵⁵ As well, the painter Francesco Parmigianino (1503-40)

⁵⁴ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 159.

⁵⁵ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 54-55.

abandoned his work, and ultimately his wits, in his fascination with alchemy. According to Vasari he “like so many others, grew quite crazy. He changed from a fastidious and gentle person into an almost savage and unrecognisable man with a long beard and unkempt hair.”⁵⁶

While a number of Italian male artists were described as melancholic, and their eccentric behaviours expected and tolerated, only a few were thought to possess *ingegno*. That designation was reserved for yet another level of artistic individual, the likes of a Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, or Raphael. Early modern period literature never used the word *genius* and its present day meaning did not exist during that time, however later periods have superimposed their concept of genius upon the Renaissance. This Chapter now turns to a discussion of the relationship between Renaissance *ingegno* and later notions of genius, which have both, in their respective time periods, been linked almost exclusively with male artistic creativity.⁵⁷

Components of Creativity: Genius

The concept of genius, like that of melancholy, originated with the Romans and Greeks, and has been subject to a number of interpretations over the centuries. The present-day use of the word stems from the eighteenth century, when genius began to be viewed

⁵⁶ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, Chapter IV, “Eccentric Behaviour and Noble Manners,” 67-97, provides a detailed inventory of artists who participated in “strange” behaviour.

⁵⁷ In Vasari, Le Vite, eds, Bettarini and Barocchi, Indice III, 523, one reference to the use of *genius* in Vasari’s work is listed. It was used in relation to the fifteenth-century sculptor Benedetto da Miano and reads “coloro che mossi dal genio loro imparano una scienza et in quella si conducono perfetti” Their English translation reads “those who are moved by their genius learn a science in that they are brought to perfection.”

principally as a creative power. During that time the Romantics defined it as the ability of some artists to “express fundamental truths about the human condition.”⁵⁸ The capabilities of such individuals were often constructed as being solely the result of their “nature,” and not of their training or social position. The root of this interpretation of genius can be found in the ancient past. Penelope Murray states that “before the eighteenth century “genius” had a variety of different meanings, none of which [directly] correspond to our modern use of the term.”⁵⁹ These meanings have been interconnected to such a degree over the years that it is difficult to discern a clear history of either the concept or the words used to describe it.

Throughout antiquity there were essentially three definitions of “genius,” which appear to have stemmed from two Latin words. The first of these words was *genius* from *gens* or *gentes*, meaning the spirit of the family or clan, and the second was *ingenium* which had a variety of meanings, e.g. “natural disposition, innate ability, good judgement, knowledge, talent, dexterity and facility.”⁶⁰ Therefore the definitions of genius in the ancient world included: (1) an attendant spirit of individuals, groups of people or places; (2) male virility; (3) natural ability or innate endowment.⁶¹ The concepts of attendant spirit and male virility can be traced to the Romans for whom “genius” had begun as a cult, one of a number of household spirits that “were all connected in some way with the ownership, protection and

⁵⁸ Greenhalgh and Duro, Essential Art History, 136-37.

⁵⁹ Murray, Genius, 2.

⁶⁰ Battersby, Gender and Genius, 26-27.

⁶¹ Murray, introduction of Genius, 2 and Battersby Gender and Genius, 52.

cultivation of property and land by a family or clan.”⁶² The head of each household or group was the *paterfamilias*, a free-born male who had control over and was responsible for his wife, children, lands and slaves. By the end of the last century BCE, “genius” not so much represented the property owned by the *paterfamilias* as it did the quality he was believed to have been born with and which was celebrated each year on his birthday. This quality was his ability to produce other male children who in time would inherit his property and the “genius” to protect it. Caesar Augustus used the cult of genius to stress the merits of patriarchal authority as well as male sexuality.⁶³ The origins of this concept may reach back to the fourth century BCE, when Stoic philosophers explained the origins and workings of the universe in terms of the reproductive processes of the male body.⁶⁴

The third ancient definition of genius, that of natural ability or innate endowment, stemmed from the word *ingenium*, whose history, Murray states, can teach us much about the modern concept of “genius.” While the exact meaning of the word in ancient history cannot be known, by the early modern period it was used to connote an inborn talent or ability that some individuals possessed while others clearly did not.⁶⁵ Like melancholy then, this concept of genius can be viewed as elitist, for it was extended only to certain individuals, i.e. free-born men, and it also valued specific activities above others.⁶⁶ During most of antiquity

⁶² Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 52.

⁶³ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 54 and 57.

⁶⁴ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 58.

⁶⁵ Murray, *Genius*, 3.

⁶⁶ Murray, *Genius*, 6.

it was only the poets, who, along with their work, were endowed with the “gift” of genius by the muses.⁶⁷ In the early modern period, the concept of genius as *ingenium* (translated into Italian as *ingegno*) was used to distance artists from the artisans who laboured for money in crowded, communal workshops, as part of an ongoing drive to change the social status of creative individuals.⁶⁸

The ability to copy from life or re-work an “old story, myth or piece of art” was a proof of genius in the early modern period.⁶⁹ *Ingegno*, inherited by men due to their warm natures and their ability to procreate, enabled them to make artworks which were often mistaken for “the real thing.” Vasari reported that Titian “painted a portrait of Pope Paul III which he stood in a window to dry; people passing by paid homage to the painting, mistaking it for the Pope himself.” In another instance, a “cardinal handed a pen and ink to Raphael’s portrait of Leo X to get his signature.”⁷⁰ Possessing *ingegno* therefore was considered essential to the creation of superior works of art. As we have seen, it was thought to be determined by biology, and most male artists were considered to possess it, the warm nature of their bodies heightening the possibility of creative activity. The third component of male creativity to be discussed is *virtù*. Like melancholy and *ingegno*, it was constructed as being dependent upon the nature of male biology and mental capacity.

⁶⁷ See Murray, “Poetic Genius and Its Classical Origins,” in Genius, 9-31, for a general discussion of genius in antiquity.

⁶⁸ Bruce Cole, The Renaissance Artist at Work, (New York, 1983), 28.

⁶⁹ Battersby, Gender and Genius, 26. See also Kris and Kurz, 61-71, for a discussion of mimesis in painting and sculpture.

⁷⁰ Kris and Kurz, Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist, 63.

Components of Creativity: *Virtù*

Virtù, was considered a special god-given talent for artistic creation that was bestowed upon few individuals. The concept of *virtù* was very much aligned with aristocratic court values. Court circles in general seem to have accepted that artists were paid in order that they could live and create, not just compensated for the material goods that they produced, as was the case for the artisan. *Virtù* could only be rewarded or encouraged.⁷¹ The possession of *virtù* also opened the way to a higher social status for the artist in question. Vasari's work defines *virtù* as a "nobility [of the spirit] which allowed a number of artists to overcome the social barriers and prejudices they encountered from [their lowly] birth."⁷² Some artists, such as Mantegna who was granted a knighthood, even went on to achieve high positions in court circles.⁷³ This was only possible because of his demonstrated qualities of nobility of spirit and mind, and *virtù*.

Since it was considered a divinely inspired condition, *virtù* was rarely perceived as the result of the artists' years of hard work, dedication to their craft or their connections to wealthy patrons. Rather, it was proof of God's divine favour. In order to enhance their

⁷¹ Alison Cole, Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts, 37-39, states that in 1449 Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini assured a Florentine master that he was guaranteed an annual salary, "even if he works solely for his own pleasure;" Martin Warnke, The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist (Cambridge, U.K., 1993), 135 writes that "the provision that the court made for the artist was the material expression of the kindness and liberality that his virtues deserve."

⁷² Warnke, Court Artist, 163.

⁷³ Cole, Art of The Italian Renaissance Courts, 39. A number of artists were given such titles in order to heighten their value as, "worthy court diplomats" when visiting and in the employ of other courts.

status, many artists and their biographers manufactured myths that coincided with these societal expectations; they seemed convinced that these were men who possessed a talent which was beyond the reach of many. They deliberately highlighted certain aspects of their lives which accorded with these myths, and ignored or de-emphasised the more mundane and quotidian components of artistic production.

Thus, the adoption of ancient beliefs surrounding melancholy and genius, and the status of *virtù*, influenced Renaissance thought concerning male artists and artistic creativity. This awareness was further shaped by the translation and study of ancient texts, such as essays, letters and other prose from the practitioners of scientific, legal and religious communities. Early modern art historians such as Vasari and Condivi consulted ancient and contemporary biographies to help construct their stories of the various identities, roles, responses and behaviours of the artist in this period. While these other texts potentially had a role in shaping the nature of the artist during the early modern period, my work will concentrate on the discipline of biography. To better understand the early modern art-historical biography, it is important to briefly summarise what is known of its classical origins.

Biography and the Male Artist

Reed Whittemore contends that the structure and content of biography sprang from literary practice in the ancient Greek world; the tributes engraved upon tombstones and steles were the first written memorials belonging to the *polis*.⁷⁴ This led to the emergence of

⁷⁴ Reed Whittemore, Pure Lives: The Early Biographers, (Baltimore/London, 1988) 4.

politically-motivated literature, created to promote prominent citizens largely through the process of omitting or ignoring any unfavourable aspects of the subject's conduct.

Two key elements used to direct the writing of ancient biography were the concept of "type" and the use of the anecdote. "Type," as used in the ancient world, referred to the stereotypical actions and characteristics attributed to individuals in accordance with their rank, vocation or occupation. People who became generals were believed to possess certain natures and abilities, kings possessed other natures, saints others still, and so on. These social types, their actions and character, were often valued more than individual personality and were the means by which virtue was gauged.⁷⁵

The second element of ancient biography was the use of the anecdote, or short story, which outlined the character traits of heroes through the recounting of a specific event or incident in which their moral and physical courage was displayed. Anecdotes, the backbone of ancient and early modern biography, have been described as, "the major vehicles of biographical characterisations" and as "aretalogies" because of their predisposition to exaggeration.⁷⁶

Kris and Kurz note that throughout history anecdotal stories, adapted from general biographies, were used over and over as themes within the life stories of artists. They traced these conventions from the archaic, classical and byzantine periods, through to the Middle

⁷⁵ Whittemore, *Pure Lives*, 3, 65-66, states that modern biographers carry on this tradition and treat, "our cultural heroes as representative, unindividualised standard bearers, ... that biography and tragic drama were filled with the stories of people "whose actions made them exceptional," and that "public life was the home of the moral life."

⁷⁶ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, (Berkeley/London, 1983), 50 and 58.

Ages and early modern period. They have concluded that all these eras shared a number of attributes and preconceptions of artists. Kris and Kurz argue that artists have overwhelmingly been depicted as individuals led by unearthly, unchanging forces and circumstances, not as beings influenced and directed by their particular societal situations. The conventions used in ancient biography relate principally to the artists' childhood or the affect of their work upon the public. Their births were often deemed as special, either having been foreseen or occurring under unusual and positive celestial phenomena. Even in childhood, artists were believed to possess creative gifts which were only recognised by a knowledgeable expert, e.g., Herodotus' discovery of Thucydides or Xenophon's encounter with Socrates.⁷⁷ Such artists' work often imitated nature so well that their audience was often fooled into believing that they were observing the "real thing." The young artist always surpassed the master in skill and frequently learned through autodidacticism. The artist was usually from the lower classes and by sheer will and determination rose in social standing.⁷⁸

While the "divinely-gifted" youth constituted one biographical model for the early modern artist, the 'holy man' or philosopher, was another. The four gospels of the New Testament, written ca. 70-110, are in fact biographies that recount of the life and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. Early hagiographic accounts were simple saint's-day calendars, but they evolved into full didactic narratives of pious individuals. As Catherine Parke suggests, a key change took place in the ninth century, when sacred biography was translated into the

⁷⁷ Kris and Kurz, Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist, 26.

⁷⁸ Kris and Kurz, Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist, 1-61.

vernacular languages of Europe.⁷⁹ Sacred biography blended both legend and fact and the realms of earth and spirit. It recounted events without critical analysis or speculation, mingling the fantastic with the ordinary and offered no explanation but divinity for the happenings it reported.

The holy man/philosopher model was used, for instance, to describe men such as the Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria (ca.185-ca.254) and the Roman philosopher Plotinus (ca. 205-70). This model later reappeared in Renaissance biographies of male visual artists. There are six characteristics of the ancient holy man: wisdom; superiority to others; humility; skill at teaching and/or proselytising; physical self-denial; and freedom from the concerns of “lesser minds.” Wisdom, superiority and humility were characterised by, “superior gifts of perceptions and understanding from a very early age which evolved from living life [as a] common man...” Teaching and preaching enlightened and changed the lives of others, while self-denial was associated with the ideal of complete dedication to one’s work through: solitude, consuming little food or drink, taking little sleep and having a total disregard for dress or personal hygiene. Most importantly, the holy man’s life of solitude meant that he was unaffected by personal relationships, i.e., marriage, childrearing and paid labour, situations which distracted the common man from divine thought and enlightenment.⁸⁰

Patricia Cox identifies persons displaying these tendencies as one of two types of “divine” sage or philosopher: those perceived as either a “son of God” who worked miracles

⁷⁹ Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives*, (Toronto, 1996), 7.

⁸⁰ Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 20-30.

and transcended the particularities of history, e.g., Jesus of Nazareth or Pythagoras of Samos,(ca. 560-480 BCE) or the “especially gifted man, blessed by God,” such as Socrates.⁸¹ Cox does caution that the biographies of holy men are, “picture[s] of perfection, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to discern either the extent to which the biographers have moulded their heroes to fit the type, or the extent to which the heroes themselves actually imitated the ideal.”⁸²

Among the first writer of “lives” was the Greek biographer and philosopher Plutarch, (ca. 46-ca.120), chiefly known for his Parallel Lives and The Lives of Noble Grecians and Romans. His works were collections of biographies of prominent ancients whose moral characters were illustrated by a series of anecdotes. Plutarch is described as, “the chief model for the art of biography,” and his work as the prototype of the “ethical biography.”⁸³ His writings usually compared two “exceptional” individuals; in one case he compared Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, and in another Demetrius and Marc Anthony. He detailed their early years, career accomplishments and why they were deserving of such literary attention.⁸⁴ Finally Plutarch assessed the effects that their respective careers had had on society. The extent of their virtue, which according to Whittemore was synonymous with public success, could thus be measured.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Cox, Biography in Late Antiquity, 43.

⁸² Cox, Biography in Late Antiquity, 30.

⁸³ Whittemore, Pure Lives, 12 and 32.

⁸⁴ Whittemore, Pure Lives, 27.

⁸⁵ Whittemore, Pure Lives, 28.

A late medieval Italian biographer who looked to Plutarch as an example, and who greatly influenced the biographers of the Renaissance, was the writer Giovanni Boccaccio. He constructed his Concerning Famous Women (1355-1359), discussed in Chapter Two, and The Fates of Illustrious Men (1358) using the conventions of classical biographies, such as anecdotes, comparisons, and rhetoric. Boccaccio's Fates of Illustrious Men was a study of the lives of famous kings, warriors and noblemen. He explained how fate turned against those who perceived themselves as invulnerable or who possessed overachieving ambitions. It was intended as a warning that vice and debauchery would not go unpunished, that a final judgement took place in heaven and that a virtuous life was the only one worth living.⁸⁶ Boccaccio concentrated, in the main, on the lives of pre-Christian historical figures, and he re-evaluated Roman history, all of which contributed to his book's popularity during the Renaissance.⁸⁷

The aim of early modern/Renaissance biography, "was to preserve and exalt the names and deeds of worthy men in order to provide examples, both of actions and their rewards."⁸⁸ This was done mainly to inspire readers. While not everyone could be a Leonardo or a Raphael, one could perhaps learn from example and aspire to greater accomplishments. At the very least, one's life would be better as a result of hard work and good deeds. The construction of biographies in the early modern period was based on "what

⁸⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, The Fates of Illustrious Men, trans., Louis Brewer Hall, (New York, 1965), VI.

⁸⁷ Boccaccio, Fates of Illustrious Men, XI.

⁸⁸ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 34.

might be.”⁸⁹ They were meant to be convincing, to engage attention, to confirm and establish connections, and to make definite the association of artists with high culture by presenting artistic creations as the embodiments of humanist ideals. Biography was used during the early modern period to construct the artist in a way which confirmed and strengthened their “star” status. It emphasised both, “the ultimate attainment of individual self-expression and the highest esteem of creativity in the *divino artista*.”⁹⁰

Nowhere in the literature does the ideal of the “artist as divine” receive more enthusiasm than in the writings of Giorgio Vasari. Boccaccio’s work, along with Pliny’s Natural History and The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri, (1265-1321), influenced Giorgio Vasari’s biographical work The Lives, which contains the biographies of over two hundred artists. Since its publication, Vasari has been widely regarded as the first art historian of the western world. His constructions of the artist continues to influence art-historical literature to this day. A highly rhetorical work, The Lives was written to heighten the status and prestige of the artist.⁹¹ It assisted in raising them above the category of artisan to which they had traditionally been relegated. Barolsky states that it was also a public relations exercise addressed to a circle of the interested elite and he suggests that this process was “deeply fictional and highly artful.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 36.

⁹⁰ Kris and Kurz, Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist, 6.

⁹¹ Both Rubin Giorgio Vasari, and Colin Eisler, ““Every Artist Paints Himself”: Art History as Biography and Autobiography,” Social Research, 54, (Spring 1987), 73-99 contends that the writing of artists’ biographies was a means to heighten their societal status and the status of art in general.

Vasari said that The Lives sprang from the inclination to organise his copious notes, concerning the artists of his generation, into a narrative. It followed the standard format of ancient biographies. After introducing his subjects and the circumstances of their birth, Vasari praised the artist for being well and suitably trained, sometimes through autodidacticism, and for having surpassed his master. Individual artworks would then be examined in relation to the external circumstances of their producer's life. He usually provided a series of anecdotes and examples which showcased the artist's perfections. At the end, he gave a final synopsis of their character and career.⁹³

The most well-known and studied of Vasari's many biographies was that concerning the life of Michelangelo. Its portrayal of this sculptor, both as a man and an artist, has contributed to the many perceptions of him which have been maintained and fostered in the art-historical record. Vasari is, however, just one of many writers who have used traditional literary motifs to interpret Michelangelo's life and art; the amount of literature devoted to him is massive. By extension, the multiplicity of stories concerning his life, character traits and psychological nature have served to render a good portion of his personality a myth. In order to emphasise the difficulty in deconstructing Michelangelo, the following section discusses his fashioning as it appears in a number of historical and current works.

⁹² Barolsky, "The Metamorphoses of Michelangelo," 208.

⁹³ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 11.

The Literary Construction of Michelangelo: Problems and Perspectives

The three major elements of male creativity, melancholy, genius and *virtù*, have been the primary concepts used in the art-historical literature to construct the personality of Michelangelo. The traditions have been informed principally by the writings of Vasari and Condivi, who, as contemporaries of Michelangelo, manufactured an image for him which has not been fully deconstructed by many art historians. I have consulted the works by Raymond Klibansky, Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, and Juliana Schiesari in relation to the artist as melancholic, and the works of Robert Clements, James Saslow, and Paul Barolsky, all of whom identify Michelangelo as an individual who practised self-fashioning, either through his art or poetry. This section provides a brief overview of the salient points of these authors and their contribution to either the creation or the deconstruction of the myth of Michelangelo.

The first biography of Michelangelo appeared as part of Vasari's first edition of The Lives. Though he did not specifically use the term "melancholy" to describe Michelangelo as he did for Piero di Cosimo or Jacopo Pontormo, Vasari did construct him as being of melancholic temperament and in possession of only the positive aspects of the condition. Vasari claims that he was not sluggish or slow, that his wit and his creativity were razor-sharp and keen all of his life. Michelangelo was a solitary individual, both personally and professionally, who "suffered no talented assistant near him" and refused to collaborate with anyone. He exhibited a "demonic frenzy of creation," producing sculpture, paintings, architecture and poetry.⁹⁴ He was aloof, antisocial, and moody; when he was hurt falling

⁹⁴ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 72.

from a scaffolding, he refused to be treated.⁹⁵ Disregarding rank, he frequently displayed his displeasure to Popes, Bishops and patricians alike. He was his own worst critic and reportedly was never content with anything [artistic] that he did.⁹⁶ As he grew older, Michelangelo had, “no heart for anything except death.”⁹⁷ Vasari portrayed him as maintaining an extremely austere lifestyle despite his worldly wealth. Throughout his life, so intent was Michelangelo upon his work that he “used to do with a little bread and wine...[and] always [ate] very frugally.”⁹⁸ Michelangelo’s habits and behaviour were staunchly defended by Vasari, who rationalised the sculptor’s love of solitude and apparent inability to work with others by declaring that “whoever wishes to work well must distance himself from all cares and burdens; because his *virtù* requires thought, solitude and opportunity so as not to lead the mind into error.”⁹⁹

Battersby states that while Vasari is “often credited with having invented the modern concept of genius,” it was not until the Romantic period that genius, as an exceptional intellectual and/or creative power, began to assume its current shape in late twentieth-century thought. In her study of The Lives, she claims that she could not find the word *genio*, meaning genius, even though numerous English translations frequently use the word “genius.” Battersby contends that Vasari’s use of the term *ingegno* is more correctly

⁹⁵ Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Artists, trans. George Bull, (London, 1965), 380.

⁹⁶ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 404.

⁹⁷ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 402.

⁹⁸ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 423.

⁹⁹ Murray, Genius, 46.

translated as “ingeniousness.”¹⁰⁰ Martin Kemp addresses the problem of language and meaning in relation to any study of the past when he comments that, “reading the written evidence...requires caution...in relation to our handling of the vocabulary used in the period itself.”¹⁰¹ Specifically pertaining to the concept of genius, he states that, “we should certainly not assume that the relevant terms, *ingenium* or *ingegno* and *genio* should be translated or interpreted as ‘genius’ in the romantic or modern sense,” but Kemp also suggests “less obvious words, such as *virtù* and *divino*, might have carried some of the modern connotations of genius.”¹⁰² Scholars do invest the Renaissance *ingegno* with related, if not identical, shades of meaning. In her work, Rubin equates *ingegno* with “innate talent,” while Summers defines it as “an ennobling power granted to individuals of grace, who then could create images which seemed to live and breath.”¹⁰³

Nonetheless, passages and anecdotes utilised by Vasari do construct the artist in a way which connotes the modern day concept of genius. He described the sculptor’s works as exhibiting evidence of “[a] sublime power ...combined with a natural inborn grace,” and he describes the Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel, which was unveiled in 1541, as “directly inspired by God.”¹⁰⁴ Vasari states that Michelangelo had “no need for architectural rules, either ancient or modern, being an artist with the power to invent varied and original things

¹⁰⁰ Battersby, Gender and Genius, 26.

¹⁰¹ Martin Kemp “The Super-Artist as Genius,” in Genius, 34.

¹⁰² Martin Kemp, “The ‘Super-Artist’ As Genius,” Genius, 34.

¹⁰³ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 55 and 154; Summers, Michelangelo, 51 and 58.

¹⁰⁴ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 382.

as beautiful as those of the past,” and that he “achieved in the three arts a perfect mastery that God has granted no other person, in the ancient or modern world.”¹⁰⁵ Vasari claimed that Pope Julius II “always paid the greatest honour to [Michelangelo’s] *genius* [italics mine].”¹⁰⁶ Vasari constructed the divine inspiration of Michelangelo as both within him and with him, namely, it had a life and impetus of its own that was beyond the sculptor’s control. He discussed Michelangelo’s work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling as the height of his achievement to that point in his career, stating that, “if Michelangelo’s *genius* was emboldened by what he had already done, it soared even higher and achieved even more in the five sibyls and seven prophets that are painted on the ceiling [italics mine].”¹⁰⁷

Vasari’s work on Michelangelo restructured many of the conventions of ancient and artistic biographies. Vasari perceived Michelangelo as a “son of God,” sent down to show contemporary artists the errors of their ways and how to redress them.¹⁰⁸ Since he was born

¹⁰⁵ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 397 and 418.

¹⁰⁶ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 397. It is of note that in this passage Vasari, Le Vite, eds Bettarini and Barocchi Testo VI, 86, use the word *virtù* while Bull translates it into English as *genius*: “Et in fra l’altre volse - perché egli ci andava spesso col Vasari -, stando Sua Santità intorno alla fonte dell’ Acqua Vergine con dodici cardinali, arrivato Michelagnolo, volse, dico, il Papa per forza che Michelagnolo gli sedessi allato, quantunque egli umilissimamente il recusassi onorando lui sempre, quanto è possibile, la virtù sua.”

¹⁰⁷ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 357. Here in Vasari Le Vite, Bettarini and Barocchi Testo VI, 42, *animo* is used in Italian and *genius* in English: “Non si può dir quanto sia bene espressa la storia di Noè, quando inebriato dal vino dorme scoperto et ha presenti un figliuolo che se ne ride e due che lo ricuoprono: storia e virtù d’artefice incomparabile e da non poter essere vinta se non da sé medesima. Conciosiaché, come se ella per le cose fatte insino allora avessi preso animo, risorse e demostrossi molto maggiore nelle cinque Sibille e ne’ sette Profeti...”

¹⁰⁸ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 325, states, “the benign ruler of heaven graciously looked down to earth, saw the worthlessness of what was being done, ...[s]o he decided to send into

on the 6th of March, 1475, with the planets Mercury and Venus in the house of Jupiter, “his mind and hands [were] destined to fashion sublime and magnificent works of art.”¹⁰⁹ He characterised the artist as a precocious child and eccentric adult who had few teachers and learned mainly by autodidacticism. Michelangelo neglected food, drink and his personal appearance, he had fits of temper and times of despondency. To Vasari, Michelangelo was both wise and clever. His rapier-like wit always out-manoeuvred both his intellectual and artistic contemporaries. Furthermore his body, twenty-five days after death was deemed to be incorruptible.¹¹⁰ Vasari’s assessment of Michelangelo is well known and often reiterated in contemporary popular society, as with Irving Stone’s novel, and the subsequent motion picture, The Agony and the Ecstasy (1961). Within the discipline of Renaissance art history, scholars now believe that Michelangelo may have directed the hands of Vasari and Condivi, and they question to what degree he helped to shape the writing of his “biographies.”¹¹¹

The guiding hand of Michelangelo is apparent in the biography which appeared three years after The Lives; that is, Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti raccolta per Ascanio Condivi

the world an artist who would be skilled in each and every craft...so that everyone might admire and follow him as their perfect exemplar in life, work and behaviour....and he would be acclaimed as divine.”

¹⁰⁹ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 326. See also Kristen Lippencott, “When Was Michelangelo Born?” 228-232 and Don Riggs, “Was Michelangelo Born Under Saturn?” 99-121, regarding the controversy surrounding Michelangelo’s birthdate and horoscope.

¹¹⁰ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 438. The belief that those of special virtue and sanctity had, after death, incorruptible bodies stems from sacred biography.

¹¹¹ Saslow, James M., trans, The Poetry of Michelangelo, (New Haven/New York, 1991) 2, states that “Michelangelo, being somewhat dissatisfied with Vasari’s first edition, commissioned his disciple Ascanio Condivi to prepare a biography, published in 1553, which was all but dictated by the artist.”

da la Ripa Transone, (1553). As an art student Condivi (1525-1574) had, in his twenties, lived in the home of Michelangelo. He was commissioned to write the work in response to that of Vasari, with which Michelangelo was reportedly less than pleased.¹¹² Indeed, Vasari's second edition of The Lives uses Condivi's work as a model to "correct" many of the first edition's omissions and oversights. Hellmut Wohl calls Condivi's work "our strongest source for Michelangelo's life," due to the fact that it was, for the most part, dictated by the sculptor himself.¹¹³ There were eleven Italian editions in all, and the work has also been translated into German, French and English.

It has been stated that Condivi's simplicity of mind and manner did not equip him to adequately respond to Michelangelo's towering intellect.¹¹⁴ Regardless of Condivi's supposed failure to understand Michelangelo's complex nature, he was very much aware of the traditional motifs of biography (perhaps with the guidance of the artist). Condivi uses many of the same models and examples as did Vasari, in order to tell his story. He begins by providing the artist with noble ancestors and an auspicious birth. He contends that the majority of Michelangelo's abilities came from his personal observation of nature and not

¹¹² Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 3, reports that, "there have been some who, writing about this rare man, though not having (as I believe) frequented him as I have, on the other hand have said things about him which never were so, and on the other hand they have left out many things which are most noteworthy."

¹¹³ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, xiii and xvii.

¹¹⁴ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, xviii-xix, states that "Condivi did not seem aware - at least he did not express his awareness - of the complexities and contradictions in his master's character." These complexities and contradictions are described by Wohl as Michelangelo's, "cryptic manner, terrible sensuousness, vulnerability, torments of conscience, and unflinching discernment of existential truth."

from the instruction of others. Condivi endows him with the standard tendencies of the melancholic and, in relation to his genius and ability, portrays him as without rival, among the ancients and his contemporaries. Michelangelo's *virtù* makes him the favourite amongst humanist and papal court circles, but also the envy of his fellow artists, Pietro Torrigiano, Donato Bramante and Raphael, from whom he continuously suffers persecution. However, Michelangelo himself is all modesty and goodwill towards others.

Condivi begins his biography of Michelangelo by stating that the artist's paternal family history can be traced back to the year 1250, and noting that the earliest recorded relative was a *podestà* who possessed both a good name and *virtù*. Michelangelo's noble roots, as befitted an individual of his stature, were therefore established. The circumstances surrounding his birth and childhood also assured the reader that Michelangelo was destined to be a unique individual. Condivi, like Vasari, reported that the birth of Michelangelo took place when the positioning of the planets boded well for his chances of becoming "a noble and lofty genius" particularly in the areas of painting, sculpture and architecture.¹¹⁵

Michelangelo's fate as a sculptor of stone was, according to Condivi, also assured by his wet

¹¹⁵ In Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 5-6, the translator employs the word genius in this instance. However Paolo D'Ancona et al Michelangelo Architettura, Pittura, Scultura: In appendice la Vita di Michelangelo di Ascanio Condivi, (Milano, 1964), 176 uses "nobile ed alto ingegno" in the same sentence: "Gran natività certamente, e che già dimostrava quanto dovesse essere il fanciullo, e di quanto ingegno; perciocchè avendo Mercurio con Venere in seconda nella casa di Giove ricevuto con benigno aspetto, prometteva quel che è poi seguito, che tal parto dovesse essere di nobile ed alto ingegno, da riuscire universalmente in qualunque impresa, ma principalmente in quelle arti che diletmano il senso, come pittura, scultura, architettura." See footnotes 106 and 107 above.

nurse who, as the daughter and wife of a stonecutter, influenced the baby's interest in art, byway of her breastmilk.¹¹⁶

Indeed, Michelangelo became interested in the visual arts at an early age. He was always “drawing one thing and then another at random, having no fixed place or course of study.”¹¹⁷ One day as a teenager he visited the gardens of Lorenzo de' Medici, and spent the next two years there sculpting works for the amusement of *Il Magnifico*. Condivi does not identify any specific artist as his painting or sculpting master, leaving the impression that Michelangelo was responsible for his own art education, [although current scholars do not generally accept this assertion].¹¹⁸ Specifically, Condivi makes reference to Michelangelo's self-training through his observation and copying of nature.¹¹⁹ Michelangelo prided himself as an artist who was naturally blessed with “ease of execution” and stated that in comparison “Raphael did not come by his art naturally, but through long study.”¹²⁰

Condivi constructs Michelangelo as a melancholic who practised many of the standard tendencies, such as asceticism: “[he] content[ed] himself with a piece of bread which he ate while he worked,” and slept little as it gave him a “headache and upset

¹¹⁶ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 7.

¹¹⁷ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 10.

¹¹⁸ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 195. As a young boy Michelangelo was an apprentice in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio.

¹¹⁹ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 90, states that, “from boyhood Michelangelo has been a very hard worker, and to his natural gifts he has added learning, which he was determined to acquire not through the efforts and industry of others but from nature herself, which he set before himself as a true example.

¹²⁰ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 106.

stomach.” He also paid little attention to his physical appearance: “he [had] sometimes gone so long without taking [his boots] off that [when he did] the skin came away like a snake’s with [them].”¹²¹ His *ingegno* and *virtù* were without rival in antiquity and, certainly, amongst his contemporaries. Condivi places Michelangelo first among all artists, since the beginning of time, stating that nature had invested him with extraordinary *virtù* so that he could stand as the “example and norm” to which all other artists would look.¹²²

His great *virtù* caused Michelangelo to become a favourite amongst the learned and the powerful. Lorenzo de Medici treated him as a son, and a tutor in the Medici household, Angelo Poliziano, recognised in him “a superior spirit.” He was loved by the Popes who employed him, Julius II who “loved him with all his heart,” supposedly had a secret drawbridge constructed which led to Michelangelo’s rooms so that he might visit the artist at any time he chose, and Paul III expressed the wish to have the artist embalmed after his death so that, “his remains will be eternal like his works.”¹²³ However, according to Condivi, the favours bestowed upon him by his patrons due to his superior technical skills and intellect caused envy amongst his peers, like Bramante, who had the ear of Julius II and, who convinced the pope to side-track Michelangelo’s work on his tomb by having him paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 105-06.

¹²² Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 93.

¹²³ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 30, 58 and 95.

¹²⁴ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 30.

Condivi's biography ends when Michelangelo is seventy-nine years of age. He describes the old man as very interested in life and still "produc[ing] something every day."¹²⁵ He ends his study with the declaration that he will soon publish a collection of Michelangelo's poems and madrigals in order to, "prove to the world how great are his powers of invention and how many beautiful ideas spring from that divine spirit."¹²⁶

After the publication of Vasari's and Condivi's biographies, Michelangelo became known as an artist to which others could look for inspiration and with whom they would be compared. Among all the attributes with which Michelangelo is imbued by Vasari and Condivi, perhaps the most sustaining belief about him, and about artists in general, concerns the concept of melancholy. As discussed above in this chapter it was a motif widely used in antiquity and in the early modern period to define the male artist. However, myths concerning the enabling power of melancholy for artistic creativity have continued to the present day.

During the 1960s two books appeared which examined the personality of the early modern European artist. While providing documentary evidence regarding two major artists, Michelangelo and Dürer, both texts maintain the idea of an early modern creative elite. The Wittkowers' Born Under Saturn, (1963) explores the many cultural stereotypes that were used to describe the visual artist, whom they view as being one of two types: conformist or non-conformist.¹²⁷ They relate the "problem of the alienated artist" to the presence of

¹²⁵ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 87.

¹²⁶ Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 109. Condivi's collection was never published.

¹²⁷ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 16.

melancholy and non-conformist attitudes in the lives of male artists; as they state, their “work attempts to trace the cause and effect of *his* alienation [italics mine].”¹²⁸

Their work comprises a series of key case studies of artistic individuals who have historically been described as melancholics. While they view Michelangelo as one of a number of melancholic individuals, he is constructed here as the quintessential example of the affliction; he is the “great solitary,” obsessive about his work and his relationships, and “aloof...and sad.”¹²⁹ Michelangelo is the new type of independent Renaissance artist, who having escaped “the shackles of the medieval guild system, was able to realise all aspects of his complex nature, both negative and positive, and give them free reign.”¹³⁰ He was a glowing example of the new “noble” artist who was fluent in classical studies and who was confident amongst the polite and learned company of court society.¹³¹

The Wittkowers’ also address the dialectical relationship that exists between the artist and cultural mores. While they do ascribe all of the standard motifs of artistic personality to Michelangelo and many of his artistic contemporaries, they contend that these traits and behaviours were more pronounced under certain conditions and in certain periods, and that the image of the artist, [in its many manifestations], “sprang from changing conceptions

¹²⁸ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, xix.

¹²⁹ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 63, states that Michelangelo “suffered all the agonies of seclusion...,” see also 75, 96 and 104.

¹³⁰ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 63.

¹³¹ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 93, traces the beginnings of this image of the “noble” artist to the mid-to late-sixteenth century. The reference here is to the celebration of the nobility of spirit and not to circumstances of birth.

rather than from an innate, specifically artistic temper.”¹³² In their minds melancholy also sprang from the shifting and changing socio-cultural context. They claim that it was little more than a fashion that waxed and waned over the centuries.¹³³ They end their book with an important disclaimer, stating that they have not fully explained the concept of the alienated artist; they contend that there “never has been and never will be a final answer to the enigma of the creative personality.”¹³⁴

Another seminal work on the history of melancholy, Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy Religion and Art, was published in 1964. Authors Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl divide the text into four major areas of discussion. Part I deals with the history of melancholia from antiquity to the middle ages, its connection with the four humours, and Aristotle’s and Galen’s interpretations and their subsequent influence on how the condition was regarded in intellectual and medical circles. Part II traces the history of Saturn during the same time periods, both in the Arabic and Greco-Roman traditions and recounts the myth of Kronos/Saturn, whose artistic portrayal throughout history is also discussed here. The third part of the text considers two particular types of melancholia, that is, “poetic melancholy” and “melancholia generosa.” The latter type is identified as an “intellectual force...which ultimately led to the birth of the modern notion of genius”¹³⁵

¹³² Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 293.

¹³³ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 105-06, suggest that, “at the height of the melancholy vogue, doubts [were beginning to be voiced] which eventually helped to supplant the Renaissance concept of the *melancholicus*.”

¹³⁴ Wittkower and Wittkower, Born Under Saturn, 294.

¹³⁵ Rev. of Saturn and Melancholy. Personalist (Summer 1965), 431-32.

Lastly, there is a discussion of Marsilio Ficino and the impact he had upon ideas surrounding both the planet Saturn and the condition of melancholy.

Part IV concentrates upon melancholy as interpreted in the intellectual circles of Northern Europe, particularly in the paintings and engravings of Dürer. As with Michelangelo for the Wittkowers, Dürer is used here as the exemplar of the melancholic personality, specifically in regard to his engraving, Melancholia I (1514). As well he is viewed as an individual who interpreted melancholy as a positive attribute. Panofsky argues that this artist, as an “agent of reason,” proposed a radical reevaluation of the medieval condition of melancholy for the Renaissance. According to Panofsky, Dürer [like Ficino] rejected the medieval understanding of the melancholic temperament as unattractive and undesirable, replacing it with a humanist conception of melancholy as the temperament of genius.”¹³⁶ Although both of these studies were produced over thirty years ago, many of the observations by the Wittkowers, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl continue to contribute to the current understanding of melancholy’s complex history.

During the last few decades, perhaps due to an increased interest in examining the formation of individual and national identity, a new trend in the area of study concerning Michelangelo has emerged. Several scholars have claimed that Michelangelo played a significant role in the creation of his own reputation, as was often the fashion during the early modern period. Three authors in particular have viewed his artistic productions as an indication of how he viewed himself and wanted others to regard him. Robert Clements and

¹³⁶ Keith Moxey, The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History, (Ithaca/London, 1994), 72-3.

James Saslow have studied his poetry in this regard, while Paul Barolsky recognised that a key to Michelangelo's self-fashioning and promotion was his knowledge and admiration of literary and biblical figures of the past.

Clements, in The Poetry of Michelangelo (1965), states that through his poetry, Michelangelo indulged his desire to partake in activities prescribed as suitable and necessary for a "Renaissance" man. He used them to confess what he perceived as his many sins and by doing so, gain immortality. He also wished to share intimate feelings with friends. In addition, he viewed writing as less physically and mentally exhausting, (and therefore of more stature), than sculpting and painting.¹³⁷ Clements calls Michelangelo's poetry "spiritual self-portraits" in which the artist could express his unhappiness and construct his personality. Michelangelo viewed himself as "different from other men and in need of solitude" to maintain his *virtù*, thus promoting himself as the lonely, isolated artist.¹³⁸ Clements states that Michelangelo adopted the style and conventions of Petrarch's poetry, as publicly promoted by Bembo, because "the century's taste demanded it..."¹³⁹

Saslow's The Poetry of Michelangelo (1991) agrees with Clements that the sculptor's poems were, like his artworks, self-portraits which "celebrate the subjectivity of his responses to external experience." Saslow identifies his desire for self-expression as self-serving: "a sign of the new, individualistic consciousness of the Renaissance era, which

¹³⁷ Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 10-12.

¹³⁸ Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 180, writes that according to Michelangelo, "he would give too much of himself in the company of men of virtue and genius."

¹³⁹ Clements, Poetry of Michelangelo, 35.

Michelangelo exemplified and promoted and which in turn made it possible for him to be a protomodern celebrity during his lifetime.”¹⁴⁰ Saslow identifies Dante and Petrarch as the two most important influences on Michelangelo’s poetry. While he turned to Dante for precedence in the description of religious imagery, Petrarch was his model for “spiritualised earthly love.” He used the topoi employed by Petrarch in his mourning of Laura for his memorial poetry to Vittoria Colonna.¹⁴¹ Saslow claims that Michelangelo is “heavily indebted to the poet as well as to Lorenzo de’ Medici [whenever his poetry] poignantly captures the bliss and frustration of love and the melancholy of earthly decay.”¹⁴²

Barolsky, who uses biblical and secular textual sources to relate the sculptor’s artworks to his literary output, views Michelangelo, particularly in his later life, as the ultimate self-promoter. His book begins with an essay discussing the myth of the sculptor’s nose, whose deformity Michelangelo exploits to compare himself to Socrates, who, though physically ugly, supposedly possessed, “inner virtue”¹⁴³ Michelangelo’s propensity towards constructing himself as a grotesque is found elsewhere in Barolsky’s work. He claims that the artist saw his own image in that of an elderly faun he had sculpted for Lorenzo de’ Medici. He also points out that many of Michelangelo’s poems contained rather negative

¹⁴⁰ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 4.

¹⁴¹ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 46-47.

¹⁴² Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 41.

¹⁴³ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, xvi.

self-images, such as his description of his failing body, a result of the long hours he spent painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling.¹⁴⁴

Socrates was just one of a number of historical and mythological figures which Barolsky identifies as used by Michelangelo to fashion himself. The artist was also a great admirer of Dante, making references to the poet in both verse and paint. Barolsky claims that Michelangelo desired to become the “new Dante,” describing himself, as not only a sculptor, but also a poet, philosopher and theologian.¹⁴⁵ Inspiration came from biblical figures as well. Barolsky writes of the identification Michelangelo felt and fostered with a number of the figures he carved throughout his career, i.e., Jesus, David, Moses, Saints Paul and Peter.

While Barolsky views Michelangelo’s fashioning as a personal endeavour, he nonetheless situates him within the Renaissance social milieu where the construction of images was common and expected. Throughout his life Michelangelo was considered part of an educated elite: whether during his two years in the house of Lorenzo de’ Medici as papal artist or as a participant within a circle of correspondents. His self-fashioning was ultimately the result of living within a society in which image was all-important. The following section explores the specifics of Michelangelo’s self-fashioning which was undertaken through both the visual and literary arts.

¹⁴⁴ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, 20-21; Leibert, Michelangelo, 148, In a poem written to a friend about the physical strain of working on the ceiling Michelangelo stated: “My belly’s pushed by force beneath my chin/My beard toward Heaven/ I feel the back of my brain upon my neck/ I grow the breast of a Harpy...”

¹⁴⁵ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, 77.

Michelangelo's Self-Fashioning

As stated earlier Barolsky claims that far more than has been recognised, Michelangelo was responsible for his own myth.¹⁴⁶ In addition to the work of his biographers, the beliefs surrounding melancholy and the identification of artists with philosophers allowed Michelangelo to personally construct himself within the literary record, rhetorically stressing both persecution and martyrdom in his letters and poetry.¹⁴⁷ Michelangelo was a prolific writer; more than 500 of his letters are extant and he composed over 300 sonnets, madrigals and poems, most of them created in his later years. The extent of his literary opus is indicative of his desire for self-expression so characteristic of Renaissance society.

His letters to his family, friends and patrons speak of his unhappiness and his struggle to create despite the difficulties it presented. He wrote to his father in 1515, proclaiming, "I lead a miserable existence...wearied of stupendous labours and beset by a thousand anxieties. And thus have I lived for some fifteen years now and never an hours happiness have I had..."¹⁴⁸ He wrote to Sebastiano del Piombo in May 1525, regarding a supper with some friends, "which gave me the greatest pleasure, as I emerged a little from

¹⁴⁶ Barolsky, Michelangelo's Nose, xviii.

¹⁴⁷ Barolsky, Michelangelo's Nose, 54. Barolsky's study details the means by which Michelangelo fashioned himself after a number of philosophers, artists and writers, admired by both himself and Renaissance society, i.e., Socrates, Dante, Homer, Virgil, Praxeteles and Phidius.

¹⁴⁸ Riggs, "Was Michelangelo Born Under Saturn?" 112-113.

my depression, or rather my obsession...”¹⁴⁹ He wrote to Vasari saying that, “God wishes it, ...that I should continue to live in misery for some years.”¹⁵⁰

His poetry “not only acknowledges but celebrates the subjectivity of his response to external experience.”¹⁵¹ It is filled with references to his mental state, and his obsession and anxiety over the inevitability of death, and in this way he constructed himself as a melancholic. Michelangelo took part in the lively exchange of letters, poems and drawings amongst the Renaissance educated elite. Many of his poems were sent to friends as tributes and gifts. He appears to have planned for the publication of a select collection of 150 of his poems but this was never achieved during his lifetime.¹⁵²

His early works speak of his role as the victim of love. Circa 1515, at the age of forty, he wrote: “How much less painful a quick death would be than to suffer a thousand deaths/hour by hour/since in return for loving she wishes me dead.”¹⁵³ In his later years his chief themes were personal guilt and suffering, salvation and damnation, and his fear of Christ’s rejection.¹⁵⁴ In one he writes, “Everything must come to death/ once on a time our

¹⁴⁹ Liebert, Michelangelo, 236.

¹⁵⁰ Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 406.

¹⁵¹ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 4.

¹⁵² Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 1.

¹⁵³ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 80; Condivi, Life of Michelangelo, 146, note 131, states that in 1623, when Michelangelo’s poems were first published by his grandnephew, Michelangelo Buonarroti, many of them were rewritten, “to protect his memory from the stigma of homosexuality.” Because of this, it is believed that a number of the references to women found in his poetry today originally referred to men.

¹⁵⁴ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 15.

eyes were whole/ Every socket had its light/ Now they are empty, black and frightful/ This it is that time has brought,” and, “I live, dying for me, for sins alive/ My life’s indeed not of me/ but of sin/... I am born to what unhappiness/What living...”¹⁵⁵ Of death, he states in 1524 that, “My soul is in conversation with death/and is consulting with him about itself/Saddened by new anxieties constantly the body hoping to leave it from day to day,” and that, “Certain of death/ though not yet of its hour/ life is short and little of it is left for me/ it delights my senses/ but is no fit home for my soul/ which is begging me to die.”¹⁵⁶

Michelangelo also fashioned himself in his artworks. Although he has been described as reticent about rendering a self-portrait proper, scholars have identified his image in a number of artworks.¹⁵⁷ He portrayed himself in a variety of historical and mythological guises and placed himself within the ongoing narrative. For example, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo’s self-portrait is identified in the image of the Prophet Jeremiah, and on the Chapel wall, within the portrayal of The Last Judgement, the flayed skin held by St. Bartholomew as the symbol of his martyrdom has also been identified as a self-portrait, supposedly created in reference to Dante’s allegory of Marsyas in Paradiso, as Michelangelo’s prayer for redemption.¹⁵⁸ His self-portrait may also be identified in the figure of Joseph of Arimathea in the Florence Pietá. Joseph was the elderly patrician who donated his own tomb as a resting place for the body of Jesus. The figure has also been

¹⁵⁵ Liebert, Michelangelo, 237.

¹⁵⁶ Saslow, Poetry of Michelangelo, 490.

¹⁵⁷ See footnote eight, this chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, 30-31.

identified as that of Nicodemus, the sculptor, who questioned Jesus regarding rebirth for the aged.

Michelangelo used interrelated classical and biblical traditions to fashion himself. As we have seen, he was aware of and borrowed from the literary history of poetry and biography in order to construct himself as the ideal “Renaissance” man. Barolsky sees his efforts as closely related to those recommended by Machiavelli in the construction of the “perfect prince.”¹⁵⁹ Whatever the outcome of his self-fashioning, it was steeped in the conventions of the time. Michelangelo’s self-construction utilised accepted conventions, in particular those which had been practised by Dante and Petrarch, which were informed by beliefs surrounding the nature of “man” and artist. Michelangelo had a particular path to tread in order to realise his self-construction as a Neoplatonic citizen of the Renaissance. His life has been used in this chapter as an example of how the concepts of melancholy, *ingegno* and *virtù* could be negotiated to maintain the artistic privilege of the male artist.

Conversely, Juliana Schiesari’s work calls for a reassessment of the ways in which this artistic privilege has been extended to certain men through the hierarchical ordering of melancholia. Schiesari views the melancholy of the early modern writer, such as Ficino and the early modern subject, e.g., Hamlet, as a cultural construct which was “essentially theatrical” and which worked for, “those who [had] the power of leisure.”¹⁶⁰ While her study focuses on the privileges garnered by the melancholic male writer and his masculine protagonists, her theories can also be extended to include the cultural life of the male visual

¹⁵⁹ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, xviii.

¹⁶⁰ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 236 and 264.

artist. Schiesari recommends a re-examination of the designation of melancholy as a vital, activating principle of artistic creativity, due to the fact that it has always privileged one sex over the other, virtually excluding women. She contends that while both men and women experience sadness, fear and loss in their lives, the male expression of these feelings, under the name of melancholy, often has been equated with inspiration and eloquence, and has been given particularly high status in society. Conversely the expression of sadness, fear and loss by women has been devalued and “denied validity and significance.”¹⁶¹

Mourning, i.e., crying and grieving, has historically been viewed as the female means of indicating loss. According to Schiesari, it has been constructed to imply a lack of clarity in thinking, inarticulateness and loss of control. Thus while “men’s personal loss is converted into something grand” and enabling, that of women is trivialised.¹⁶² Schiesari “wants to situate mourning as an alternative expression of grief and loss,” thereby extending validity to women’s expression of sorrow and deploying it as an “interpretative strategy,” just as creativity has historically been constructed for men.¹⁶³ Her work prompts a re-evaluation of the historical construct of melancholy as a site of privilege for men such as Michelangelo, and she shakes the very foundation upon which his status as “melancholic genius” is based.

As we have seen in this chapter, like melancholia, *genius/ ingegno fantasia invenzione*, and *virtù* were constructed qualities inherited and exercised by a chosen few.

¹⁶¹ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholia, 14.

¹⁶² Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholia, 11-12.

¹⁶³ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholia, xi.

They ensured the establishment of a creative hierarchy, which, positioned “*Il divino*” Michelangelo at the pinnacle, at least in Vasari’s and Condivi’s minds.

This chapter has also demonstrated that the visual arts were not the only artistic means by which to proclaim creative supremacy. Barolsky’s work reminds us of the importance of studying the wider social context in relation to these patterns of self-fashioning. Many of Michelangelo’s male contemporaries, either poets, nobles or court officials, claimed aspects of melancholy, *ingegno* and *virtù* for themselves. The work of Clements, Saslow and Schiesari also highlights the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to creativity. They demonstrate that such interrelated practices as Petrarchian literature and poetry, along with art making, were crucial to the establishment and maintenance of the intellectual elite.

As a counterpoint, Chapter Two discusses self-fashioning for women of the early modern period. Like their male contemporaries, female artists and writers were influenced by beliefs surrounding biological essentialism and by the standards and aspirations of humanism. However, women also carried with them particular responsibilities to family name and lineage which often necessitated that they eschew personal achievement in favour of husband and children. As the notion that women could not concurrently satisfy both intellectual leanings and societal expectations prevailed, their decision to create often led to forms of self-fashioning which negotiated and modified the socially accepted norms of behaviour for women in the early modern period.

Chapter Two

Female Creativity and Self-fashioning During the Early Modern Period

As discussed in Chapter One, artistic creativity in the Renaissance was widely considered to be the preserve of men. I contend that, during the Renaissance, there were two gendered traditions of artistic practice in Europe, which, while containing some elements in common, differed vastly from each other depending upon the sex of the producer. The artistic practice and production experienced by men of the time does not reflect or represent that of the female artist. In addition, while my work recognises the differences in the ways creativity and self-fashioning were practised by male and female artists in the early modern period, it also recognises the validity and historical importance of men's and women's traditions within the disciplines of the fine arts. As suggested by Braidotti, I will present the experience of women as different from that of men, in ways that are valid and essential to the history of the Renaissance as well as to the human experience in general.

While Greenblatt's work outlines the significance of self-fashioning for men in elite Renaissance circles, he neglects to address how identity may have been understood and expressed by upper-class women in English society. Like their male counterparts, women fashioned themselves in accordance with societal expectations appropriate to their gender. In addition, creative women usually structured themselves in ways which served to promote the success of their creative endeavours, as well as enhance their sense of personal power and social status. In this study I argue that one key trend in female self-fashioning consisted of negotiating an uneasy path between notions of the virtuous and chaste woman, and the

woman as creative, individual artist, author or musician.¹ Christine de Pizan was perhaps the first writer to address the problem of identity for the creative woman. She experienced it in her own life, when as a widow, she was pressed into dealing with men in a patriarchal world.

While Chapter One concentrated on the self-fashioning of men in urban Italy, this chapter focuses on the creative woman, again in Italy and the rest of early modern Europe. It briefly surveys ancient and early modern perceptions of woman's nature and biography, the role played by melancholy, genius and virtue/*virtù* within her creative life, and how she fashioned herself within society in order to produce artworks, books or music. The lives and work of a number of women visual artists, writers and musicians will be discussed within the context of female education. It will look at factors such as their age, social status and in particular at the notion of the hermaphrodite or "third sex." The first section discusses how sacred and secular beliefs from antiquity concerning women determined their physical and intellectual agency during the early modern period.

Women's Natures, Women's Bodies

Debates concerning the nature of women have had a long history. Ancient practitioners from the disciplines of science, law and ethics, theology and medicine all meditated upon women's place in the universe. During the early modern period the most quoted and respected of these sources were Aristotle and Galen. For them, one's body was

¹ Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art, (London/New York, 1988), 21, states that, "creativity [throughout history] had been appropriated as an ideological component of masculinity while femininity had been constructed as man's and therefore, the artist's negative."

the indicator of one's nature and they both found the body of woman wanting in relation to that of man. Women's bodies were believed to be inherently cold, the presence of phlegm and black bile responsible for both the temperature and shape of the female form. Being colder than man, woman's body was "less robust and more frail than his; it caused her to menstruate; rarely lose her hair; possess a high voice; have denser, paler fatter, softer flesh than did a man...she took longer to form in the womb, caused her mother greater pain during birth; reached puberty earlier and aged more quickly."² Coldness was also used to explain the position of women's internalised sex organs and her lesser physical size and strength in relation to men. Due to these factors, Aristotle reasoned, women were incomplete, less fully developed, "less-perfect" than their male counterparts, the result of a mistake at the time of conception. For Aristotle, nature always strived to form the most perfect thing, in this case man, and the birth of a female child meant that some aspect of the procreative process had gone awry.³

Woman's bodily characteristics were believed to establish and indicate her mental and moral makeup. Since her cranium was smaller than that of men, her brain was therefore

² MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 35.

³ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 31 and 38, while Aristotle had stated that women took no part in procreation beyond that of incubator for the "active" male sperm, Galen believed that women, like men produced semen. Hers, however, was colder and less active than his. The combined semen, along with their place of origin, determined the sex and the disposition of the child. The "perfect" man was created from male semen which was produced in the right testicle and deposited in the right side of the uterus. The "perfect" woman was created from predominately female semen from the left-side of the uterus. As discussed below, variations of these combinations resulted in a variety of individual characteristics.

believed to be smaller and less effective or efficient. Her small ribcage meant that she needed less air than did the male body, an indication that she was to live a less physically active life than he. As well, her fatter hips and narrow shoulders meant that her body did not possess the energy to drive matter [with which to think] up towards her head.⁴ Women were also believed to be more compassionate than men but also more jealous, more querulous, less prone to shame or self-respect, more deceptive, and more difficult to rouse to action.⁵

During the early modern period these theories were not utilised to claim, as did the ancients, that woman were inferior to man, but that her nature and body were deviant to the *norm*, which was man. Along with the secular theories of antiquity, scholars of the early modern period incorporated medieval religious beliefs within their work. This was done in order to develop a comprehensive system by which the existence of a nature and bodily makeup which differed from that of man could be explained and reconciled with their world view. The Judaeo-Christian tradition perceived women as capable of being both sinful and virtuous, because of the figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary. They were believed to possess the same personality traits which had guided the actions of Eve, the ultimate temptress, and Mary, the ultimate virgin. Created from one of Adam's ribs, Eve was *ex viro propter virum*, which is to say that she was made in the image of man, while he in turn had been made in the image of God, the ultimate Creator.⁶ Eve's participation in "The Fall" meant that all women

⁴ MacLean, Renaissance Notions of Woman, 35.

⁵ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 41-42.

⁶ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 13.

were capable of deceit. As Eve had persuaded Adam to partake of the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, talkativeness in women was regarded as a vice. The fall was also regarded to be the origin of the womanly vice of sensuality; since Eve had tempted Adam, all women were capable of temptation with their bodies. It was believed that Eve's actions laid three eternal curses upon women: pain in childbirth, sadness, and subjection to men.⁷

Mary, the mother of Christ, was also considered to be an influence over the moral capabilities and actions of women. Her example, as devoted mother and chaste female, was considered to be the ideal, if somewhat contradictory, role model for the early modern woman. While Mary was revered as the symbol of eternal purity, virginity was not always favourably viewed by scholars, philosophers or laypersons. It was particularly feared and discouraged in regards to secular life. The educated, chaste woman who could move about in public posed a threat to her male contemporaries, as she was in a position to possibly usurp his authority in the public realm.⁸ Being a virgin also undermined the sacrament of marriage which was deemed to be the ultimate duty and ambition for many women

⁷ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 17, claims the source of the belief that women were cursed can be traced back both to the Book of Genesis and to Judaic law which associated women and her menstruation cycle with uncleanness.

⁸ Margaret King, Women of the Renaissance, (Chicago/London, 1991), 195-97, the wanderings and autonomy of the Beguines were severely limited in 1318 by the decisions of the Council of Vienne which forced them to establish settled communities under male supervision; and later, she reminds us that the vows of chastity and eternal maidenhood taken by the Veronese writer Isotta Nogarola (b. 1418), and Caritas Pirckheimer, (1467-1532), were only applauded after their withdrawal from society - Nogarola to a room in her mother's home and Pirckheimer to a convent.(205) Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 62, stated that, "both Protestant and Catholic authorities viewed marriage as the "natural" vocation for women...so that women who did not marry were somehow "unnatural" and therefore suspect."

throughout history. At the same time that marriage and childbearing were perceived to be the responsibilities of women, celibacy and virginity were also practised and celebrated. This created a considerable dilemma for the church.⁹

The church fathers interpreted biblical sources and recommended womanly behaviour according to their perceptions of Eve and Mary. Within the confines of the church walls, women were to be silent and cover their heads as a sign of submission. They were barred from both teaching and preaching and from taking any prominent role in the service. For most women the church recommended marriage: Paul in I Corinthians, 11:7, had written that, “the [w]oman is the glory of the man.” St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), championed marriage as the most desirable station for a woman, again quoting Paul from I Cor. 7:34, “unlike the unmarried, wives care for the things of this world, and try to please their husbands.”¹⁰

Woman’s marital state was also believed to have a considerable amount of influence over her mental and bodily health. It was first an Egyptian belief, later adopted by the Greeks, that the uterus was the site of origin for female illness of every description. Often any illness suffered by unmarried women and widows was believed to be caused by the uterus wandering throughout their bodies in search for sex satisfaction. The displacement, inflammation or suffocation of the uterus was believed to be the cause of both physical and

⁹ Laurinda S. Dixon, Perilous Chastity: Women and Illness in Pre-Enlightenment Art and Medicine, (London, 1995), 23.

¹⁰ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 15.

mental problems.¹¹ It could press up against and constrict other organs, leading to either physical or mental illness. Such an occurrence was believed to render the affected woman rationally weak, increased her propensity for violence, hate, love, pity, compassion, vengeance and fear.¹² The “wandering uterus” was also believed to result in depression, excessive grief and sometimes the desire to practice witchcraft, all of which, for both the ancients and citizens of the early modern period, constituted female melancholy.

Women and Melancholy

While the condition of melancholy was extended to women during the early modern period, its causes, manifestations and cures were perceived as different from those of their male counterparts. It was believed to stem from sources much more biological and emotional in origin than that of men.¹³ Male melancholy, which originated in the body, was traced to such non-sexed organs as the spleen, bowels or liver.¹⁴ However, the malady of melancholy in women stemmed from the very organ that rendered her female, that is, her “wandering uterus.” As well, “smoky vapours” from the menstrual flow or the flow’s cessation, [that which we identify today as menopause] could also cause a woman to display: “care, sorrow and anxiety, obfuscation of spirits, agony, [and] desperation...” This type of

¹¹ Dixon, Perilous Chastity, 13-14.

¹² MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 42.

¹³ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 10.

¹⁴ Dixon, Perilous Chastity, 197.

melancholy was believed specific to “ancient maids, nuns and widows” and could be cured in a variety of ways. The best remedy was to, “see them well-placed and married to good husbands.” Other cures included “religion, good discipline, honest education, labour and exercise, strict diet, rigour and threats.”¹⁵ Idleness was seen as a major reason for female imaginings of the mind.

As with men, class was a major determining factor in women’s melancholy. Burton makes the observation that one rarely saw a “hired servant, poor hand maid or coarse country wench” suffering from melancholy. Its female victims were invariably the “noble virgin or nice gentlewoman” with too much time on her hands.¹⁶ Women of the upper-classes were also prone to love melancholy. While they contracted the disease due to their “frustrated desire,” as did men, their love sickness was neither glorified nor romanticised, but perceived as “acute difficulties in sexual relations.”¹⁷ Properzia de’ Rossi’s melancholy, discussed in Chapter Three, provides a test case for us to examine these factors in more detail.

Regardless of their industry, women of the lower class could also suffer from the condition. The “common sort,” however, were most often connected with evil spirits and it was

¹⁵ Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 272.

¹⁶ Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 273; Dixon, Perilous Chastity, 127-29, states that upper-class women in Renaissance Protestant Europe were warned against idleness and too much physical comfort, which were regarded as the causes of a dissatisfied uterus. Working their bodies instead of their minds, women were encouraged to remain in the domestic sphere, away from the public world of men which would only serve to exacerbate their weak physical and mental conditions. Marriage was recommended in most cases as a deterrent to female mental and physical disturbances.

¹⁷ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 151.

believed they consorted with the devil.¹⁸ Some viewed these women as suffering from a mental imbalance which caused delusions.

In addition to a woman's physical makeup, the celestial bodies also played a role in determining her personality and the actions of her humours. While men, both in antiquity and the early modern period, were believed to have been influenced by Saturn, the planet of melancholy and Mercury, the planet of industry; women's planetary influences were more benign, romantic and domestic. According to Claude Dariot, in his 1557 publication, A briefe and most easy introduction to the astrological judgements of the Starres, women such as queens, ladies and widows who "lived well or were celibate," along with fishers and fools, were believed to be influenced by the moon. They were also ruled by Venus, the planet of love, desire and comfort, who watched over and influenced mothers, wives, embroiderers and cooks.¹⁹ The planet had received its name in tribute to the Roman goddess Venus, who was associated with Aphrodite, an ancient spirit of kitchen gardens, who became the Greek Goddess of love, beauty and marriage. During antiquity, Aphrodite/Venus was also associated with temple harlots and other women of loose virtue, because she wore a magic girdle which rendered her irresistible to men. The Graces, Hours and Seasons were her handmaidens.²⁰ She was the mother of Hermaphroditus, the god whose body displayed both male and female attributes.

¹⁸ Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 273.

¹⁹ Dixon, Perilous Chastity, 55.

²⁰ Morford and Lenardon, Classical Mythology, 141.

The key difference between men's and women's melancholy was that while the male condition could both cause and be caused by scholarly leanings, that of women was not considered to be connected to nor be a contributing factor to creativity.²¹ While melancholy often enabled men to articulate their innermost thoughts and creative energies, it was not perceived as affecting women in the same way. The seventeenth-century scholar Burton declared that, "many of them [women] cannot tell how to express themselves in words, or how it [melancholy] holds them, ... you cannot understand them, or well tell what to make of their sayings; so far gone, sometimes, so stupefied and distracted, they think themselves bewitched."²²

While melancholy was used in order to both prove and promote the existence of male exceptionality, Schiesari identifies it as historically available to women only, "as a debilitating disease and certainly not as an enabling ethos."²³ She describes melancholy as the "cultural representation of loss," in which that suffered by the male is seen as more grand than that experienced by the female.²⁴ Schiesari considers how loss is symbolised in the literary melancholic tradition and uses Shakespeare's Hamlet as a prime example of how it became historically legitimated in terms of melancholy for men. While men's display of loss was believed to be manifested in inspired artistry and genius, silent grief and stamina, that of

²¹ See Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy and Battersby's Gender and Genius for a comprehensive analysis of this belief, both during the Renaissance and later.

²² Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 273.

²³ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 15.

²⁴ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 13.

women was associated with the act of mourning, through “widow’s weeds, inarticulate weeping and ritual, which while viewed as necessary in certain circumstances, was to be kept within limits.” Both Ficino and Petrarch regarded female mourning as largely without value and the latter demanded that wailing women be confined to the home.²⁵ Schiesari locates the act of mourning as an important component of female melancholy and aims to “displace androcentric privilege by presenting it as an alternative expression of grief and loss.”²⁶ She also reminds us that “the cultural expression of women’s losses is not given the same representational value as those of men within the western canon of literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis.”²⁷

Prior to the early modern period there were mythological and historical women of accomplishment, learning and virtue, who were described as suffering from melancholy. According to Burton, Aristotle “confesses” that the sibyls, such as Cassandra and Nanto, were deeply melancholic, while Lucretia, wife of a Greek general and the Egyptian Queen, Cleopatra, both of whom committed suicide, were also afflicted with the malady.²⁸

Recent scholarship has suggested that during the early modern period when the existence and expression of women’s melancholy was granted little significance within the scholarly realm, a number of learned, artistic women, particularly in Spain, were claiming

²⁵ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 12, 18 and 165.

²⁶ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, xi.

²⁷ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholy, 13.

²⁸ Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, 173 and 252.

the very condition as a contributing factor in their creativity. It was also used in order to further ambitions related to the cloister and the court.²⁹ This new research substantiates that female melancholy was diverse in nature and scope, and requires further research in order to explain and define it. As demonstrated by Soufas, it also constitutes a female subversion and negotiation of the traditional literary, medical and scientific status quo.³⁰ Their actions corroborate Greenblatt's hypothesis concerning the achievement of self-fashioning in relation to alien or hostile conditions.³¹

A number of early modern women wrote about melancholy and the role it played in their lives. They described it in similar terms to their male contemporaries, many concentrating upon the relationship between it and their scholarly pursuits. Some female Spanish poets identified themselves as melancholics. In the mid-sixteenth century Luisa Sigea, in her poem, "I had vacant months and wearisome nights, numerous to me," invokes the influence of Saturn for herself when she writes of her unhappy life that is controlled by a

²⁹ Soufas, "Gendered Context of Melancholy," *Spanish Women in the Golden Age*, 176, states that, "St. Teresa of Avila protected the ecstatic nuns in her convent from charges of demonic possession by describing them as melancholics whose...condition is brought on ...by exaggerated asceticism." Magdalena Sánchez, "Pious and Political Images of a Hapsburg Woman at the Court of Philip III (1598-1621)," *Spanish Women in the Golden Age*, 98-99, writes of how Margaret of Austria, Queen of Spain and wife of Philip III, used melancholy to express her displeasure at Philip's absences from court and the influence of the Duke of Lerma over the king as well as to exert control over her servants. Also see Sánchez, "Melancholy and Female Illness: Hapsburg Women and the Court of Philip III," *Journal of Women's History*, 8/2, (Summer 1996), 81-102.

³⁰ Soufas, "The Gendered Context of Melancholy," 173.

³¹ See Chapter One.

“cruel star.”³² Approximately one hundred years later, Marcia Belisarda (Sor María de Santa Isabel) wrote a poem that she entitled, “Melancholic Ballad” in which she stated that, “Thought/if you think about providing a remedy for my illness/ you think mistakenly/ because it is a sickness caused by thoughts.”³³

Contrary to Burton’s contention that women were rendered immobile and inarticulate by the throes of erotic or love melancholy (the latter described as romantic love in the twentieth century), both Marcia Belisarda and poet Leonor de la Cueva y Silva wrote of the proactive stance they adopted in order to release themselves from the unrequited love they held for certain young men. While Belisarda recounts her use of “controlled mental processes and the act of purposeful forgetting,” Cueva “guards herself...by refusing to fall in love with an appealing youth,” she writes: “now that I am acquainted with his deceits and cunning/in order not to become ensnared in his traps/ I will close my soul’s portal.”³⁴

These poems substantiate that a number of learned women of the Renaissance were indeed aware of the culturally gendered attribution of melancholy extended to men and sought to redirect its powerful association with scholarship and creativity for their own use. Female attitudes and actions regarding melancholy have yet to be fully explored and incorporated into the general history of the condition. Soufas’ work, as important as it is, may convey but a hint of the role played by melancholia within the lives of educated women

³² Soufas, “Gendered Context of Melancholy,” 174-75.

³³ Soufas, “Gendered Context of Melancholy,” 171.

³⁴ Soufas, “Gendered Context of Melancholy,” 177-79.

in the early modern period.³⁵ A similar study focused on the relationship between creative Italian women and melancholy would be most instructive and would broaden our understanding of how creative women fashioned themselves in ways which led to their participation in the artistic communities of Renaissance Europe.

While the opinions held by the Italian poet and scholar Vittoria Colonna, (1490-1547) regarding self-fashioning are currently not known, she viewed the practice of writing poetry as an enabling strategy: it provided respite from her personal suffering. She stated that, “I write only to free myself from my inner pain.”³⁶ Sadness is evident in her writing. While the majority of her poems focus on the character and exploits of her late husband and the civil strife within Italy, many of them refer to her state of mind and disappointments with the course her life has taken. In the early years of her marriage she wrote in relation to her husband’s military status: “Your mighty valour has proclaimed you kin to Hector and Achilles/But for me/ forlorn and weeping/ what can this avail?/My mind was evermore prey

³⁵ Margaret R. Greer, rev. of Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities, ed. Magdalena S. Sánchez and Alain Saint-Saëns, Renaissance Quarterly, 51/2, (1998), 636-637, states that Soufas provides an, “interesting and appropriately situated consideration of the association of women with melancholy in terms of weakness, passivity and irrationality, and women writer’s attempts to redirect the humoral and literary tradition of the pain-and creative power...of ...melancholic thought to articulate feelings of unresolved identity and create outlets for scholarly creativity.”

³⁶ Liebert, Michelangelo, 313; Barolsky, “Cellini, Vasari, and the Marvels of Malady,” Sixteenth-Century Journal, 24/1, (1993), 45. Colonna’s sentiments are similar to those of Vasari who stated that the allegorical drawings that he had created were a means by which he, would “endeavour to regain [his] health”.

to dread/ Whoever saw me melancholy/judged that jealousy and absence wounded me.”³⁷

Seven years after her husband’s death she lamented: “and since on high the sun still runs his course/ these cannot make my loss less heavy nor my heart more weak/My grief despises time/ and sufferings I.”³⁸

Colonna had been born into the upper classes of Italian society; she was the granddaughter of Federigo da Montefeltro, and her father had served as Constable of Naples. She had received a humanistic education and began to compose poetry at a very young age. At nineteen she wed the Marchese di Pescara, Ferrante Francesco d’Avalos, a career soldier of whom she saw little during their marriage. He died in 1525 from wounds sustained in battle. They had had no children and after his death, Colonna spent the next twenty-two years of her life practically as a recluse, living in convents, in order to “be able to serve God more quietly.”³⁹ During these years she also wrote poetry, five editions of which were published during her lifetime, and carried on a prolific correspondence with some of the most renowned thinkers of the time such as Baldassare Castiglione, Pietro Bembo, Marguerite of Navarre, Jacopo Sannazzaro and Michelangelo. While Liebert contends that the sculptor recognised a kindred melancholic spirit within Colonna and desired to dispel the “core of sadness that she herself could not dissolve,” there is still more work to be done on

³⁷ Maud F. Jerrold, Vittoria Colonna With Some Account of Her Friends and Her Times, (New York, 1906), 68.

³⁸ Jerrold, Vittoria Colonna, 79.

³⁹ Liebert, Michelangelo, 313.

the subject of her life and personality.⁴⁰ Hopefully an examination of Colonna's life and work in relation to self-fashioning and melancholy will be conducted. A study of Colonna, similar to that undertaken by Soufas for Spanish women, could shed new light upon this intelligent and prolific writer and contextualise her within early modern humanist society. Whereas creative women may have recognised melancholy as a socially-driven qualifier of masculine creativity, their relationship with the concept of genius was not as easy for them to define, appropriate or subvert.

Women and Genius

While women of the early modern period could possess their own types and degrees of melancholy, albeit inferior and deviant to those of men, they were perceived as lacking genius due to its association with male sexuality. As discussed in Chapter One, Battersby identifies the Renaissance concept of genius as *genio/genius* or the divine forces of male fertility. It was, at that time associated, but not yet melded with, *ingegno/ingenium*, which constituted good judgement, knowledge and talent. Due to conventional wisdom regarding the nature of woman, the female body was thought to be incapable of either procreativity or reasoning. They were not capable of producing either the heat required to manufacture strong regenerative semen, nor could they exercise rational judgement or extraordinary skill. In other words, women's bodies were designed to create neither offspring nor creative works.

⁴⁰ Liebert, Michelangelo, 320. Also see Ernidio Campi, Michelangelo e Vittoria Colonna, (Torino, 1994), for a further examination of the theological and artistic discussions carried out between these two individuals.

Physically women were inferior to men because they lacked genius, and artistically they were inferior to men because they lacked *ingenium*. As artists, they were able to conceive beauty when in its presence but were unable to mimic its essence, either in spirit or appearance.⁴¹

Philosophers and scholars of the early modern period thus manufactured genius as the exclusive prerogative of men. It was an “atemporal and mysterious power” which was beyond the reach of most human beings, certainly beyond that of all women.⁴² The first allusion to the concept of genius in relation to women was penned by Christine de Pizan, the Italian woman of letters who wrote commentaries on social position, as we shall see below regarding the concept of “the third sex.” Pizan criticised the practice of most “learned and wise men who adopted the [pagan] ideals and mythology taken from patriarchal Rome,” in which to construct themselves as superior to women. Pizan reinterpreted myth and history in order to include learned and chaste women in the equation.

While women were unable to claim genius without declaring themselves to be men, the very fact that they were female necessitated that they declare and show themselves to be virtuous. Genius may not have been a prerequisite for female creativity, but a reputation for virtue surely was.

⁴¹ Battersby, Gender and Genius, 33.

⁴² Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays, (New York, 1988), 153.

Women, Virtue and Creativity

The belief that women's natures rendered them susceptible to wanton and soul-destroying behaviour, which would place their family's reputations in danger, necessitated strict limitations upon their access to public life. Women of all ages and marital states were warned against the temptations to be found at banquets, dances, the court or marketplace, or anywhere else they could see and be observed by men. Going to mass was considered a threat as well, however, even women had to attend church and the shortest, most covert route there and back was recommended. They were to observe silence, keep their eyes lowered in company; and make no unnecessary motions of hands, feet, or arms. Laughter was most objectionable because it showed the teeth.⁴³ Gossips eager to find fault were everywhere, and any hint of impropriety was cause for alarm and scandal. The active life, expected of and encouraged for a man, was virtually unthinkable for a woman.⁴⁴ Such restrictions determined women's social behaviour, limited their access to learning, and regulated the amount of power they held in family and business matters. Taken in total, the physical limitations and the perception of their natures that were placed on women helped to create a social order that privileged the elite male and proved, for most women, too powerful to even conceive of altering or combating.⁴⁵

⁴³ Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 51.

⁴⁴ King, Woman of the Renaissance, 88.

⁴⁵ Lerner, Creation of Feminist Consciousness 10, identifies in particular the "systemic educational disadvantages of women [which] has affected [their] self-perception, their ability to conceptualise their own situation and their ability to conceive of societal solutions to improve it."

Female virtue was the major bargaining tool used by families during marriage negotiations and the settlement of dowry. Both a means and an end for the young woman who wished to be married, female virtue could be defined in a number of ways, as: sexual chastity, modesty, obedience, humility, constancy, patience, temperance, piety, devoutness, kindness, prudence in household management and, fortitude under affliction.⁴⁶ All were perceived as qualities necessary for a successful marriage and homelife. Indeed, as Kelso notes, Renaissance conduct literature contained little definition of the concept of “lady” other than being a wife.⁴⁷

The sexual virtue of female family members could be guaranteed only through strict supervision; women were never to be without a chaperone in the presence of an unrelated male and they had to conduct themselves with the utmost of decorum. An unblemished character was of prime importance in a society which depended greatly upon a daughter’s success in the marriage game.⁴⁸ A woman with a tarnished reputation would be much more difficult to “marry off” since a very high dowry would be expected by the man willing to take her as his wife.

⁴⁶ See Kelso, “Women in the Scheme of Things,” in Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 5-37; King, Women of the Renaissance, 29-32 and MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 23-24 and 57.

⁴⁷ Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 1.

⁴⁸ King, Women of the Renaissance, 30. In the late fourteenth century, Marietta Strozzi, though in possession of both beauty and a good dowry, called her virtue into question by participating in a snowball fight with some young Florentines.”

Sexual chastity, then, was the most important of all the virtues and was jealously guarded by a woman's family. Along with ensuring success in marriage, Margaret King, states that, "[c] chastity assured future husbands of the purity of their line, the legitimacy of their heirs and the reputation of their family. Thus, the guarding of chastity was the primary business of the woman in the Renaissance, and a man's honour depended upon how he supervised the actions of his daughters and wife."⁴⁹ However, while sexual innocence and gentle demeanour were regarded as suitable characteristics of a young woman in the marriage market, intelligence and capability in the arts and letters were viewed as an asset to wives of the upper-class. Again, this led to a dilemma for both Renaissance families and society. There was much debate over how to provide an education for girls which would not encourage them to overstep the bounds of propriety, risk their own virtue or interfere in the lives of men, all of which would be "unnatural" for them. Those women wishing to take part in public life, would, being educated have a greater capability to do just that. This desire was to be kept in check.⁵⁰

Women's major outlet for creativity in the Renaissance was to be found within the domestic sphere. The fabric arts have historically been the most available mediums with

⁴⁹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 29.

⁵⁰ Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 60-61, "[o]pposition to educating girls on the same lines as boys...is in accord with Renaissance belief in the freedom conferred by studies; a mind liberally trained is not easily subdued at the will of another, or shut within a narrow round of interests. Open the door of the cage and the bird is almost certain to fly out."

which women could expand their creative energies.⁵¹ Sewing, weaving, lace-making, embroidery and quilting were considered most suitable occupations for women. Such skills were essential, especially in the lower-classes, and in addition to being an expression of self they were also a means by which to keep one's family dressed and warm.

For the upper-classes, the desire to have one's daughter considered a refined and cultured lady led to the encouragement of painting, poetry writing, and playing musical instruments as hobbies. While the advocacy and interest of their fathers was necessary in order that young women could partake in higher learning, or express themselves artistically, other social and personal elements also had to be in place. As Natalie Zemon Davis argues, some of the conditions needed for early modern women writers to create were: an access to materials about her subject of interest, and to the genre of historical writings in general; a public life and a sense of connection with that life, as well as a serious audience for her work.⁵² Personal autonomy would also be important to their success.⁵³ Throughout history, most women who wished to express themselves creatively or live lives popularly viewed as deviant were virtually on their own.⁵⁴ Margaret King comments upon the "thwarted" desires

⁵¹ For a history of the fabric arts and their relationship to constructions of femininity see Rozisika Parker, The Subversive Stitch, (London, 1984).

⁵² Natalie Zemon Davis, "Gender and Genre: Women As Historical Writers, 1400-1820," in Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past, ed. Patricia H. Labalme, (New York, 1980), 154-55.

⁵³ Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness. 179; also see Anne-Louise Brooks, Feminist Pedagogy: An Autobiographical Approach, (Halifax, 1992).

⁵⁴ Regarding the lives of the learned courtesans from the early modern period, Olwen Hufton, The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, Vol.1, 1500-

of many learned women, resulting from their self-doubts, low evaluation of their own sex, the ostracism they suffered by and from other women, as well as from men who were threatened by their desire to go beyond the limits set for women.⁵⁵ The potential loss of family, friendship and economic support and the chance for a “normal” life no doubt turned many determined women away from a life of learning and creativity.⁵⁶ However, there were women who did produce art, music or poetry, participate in battle, reign over kingdoms and manage their own homes or estates with great success. Since their activities and accomplishments served to disprove traditional expectations about the physical and intellectual capacities of nature, society and scholars alike looked for an explanation. Many thought they had found it in the concept of “the third sex.”

1800, (London, 1995), 303-304 states that “relatively little is known of their social origins or training. In some instances daughters may have learned the rules of the game from their mothers.” The courtesan was usually a woman of “some education... with musical gifts ...physical beauty and refined tastes...who excelled in the erotic arts.” No matter how extensive their skills or intellect, these women relied heavily upon the good will and interest of men for their livelihood. Italian courtesan and poet Veronica Franco wrote in the 1640s about the “price a woman paid for mixing with men in public without the ties of matrimony” and about the transitory nature of her profession which rendered her “as subject to the whims of men as any wife to her husband.” 423.

⁵⁵ King. “Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance,” Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past , 74.

⁵⁶ Battersby, Gender and Genius, 46, states that contrary to the myth of the lone male genius, it was the female creator who, [lacking the social and institutional support enjoyed by men], was the more isolated figure in the history of creativity, but this view may well be overturned once more studies of women and their communities have been undertaken.

The Third Sex

The teachings and theories of Aristotle, so popular during the early modern period, were dependent upon the concept of hierarchical opposites. “Male” and “female” were constructed as opposites, with “male” and all its related natures, behaviours and activities viewed as the “norm” and as superior to those natures, behaviours and activities relating to the “female.” The concepts of what was male and female were compartmentalised, no overlap was allowed or acknowledged. While this may have worked in theory, those who tried to modify reality to fit the concept would encounter difficulties. Like the Greek god Hermaphroditus, many early modern individuals displayed traits and excelled at activities believed to be the forte of the opposite sex. The existence of such deviance was believed to originate in the womb. An effeminate man was thought to have been produced predominately by male sperm but having grown within their mother’s body on the left-hand side of her uterus, he had inherited some of her female traits. Conversely, a *virago* or “mannish woman” had been formed predominately by female semen but on the right side of the uterus, thereby creating a female with masculine tendencies. Hermaphrodites were considered to be monsters, their formation occurring because of a probable illness or imbalance of heat, blood or semen in one or both of their parents.⁵⁷ They were deemed as “unnatural,” as a third sex, fitting into neither of the two gendered categories.

Artistic endeavours, warfare, politics and finance were all viewed as belonging exclusively within the realm of men. During the early modern period a number of women

⁵⁷ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 38-9.

“invaded” these realms, taking on responsibilities as painters and sculptors, soldiers, heads of state and estates. The success that some women attained in these areas caused them to be described as the exception while their accomplishments were conceived as beyond the capabilities of “normal” women. Thus, they were not judged successful on their own terms but rather because they had “acted as a man would.”⁵⁸ Such logic maintained the belief that that which constituted “maleness” was superior to that which constituted “femaleness.” By the construction of this “third or intermediate sex,” an individual who looked like a woman on the outside but was a “man inside,” societal expectations of the sexes in general could remain, for the most part, unchallenged.⁵⁹ Some women would have been uncomfortable with being designated as “unnatural” or a member of the “third sex” and few would have dared to go beyond the existing prescribed gender boundaries

Nonetheless, there were women who, through their actions and accomplishments, were considered to be hermaphrodites or members of the third sex. Sofonisba Anguissola was the only female artist of the early modern period lauded for her ability to render human subjects in a way that gave them the “spark of life,” as only male artists were deemed able to do. Anguissola’s designation as a “marvel” and a intermediary stems from the notion that she was able to, according to Vasari, “rise above the condition of her sex and act (or paint)

⁵⁸ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 159, states that during the early modern period “the excellence of woman depend[ed] on whether she [could] rise above the condition of her sex and act (or paint) like a man.”

⁵⁹ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 160, defines the physical makeup of an intermediate as, “not quite male, not quite female.” Concerning the virtuosity of a female artist, she would be described as “a woman with masculine virtuosity.”

like a man.”⁶⁰ Women who excelled in the European political arena on male terms were also viewed as deviant, as going against norms of female nature and behaviour. In the case of Joan of Arc and Elizabeth I of England, they could also be designated as Amazons, those female warriors of old who relished in the field of battle, the glory of conquest, and who often disdained male companionship. Joan of Arc was a “marvel” due to her inclination for and her success on the field of battle. Her predilection for the trappings of a male warrior filled her contemporaries with wonder and fear and her attire was a major point of contention at her trial.⁶¹ The adoption of one sex’s clothing by another was viewed as a critical breach of the divine order of both sex and class.⁶²

Posing a further concern for a society which neither recognised nor sanctioned female supremacy over men in any form were those women who, by right of birth, were eligible to ascend to positions of power in government or within their families. Queen Elizabeth I’s choice never to marry and therefore rule England by herself, flew in the face of conventional belief concerning the appropriate sphere for women and the extent of their capabilities. Elizabeth is perhaps the ultimate early modern example of self-fashioning, and it was a fashioning that transgressed gender lines. Throughout her life she constructed her identity in a variety of ways, often referring to herself in male terms while adopting a number of female

⁶⁰ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 159. See footnote 58.

⁶¹ King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 190.

⁶² Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 253, states that women’s adoption of masculine dress was believed to lead to, “a breakdown of distinction of social class as well as gender, because a woman in man’s clothing did not reveal her class affiliation as she would with her normal dress.”

persona.⁶³ Despite the rule of a number of female monarchs, Elizabeth, Mary, Queen of Scots, Christine of Sweden and the Queen of Cyprus, Catarina Comaro, a number of justifications for women's unsuitability for leadership were advanced : they could not bear arms because of their modesty [and allegiance to chastity], they could not mix freely with men; they [had] wayward judgement [*fragilitas consilii*]; [were] deceitful and [could] keep neither their word nor a secret.⁶⁴ Despite the dilemma they presented to the status quo, female monarchs were few in number and often dismissed as "exceptional and abnormal." Their positions of power were not regarded as reflections of the "true" capabilities of women. It was those women who wished to engage with men of their own class in scholarly and creative circles who were perceived as the greatest threat to male dominance of public life. The female pursuit of a humanistic education, by which they could enter these circles, was a matter of concern during the early modern period.

⁶³ King, Women of the Renaissance, 158. At the same time that Elizabeth referred to herself as a "prince with the body of a woman and the head of a king," she presented herself to her subjects as Astraea, the goddess of justice, Deborah, the biblical prophet and military leader, and Diana the Huntress. Frances A. Yates, Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (London/Boston, 1975), 66 contends that as the figure of Astraea, she was the epitome of "imperial [renovation] implying the return of that best rule[golden age] under the One when the world is most at peace, and justice, together with all other virtue, reigns." The "one" theme is strong in Elizabethan worship. The royal virgin [was] unique, the one and only."

⁶⁴ MacLean, Renaissance Notion of Woman, 54.

Women and Education

During the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, the attraction of some women to higher learning caused men to become increasingly antagonistic towards female education and physical freedom. Throughout these years there was considerable debate surrounding just how much formal education was safe, necessary and within the capabilities of women. Social status and family wealth determined the extent of a girl's education. In his study on schooling in Italy during the early modern period Paul Grendler states that "probably all noble and wealthy commoner girls learned to read and write. Middle-class girls had some opportunities to learn, and working-class girls had few possibilities."⁶⁵ For the most part, education for girls of the upper-classes focused on perfecting those skills necessary to household management, such as reading and writing in the vernacular, simple arithmetic, cookery, needlework, manners, entertainment, bible reading and music. All were viewed as important in both attracting and pleasing a husband. Some young upper-class girls were given a humanistic education which included lessons in the classics, philosophy, mathematics, Latin and Greek. Knowledge of rhetoric was frowned upon as it was deemed useless to women who would not be taking part in public forums, it was also considered dangerous as it would lead them to talkativeness and articulation of their own opinions.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Paul Grendler, "Girls and Working-Class Boys in School," in Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literary and Learning 1300-1600, (Baltimore/London, 1989), 101-2.

⁶⁶ Grendler, "Girls and Working-Class Boys in School," 87-88 states that most humanist studies, in particular the learning of Latin, were linked to public roles in the minds of such scholars as Leonardo Bruni, Ludovico Dolce and Erasmus and so were deemed to be of little use to women.

Girls were, for the most part, taught at home by their mothers or hired tutors or in the homes of these tutors. Most often their teacher was a man, though there were a small number of female teachers who taught the elementary vernacular curriculum during the early modern period.⁶⁷ Girls seldom were permitted to attend the neighbourhood independent schools in their communities. As well a number of them, mostly motherless daughters or orphans, were educated by nuns in female monasteries where they resided, sometimes until the age of twenty-five.⁶⁸

While, for the most part, girls of all social classes were not highly educated or encouraged to be so, there were a number of women in Italy in the early modern period who were well-educated and accomplished and who gained fame and adoration due to their achievements. They included: noblewomen such as Isabella d'Este, (1474-1539) who mastered Latin and Greek and was an enthusiastic patron of the arts and Elizabetta Gonzaga, (1471-1526) the Duchess of Urbino who was well-known for her political and social capabilities, and whose court was the setting for Castiglione's The Courtier. The Venetian Catarina Cornaro (1454-1510), was another such noblewoman, she became Queen of Cyprus and reigned over a coterie of literati at her court in Asolo. Female artists were also revered for their talents during this period : Caterina dei Vigri (St. Catherine of Bologna) (1413-1463), Lavinia Fontana and Sofonisba Anguissola were all popular artists during their life times. The lives and achievements of these women are evidence that a humanistic education

⁶⁷ Grendler, "Girls and Working-Class Boys in School," 90-93, discusses the documentary sources regarding the occurrence of female teachers in Italy during this period.

⁶⁸ Grendler, "Girls and Working-Class Boys in School," 96-97.

of girls was accepted in some quarters and that its purpose was not always directed towards the securing of a husband.

While higher learning for women during the early modern period was condoned, in some cases it remained within certain boundaries. The extent to which a woman indulged in educational pursuits seems to have been totally dependent upon how much it was perceived to disturb, or threatened to disturb, the traditional structure and order of the family and/or the state. The Spanish humanist Juan Louis Vives (1492-1540) warned in his book, Instruction of a Christian Woman, (1523) that education for women was necessary for the happiness and prestige of the state, and was to consist of “many things, but only such as are of use to her to know.” This education consisted of learning her “letters and spinning,...both wool and linen, two arts which that famous golden age and that epoch of innocence taught to posterity, most useful in the domestic economy.” According to Margaret King “the education that Vives prescribed for the young woman of the Renaissance was not one that would cultivate her mind, but one that would encourage her obedience to familiar duties and virtues.”⁶⁹ The sixteenth-century Italian pedagogue Silvio Antoniano recommended the bare minimum of educational instruction for women of all classes, “as to those of humble status, it is not necessary that they even know how to read; as to those of middle condition, do not teach them to read; as to the noblewomen who must be mothers to the children of grand families, I would certainly approve their learning to read a little and do some arithmetic.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 164-65.

⁷⁰ King, Women of the Renaissance, 186.

Formal education for women of northern Europe in the early modern period seems to have fared no differently. Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) who, according to King, “assumed the stark subordination of wives to their husbands,” did educate his daughters but “only for their own edification.” He supposedly told his daughter, Margaret, not to “seek for the praise of the public, nor value it...but because of the great love you bear us, you [should] regard us - your husband and myself - as a sufficiently large circle of readers for all that you write.”⁷¹ King states that More’s aim was not to “create professional scholars of his daughters, but effective mothers and compassionate wives for the governors of England.”⁷²

The Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1469-1536) may be identified as being more in favour of formal education for women than his male contemporaries, however he perceived it less as a means for them to improve themselves, or the world, and more as a conduit to female virtue. He wrote in a letter to a colleague that, “there is nothing that more occupies the attentions of a young girl than study. Hence this is the occupation that best protects the mind from dangerous idleness, from which the best precepts are derived, the mind trained and attracted to virtue...”⁷³

Despite the constraints placed upon them, there appears to have been two circumstances, both beyond the control of girls, whose presence made it easier for them to study, write, paint or produce music. The first was the presence in their lives of an

⁷¹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 39, 185-86.

⁷² King, Women of the Renaissance, 207.

⁷³ King, Women of the Renaissance, 181.

encouraging, male mentor, the second was their age. Girls, as well as boys, required a person who believed in and encouraged their education, and who was in the social and financial position to access such learning for them. For girls, this was almost invariably their father. Margaret King states that, “it was the father of learned women whose actions themselves testified to their high estimation of their daughter’s intelligence.”⁷⁴ Sometimes, in the absence of the father, a male mentor would appear from another quarter. Irene di Spilimbergo’s father died when she was less than two years old. In his stead, her maternal grandfather oversaw her education.⁷⁵ Wiesner claims that like female writers and artists, female musicians relied heavily upon the tolerance of their fathers, usually musicians themselves, for encouragement and training.⁷⁶

However most fathers, of all classes, were very much against their daughters moving beyond a rudimentary education. They neither encouraged or supervised their daughter’s learning. Many of them saw women’s ability to read as unnatural and threatening to the

⁷⁴ King, Women of the Renaissance, 184, lists Laura Cereta, Alessandra Scala, Cassandra Fedele, Olimpia Morata, Cecilia Gonzaga, Cataruzza Caldiera, Costanza Barbaro and Lucrezia Marinelli as women who received a humanist education due to the interest and pride that their fathers, who as either statesmen, secretaries, physicians or scholars themselves, were interested in higher scholarship. See Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil eds, Introduction in Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works By and About The Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy, (New York, 1983), 25.

⁷⁵ Anne Jacobson Shutte, “Irene di Spilimbergo: The Image of a Creative Woman in Late Renaissance Italy,” Renaissance Quarterly, 44, (1991), 44, 50 and 53, states that Zuan Paolo da Ponte ensured that both Irene and her sister Emila were, “trained in such polite accomplishments as music (the lute, stringed instruments and singing) and had their portraits painted.” He also engaged Titian as Irene’s art instructor.

⁷⁶ Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 157, lists singer-composers, Francesca Caccini (b.1587), once the highest paid musician in the Medici court and Barbara Strozzi (b.1619), who managed a musical salon in Venice, as two such women.

order of the household. They believed that female literacy at an advanced level contributed to marital discord and led to a loss of interest in things considered to be within the realm of women. The early modern Italian scholar Lucrezia Marinelli speculated that such statements reflected the fear men harboured of the loss of political and societal dominance in a society in which women had access to education.⁷⁷

A girl's age also determined the type of encouragement she received regarding her education. Those deemed too young to wed were much more free to take part in scholarly life. Margaret King and Albert Rabil have concluded that most of the learned women of that period who were "regarded as prodigies when they were young," achieved their success early on, as there is evidence that they received less and less encouragement to excel in their studies and artistic endeavours as they aged. The possibility of their continuing to study, paint or compose up until the time of or after their marriage was perceived as a threat both to the event itself and to its success. When a young girl's family prepared her for marriage, their encouragement of her scholarly accomplishments usually stopped. King and Rabil state that, "[t]he learning which made... women so happy as young girls made them miserable as women."⁷⁸ Wiesner points out that, "most humanists women stopped studying and writing once they married..." and that if one wished to continue, "a convent or a life of seclusion were the only avenues."⁷⁹ When one considers that the average age of consent to marry was

⁷⁷ King, Women of the Renaissance, 186.

⁷⁸ King and Rabil, eds., Her Immaculate Hand, 28.

⁷⁹ Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 127 and 132.

twelve for Italian girls, it is easy to see that, for most females, creative careers did not last long and most talents were never given the opportunity to mature.⁸⁰ It almost always came down to a choice for these girls, for to have both a marriage and a career was virtually unheard-of. If such dualistic lives indeed become a reality, as in the case of Lavinia Fontana and Sofonisba Anguissola, the reason usually cited for their existence was the absence of a son and/or male heir to whom the family could look for financial support or the biological furtherance of the family name.

Sometimes death intervened and a young woman never had to face making the choice between being an adult and continuing to study, paint or write. A case in point is Irene di Spilimbergo who succumbed to fever at the age of twenty-one. She was at the age where she may have had to decide between marriage or continuing to paint, and to choose the latter would have necessitated her remaining unmarried.⁸¹ For a mature, married, learned, secular

⁸⁰ Hufton, *Prospect Before Her*, 69-70, 101, 112. The actual age that girls married did, however, differ according to class. This was largely due to concerns over their dowries. Generally, the greater the fortune their families possessed, the younger their age upon marriage. Many lower class women had to work for a number of years in order to save enough money to be respectably married. Those who worked on farms, in factories or as servants usually did not marry until their middle or late twenties. It should be noted that the incidents of young girls leaving home to work in the early modern period was more common in northern Europe and England than in Italy or Spain.

⁸¹ Shutte, "Irene di Splimbergo," 56-57, says of Splimbergo, "Perhaps in a way he [her biographer Dionigi Atanagi] and Irene were fortunate. The girl who died escaped the ever-present pressure to conform to the expectations of others as a wife and mother or nun. Arrested on the ascending curve of the female life cycle, she could stand as a poignant indication... of women's creative possibilities."

woman to involve herself directly with the world was apparently anxiety-provoking, and she was considered dangerous to the status quo.⁸²

Convent life was the second option for young women of the early modern period. Theoretically convents were to be “social places for women which protected society from their sexuality.”⁸³ In reality they were often dumping grounds for the “excess” daughter(s) of noble families who could not afford a suitable dowry for them. Indeed, King contends that “the history of female monasticism is at least in part the history of female imprisonment.”⁸⁴ Many young girls had no desire for the cloistered life with its vow of chastity and were often forced into it by their family’s financial situation. A number of these women rebelled against the system. The nun who wished to participate in the secular world of men often did not suffer from the lack of their company, either in a sexual, political or intellectual context.⁸⁵

For those women who chose or were forced into the religious life, their involvement in a community of nuns often gave them the opportunity to utilise their humanist education,

⁸² There can be no better example of an anxiety-provoking female personality for the male patriarchal establishment in the early modern period than the figure of Elizabeth I. Her presence on the throne of England posed an even greater threat than a wife or daughter who wished to learn Latin. King, Women of the Renaissance, 159, claims that the “phenomenon of a queen-king violated the natural order.” See footnote 63, this chapter.

⁸³ Guido Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crimes and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice, (New York/Oxford, 1985), 76.

⁸⁴ King, Women of the Renaissance, 86.

⁸⁵ See Ruggiero, “Sex Crimes against God,” in The Boundaries of Eros, 70-88, for an investigation of the sexual life of nuns in various convents in Venice during the early modern period.

exercise their creativity, and interact with the outside world through the composition of letters, books and songs. In fact, “[n]uns made up a great fraction of educated women, and cloistered women were disproportionately literate; it was a commonplace for advice books to suggest that young girls not be taught to read or write unless they were destined to be nuns.”⁸⁶ Nuns were recruited almost exclusively from wealthy and respected families.⁸⁷ They were relatively well-educated compared to other of their female contemporaries. Many of them were writers who composed works largely in the vernacular and which were devotional in type. Some wrote morality plays for church festivals and performed them for their cloistered audience.⁸⁸ Some nuns were involved in the visual arts as illustrators of illuminated manuscripts and makers and decorators of textiles. Perhaps the best known artist among them was Caterina dei Vigri, who was both a painter and a writer.⁸⁹ Other nuns used their intellect to take on the system of enforced monasticism. The Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti wrote prolifically against the effacement she suffered due to her family’s decision that she become a nun, and she used it as “the fulcrum of a critique of her society, and the springboard for an original vision of female equality and freedom.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ King, Women of the Renaissance, 88.

⁸⁷ King, Women of the Renaissance, 82,

⁸⁸ King, Women of the Renaissance, 89.

⁸⁹ Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 78-80. See Appendix II for a list of nuns involved in the visual arts in Italy during the early modern period.

⁹⁰ King, Women of the Renaissance, 89.

For the nuns who accepted or relished their way of life there was a number of activities in which some degree of personal agency could be found. Many convents were involved in caring for the sick, the poor or abandoned of the communities in which they lived. For the nun who aspired to a managerial position within the convent, the position of abbess or prioress could afford a degree of power. In the 1550s, Caritas Pirckheimer of Nuremberg was abbess of a convent in that city. She was in “charge of sixty women, managed considerable property, dealt directly with city officials...and ran the Latin school for girls.”⁹¹ Some nuns could also exercise political influence upon the outside world by writing letters to “the great and the famous to whom they were related and [in doing so] could promote the interests of other family members.”⁹² Whether secluded within the secular world of the home or sacred world of the cloister, a number of women did achieve creative lives. Some of them, like the creative and accomplished man, became the subjects of biographies.

Women’s Biography and Christine de Pizan

The first early modern biography concerning women was Boccaccio’s well-known and influential Concerning Famous Women. Boccaccio recounted the lives of women from history and mythology; he wrote about brave pagan women - warriors, queens and scholars. While he congratulated himself on being the first to write a book in praise of women, he

⁹¹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 99.

⁹² Hufton, The Prospect Before Her, 372.

simultaneously maintains the usual preconceptions about women's biology and nature. He claims that women are, "unrestrained, inconstant, untruthful...and...burn with unsatisfied passion."⁹³ He defines them as having, "complete contempt for the laws of God... [as being] greedy, quick to anger, unfaithful, oversexed, truculent,[and] desirous more of frivolity than of wisdom."⁹⁴

Christine de Pizan took exception to the derogatory depictions of the female sex as put forth by Boccaccio and her other literary predecessors. Armed with a thorough knowledge of the literary canon, she launched a writing career in which she defended women, of all classes, against their detractors, and offered advice with which they could improve the quality of their lives.⁹⁵ For Pizan, this meant that women were to observe a strict adherence

⁹³ Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 24.

⁹⁴ Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 41 and 44.

⁹⁵ According to Anil De Silva Vigier trans. and Rummana Futehally Denby ed, Christine De Pisan: Autobiography of A Medieval Woman (1363-1430), (Montreux/London, 1996), 268-270, her entire *oeuvre*, in verse and prose, consists of the following: Cent Ballades, Virelais, Rondeaux, Diverses Ballades (1390-9), Le enseignements moraux...à mon fils (ca. 1397), Epistre au Dieu d'Amour (1399), Le Dit de Poissy (1400), L'Epistre d'Othea (1400), Le Debat de deux Amants and Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amants (1401), Le Debat sur "Le Roman de la Rose" (1401-02), Le Dit de la Rose and Cent Ballades d'Amantes et de Dame (1402), Le Dit de la Pastoure, Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune and Le Chemin de Longue Etude (1403), Le Livre des Faits et Bonnes Moeurs du Sage, Roi Charles V and Lettre à Eustace Mourel Deschamps (1404), L'Avision Christine, Lettre à la Reine Isabeau, La Cité des Dames, Le Livre des Trois Vertus and Le description et definition de la prodome de l'homme selon l'opinion de Mg Louis Ire duc d'Orléans par Christine de Pisan (1405), Le Livre du Corps de Policie (1406), Le Livre des Faits d'Armes et de Chevalerie Sept Psaumes Allégoriques (1409), Lamentations sur les Maux de la Guerre Civile (1410), Le Livre de la Paix (1412-13), L'Epistre de la Prison de Vie Humaine (1418), Les Heures de Contemplation de Notre Seigneur (1420) and Le Dittie dur Jeanne d'Arc (1420).

to sexual chastity and withdraw from the company of men. She cautions women regarding the contingency of life and reminds them to take a realistic view of their situations; they were not to risk their personal virtue and reputations for vague promises of financial security or true love. Pizan also makes a strong claim for the authority of the female experience in her work by recounting positive aspects of women's lives, as well as writing autobiographical poetry. By doing so she seems to redefine the conventional use of essentialism, creating a space for women in the literary tradition while providing them with practical alternatives for their daily lives. While Pizan did not directly challenge Aristotle's concept of women's natures, that is, their humoral and physical qualities, nor did she, according to Maureen Quilligan, "critique the notion of god-granted essences," she did in her books and treatises, question the traditional literary opinions concerning women's diminished capacity for intellect, virtue and constancy that stemmed from these beliefs. Using the example of her own life and those of other women, she "undermined the authority of males, who had no certain basis for their [derogatory] knowledge about women."⁹⁶

Of particular interest to this thesis is Pizan's biographical work on female artists from antiquity. She writes briefly in La Cité Des Dames (1405) of three female artists from the classical period: the Greeks Tharmaris (a painter) and Irene (a sculptor) and the painter Marcia, who was Roman. Pizan described their personal lives and work in similar terms to those used by other writers. She credited Tharmaris with "abandon[ing] all the usual tasks of

⁹⁶ Maureen Quilligan, The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cite Des Dames, (Ithaca/London, 1991), 6 and 55.

women....,” to pursue her art, and she described Irene as one who “surpassed her masters.”⁹⁷ Marcia was described as “excel[ing] all men.” Of the three, only Marcia is praised as a, “virtuous virgin of noble bearing.” Pizan thereby mixed Marcia’s personal characteristics with professional ones, suggesting that at times she regarded gender constructions in ways similar to those of her male contemporaries. She used these three classical artists to call attention to a contemporary female artist, Anastasia, a Parisian manuscript illuminator, who had collaborated with her on a number of projects.⁹⁸ Besides recounting the deeds of noble women as models to be followed, Pizan wrote prescription literature for women, in order that they might live virtuous lives. She also claimed for herself an authority as author, a stance which was rarely displayed in literary works, up to that point, in the early modern period.

Christine de Pizan: Virginité, Worldly Prudence and ‘Writing Like a Man’

Pizan’s writing seems to reflect key shifts in her consciousness in response to many of the events in her life. She was the only daughter of scholar and astrologer, Thommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano.⁹⁹ In 1367, when Pizan was four, Thommaso moved his family from their home in Venice to the court of Charles V Le Sage in Paris, where he had been offered the post of court astrologer. Pizan lived at court until the age of fifteen when she married Etienne de Castel, a notary and son of a court official. Their arranged marriage was

⁹⁷ Pizan, City of Ladies, 84.

⁹⁸ Pizan, City of Ladies, 85.

⁹⁹ The name of Christine de Pizan’s mother does not appear in any of the sources investigated by this writer.

reportedly a happy one and resulted in the birth of one daughter and two sons. However, the security of her life lasted only a short time. The deaths of Charles V (1380), her father (ca. 1387) and her husband (1389) left Pizan a widow at the age of twenty-five, with few financial resources and three children, her mother and a niece as dependants. Pizan spend a number of the ensuing years in Paris law courts trying to recover money owed to her husband. She was particularly bitter over, “the custom that denied women adequate information concerning their husband’s financial affairs...”¹⁰⁰

As the daughter of an aristocrat and court official, Pizan’s training and education did not prepare her for the situation within which she found herself. She reports that as a young girl, her father was very encouraging of her scholarly pursuits although her mother favoured a more traditional education for her daughter such as spinning and sewing. Willard contends that Pizan’s early education likely consisted of listening to “edifying stories” told to her by her father. It was only after the death of her husband that she could indulge her love of study.¹⁰¹

In the late 1390s Pizan began her career as a poet. Many of her poems were mythological allegories which commented upon courtly love and personal honour. Pizan and her work caught the attention of a number of European courts and, as a result, she began to enjoy a wide audience. In 1401-02 she became embroiled in an exchange of correspondence which debated the merits of The Romance of the Rose, a thirteenth-century allegorical poem

¹⁰⁰ Charity Cannon Willard, Christine de Pizan Her Life and Works, (New York, 1984), 39.

¹⁰¹ Willard, Christine de Pizan, 33-34.

which recounted the behaviour of the sexes in the game of love. Pizan's participation in the debate is an indication of both her increasing interest in the traditional portrayal of women in literature and her desire to counter such negative images.

As mentioned earlier, Pizan saw the female employment of virtue and chastity as the way for women to avoid a life filled with feelings of personal shame or helplessness, feelings she had experienced. In City of Ladies, she uses examples of virtuous women throughout history as mortar and brick to build the allegorical City of Ladies. Particular groups of women represent the various elements of the city's construction: queens, amazons, female poets and philosophers were the foundations of the city; sibyls, prophets, chaste wives, widows, and virgins made up the walls, while female saints were used to represent metaphorically the roofs of the buildings.¹⁰² In the eyes of Pizan, the more removed women are from sexual activity, the more virtuous and morally strong they become. While virtuous women of the past constructed the City of Ladies, it is the Virgin Mary who is the first to be invited to live in the new city.

Christine Reno states that City of Ladies was "carefully constructed so as to promote an ideal by which women can transcend the limitations placed on them by their time and milieu." The vehicle for that transcendence, the ideal Pizan sets forth for all her readers is virginity.¹⁰³ Pizan viewed women's concern with earthly things to be the reason for their earthly problems. The sequel to City of Ladies was entitled Le Livre des Trois Vertus. In it

¹⁰² Pizan, City of Ladies, 217-254.

¹⁰³ Christine Reno, "Virginity as an Ideal in Christine de Pizan's Cité Des Dames," Ideals for Women in the Works of Christine de Pizan, ed. Diane Bornstein, (Ann Arbor, 1981), 69.

Pizan offers practical advice to women of all classes, in order that they live virtuous lives and be worthy of inhabiting the City of Ladies. In this work, virtue is regarded as available for all women, not merely an unattainable ideal, and Pizan advocates that they strive towards the practice and attainment of “worldly prudence.”¹⁰⁴ While she sees virginity or abstinence from sex as the ultimate way to achieve female autonomy, she recognises and provides for those women in the marriage/childbearing continuum. The married woman gained virtue by, “encourag[ing] [her husbands] in honourable habits... refusing to indulge in adulterous behaviour...managing the farm or estate in the absence of men ...declining to participate in “gatherings arranged in gardens or pilgrimages.”¹⁰⁵ Neither was the prostitute beyond reach of a virtuous life. She was advised to, “live simply and soberly in a little room in a respectable street and devote herself to helping with the laundry ...spinning or tending the sick.”¹⁰⁶

For the woman of social status and means who wished to pursue a creative career as a writer, abstinence from sex and the daily society of men was viewed as necessary. While women, according to Pizan, were capable of self-governance, independence and creativity, this could only take place within the confines of the metaphorical City of Ladies, and not

¹⁰⁴ Willard, Christine de Pizan, 145, defines worldly prudence as “related to the concept of the active life...Christine did not believe that many women would be willing to give up family and all worldly desires in order to follow the path [of chastity or virginity]...She considered that in most cases it was more reasonable to attempt to cultivate the active life in this world to the best of one’s possibilities.” Willard sees Pizan’s humanistic outlook of virtue as different from that of other writers of moral literature who advocated the concept of “otherworldliness.”

¹⁰⁵ Willard. Christine de Pizan, 46, 61, 148-9.

¹⁰⁶ Willard, Christine de Pizan, 148.

“out” in the world of men. Women were indeed capable of running a household, a family or a country, but only in the absence of a husband, brother or father; women could and should be educated, perhaps write and teach, but only as unmarried women.¹⁰⁷

Pizan allowed for women’s exploration of their creativity and agency but only in ways that would not radically interfere with or inconvenience the lives and plans of men. She did not consider or advocate a society in which it could be otherwise. She was a conservative who did not call for a bold reinterpretation of patriarchal society in order to accommodate or expand the public role of women. While clearly out-spoken on the subject of the social constructiveness of women’s lives, her work maintains the status quo which continued to limit women within certain realms of activity. Important for their scrutiny of cultural stereotypes, Pizan’s work failed to prescribe any radically new patterns of behaviour for the creative and ambitious woman of the early modern period. Virtue, within socially accepted boundaries, was still maintained as the first consideration of the creative or ambitious woman.

For instance, Quilligan states that “while [Pizan’s work] replicated ...the prevailing master discourse about femaleness, [it] also contended with it and instated a difference that took on the hard outlines of an established subjectivity.”¹⁰⁸ Such subjectivity is evident in her constant references to herself, as both author and subject, throughout the text of City of

¹⁰⁷ Diane Bornstein, “Self-Consciousness and Self-Concept in the Work of Christine de Pizan,” Ideals for Women, 4, states that “[a]lthough Pizan sympathised with women and wished to advance their cause, she saw men as stronger in body and mind and more able to cope with the world.”

¹⁰⁸ Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 6.

Ladies.¹⁰⁹ By doing so, “she constructs her[self]...as if she were a figure of authority..., a named self-conscious subject in the position of active speaker...”¹¹⁰ Pizan then, exposes an awareness of the importance of agency for the writer, perhaps more so for herself, a woman writing within a “man’s world.”

An important and related component of Pizan’s work is her reconfiguration of the concept of essentialism previously employed by men, which was used to rationalise the reasons for women’s exclusion from public life. Pizan presented the “natural” woman as noble and virtuous. Indeed, she presents the inherent female nature as capable of great achievement. Quilligan contends that Pizan “did ...redeploy an essentialist definition of the “natural” woman in order to ...revise tradition, presenting portraits of women that were very different from their male-authored originals.”¹¹¹ Recent reevaluations of essentialism by Gayatri Spivak and Diane Fuss also identify it as beneficial due to its subversive possibilities for those on the margins.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 15, recognises this practice as unusual. The medieval writers of chronicles usually confined self-references to the prologue and did not include them within the body of their texts.

¹¹⁰ Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 15, 272-73.

¹¹¹ Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 6. She bases her evaluation on the work of Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking” Feminism, Nature and Difference, (New York/London, 1989), 2 who states that “the classical definition of essentialism is the belief in true essence - that which is most irreducible, unchanging [fixed] and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing.”

¹¹² Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 37, quotes Spivak and Fuss who both contend that, “when put into practice by the dispossessed themselves, essentialism can be powerfully displacing and disruptive.”

While Pizan negotiated a space for women in the literary discourse she was, “also aware of herself as a woman trying to succeed in a man’s world...[and] she felt that she had to discard part of her feminine nature and assume the role and even some of the characteristics of a man.”¹¹³ She conveyed these beliefs in two autobiographical poems she wrote early on in her career, Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune (1403) and L’Avison Christine (1405). La Mutacion de Fortune is a seven-part work in which she describes how, after becoming a widow, fortune changed her from a woman to a man:

Then my mistress (Fortune) came toward me/.../And touched me all over my body.../
That immediately, without doubt/ I felt changed all over/ My limbs were much
stronger than before/ which felt strange/ and the crying had stopped/ ...Fortune did not
hate me/ who so transformed me/For suddenly the great fear and doubt changed/.../ I
no longer indulged in idle crying/ which only increased my distress/ I found myself
with a strong and hardy spirit/ which astonished me/ Now I will prove that I became a
real man.¹¹⁴

It was Fortune’s desire that Pizan become “the third sex,” with the outer appearance of a woman but the “spirit” of a man, in order to withstand the trials ahead of her. In L’Avison Christine, she declared that while she was for all intents and purposes a “man” she preferred to be a woman: “As you have heard/ now I am a man and have been one for thirteen years/ But it pleased me much more to be a woman/ as I was accustomed to/ When I

¹¹³ Diane Bornstein, introduction to Ideals for Women, 3.

¹¹⁴ Bornstein, “Self-Consciousness and Self-Concept in the Work of Christine de Pisan,” 12-13. Joan M. Ferrante, To the Glory of Her Sex: Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts, (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1997), 207 states that in Pizan’s mind “by the time she writes the Mutacion, she has been a true man (“vrays hom”) for thirteen years; though she would prefer to have remained a woman with her husband, she must and will continue to be a man.”

communicated with Hymen [when she was married].”¹¹⁵ These words attest to the inner struggle and sense of sacrifice she related to her self-designation as an hermaphrodite. Pizan went even further with this concept in her poem Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc written in 1429 in honour of Joan of Arc. Pizan claims that Joan’s actions were the will of God and that the roles she assumes are in the tradition of patriarchal Biblical figures such as Moses and Joshua. Stephen Nichols contends that by doing so, Pizan puts Joan in yet another category of identity. By referencing both the “contradictory emblems of sword and breast” she becomes a being who is more than either man or woman, and who is sanctioned by heaven to be so. In the work, Pizan describes Joan’s actions and accomplishments as “God’s doing: He who counsels her, And placed within her a heart greater than any man’s.”¹¹⁶ While Pizan may have challenged, throughout her literary works, the traditional models of what constituted male and female nature, they were very much a part of her inherited world view. It would have been very difficult for her to shift consciousness anymore than she already had done.¹¹⁷

Pizan was certainly not the only early modern woman facing financial difficulties and raising her family alone. A great number of women, especially from the lower classes, were responsible for the upbringing and livelihood of their families, and many may have

¹¹⁵ Bornstein, “Self-Consciousness and Self-Concept in the Work of Christine de Pisan,” 13.

¹¹⁶ Stephen G. Nichols, “Prophetic Discourse: St. Augustine to Christine de Pizan,” The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art, ed. Bernard Levy, (Binghamton, NY, 1992), 69-70.

¹¹⁷ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance *Virtuosa*, 18, states that the hermaphrodite inhabited, “an uncomfortable and often unpopular position.”

harboured similar ideas concerning culturally-derived gender roles. Pizan, however, had the privileges of class, literacy and audience which ensured that her ideas became part of the written historical record.¹¹⁸ She is one of few female voices amongst millions that have survived obscurity, patriarchal society and the passage of time.¹¹⁹

According to scholars, Pizan's work had very little impact on the situation of women in general and, in particular, the creative learned woman in early modern Europe.¹²⁰ Into the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, it remained the onus of the individual female to explore the boundaries of social acceptability, in order that artistic women be accepted as creative while being simultaneously viewed as virtuous and non-threatening to patriarchal society. The following and final chapter defines the paths taken in this direction by three early modern artists who sought to maintain both their respectability and their desire to create. Two of them, Anguissola and Fontana, were able to navigate their paths of virtue and decorum. What is known of the life of the third artist, Rossi, would indicate that she participated in a different type of negotiation than that of other creative women, and perhaps was more willing to challenge dominant values in order to define her own life path.

¹¹⁸ King, Women of the Renaissance and Hufton, The Prospect Before Her, both provide an in-depth study of work, labour and industry for women of all classes during the early modern period.

¹¹⁹ Female literary predecessors of Pizan include two German nuns: Hildegard of Bingen, (1098-1179), and Herrad of Landsberg, (d.1195). A British contemporary of Pizan, Julian of Norwich, (ca. 1343-ca.1416) was a mystical writer of visions.

¹²⁰ It should be noted that Pizan's work was not printed for wide distribution until the 1480s.

Chapter Three

Reconstructing the Woman Artist in the Early Modern Period

The art-historical literature that examines the practice of art production usually focuses on what was the norm for men. In Chapter One above, I outlined some of the parameters of artistic production for the male artist. This often entailed a programme of training, which began at a very young age under the guidance of a master artist in a collaborative workshop setting. Later, as a trained artist and guild member, a man would either set up his own business or continue as a trained assistant in the shop of another. Most art-historical accounts of artistic training and art production do not entertain the possibility of different experience resulting from gendered social expectations. At any rate, the little that has been written about the training of women artists in general, or the evolution of their careers, has not been incorporated into most mainstream accounts of Renaissance art.¹ This chapter begins with a survey of female artistic practice in the early modern period; it examines women's relationship to the apprenticeship system, workshop tradition and mentors. As I discovered in the course of my research, there were many key problems of interpretation inherent in the scholarship surrounding the issue of art production for women.

The ability and inclination of women to create art was a matter of concern and debate during the Italian Renaissance. Traditional interpretations of female chastity and propriety coincided with a woman's innate artistic ability. This meant that women had to struggle with the conflicts and contradictions involved in gaining access to the realm of art

¹ For example, in John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1997), 27, the authors do not discuss women artists in any capacity.

production. Like their male counterparts, they had to deal with issues surrounding their personal behaviour, filial responsibilities, physical and emotional natures. This section supports the recent work of Fredrika Jacobs, who suggests that the possibility and actuality of the female presence within the realm of art production was a source of social tension for both women and men.² As Janet Wolff reminds us, “[institutional] structure[s] and creativity are in tension and are interdependent [of each other].”³

An investigation of art during the early modern period is not complete without a more precise delineation of this tension. Rosi Braidotti, who calls for a re-definition of “difference” inspires my investigation of the alternative values/social behaviours inherent in the lives and artistic practices of three prominent Renaissance women artists. To that end, the key issues and debates concerning Properzia de’Rossi’s, Sofonisba Anguissola’s and Lavinia Fontana’s art production are examined. Art-making rendered women visible, necessitating that they establish public roles, which were often at odds with expectations of them as virtuous, modest, self-effacing individuals. Each of these women had their own response to the circumstances which faced them. As a female sculptor, Rossi challenged traditional notions of women’s access to the public arena. Anguissola’s major commercial and artistic success flourished when she joined the court of Philip II of Spain, principally as a portrait painter, while Fontana, also a painter in elite circles, adhered closely to Renaissance Counter-Reformation principals of behaviour in order to ensure patronage. They, like all creative women during the Renaissance, did possess a degree of personal agency, as

² Jacobs, Defining the Female *Virtuosa*, 4.

³ Janet Wolff, The Social Production of Art, (London, 1981), 2.

evidenced by their achievements. However, I argue here that this agency was linked in part to their ability to make use of existing societal expectations of them as female. Each of these women may have, in a sense, courted a gendered position, but they did not do so because of an automatic, blind obedience to the system. Rather, it is my belief that they made use of a type of “essentialism” as a way of differentiating themselves and their artistic practice from that of their male contemporaries.⁴

As part of a lifelong process to articulate her identity during the early modern period the female artist, like her male counterpart, attempted to articulate her sense of self, however fragmented, transitory and different, through self-fashioning. Using traditional and current societal beliefs surrounding the idealising “nature of woman,” she may have established personae for herself that substantiated her role as a virtuous woman while pursuing a creative activity that was deemed to be beyond her “natural” ability. Since her knowledge and artistic talent did not easily fit into established roles and notions concerning the nature of women, she was usually labelled as an “unnatural or notable exception.” Her creative ability was believed to be unattainable and impractical for the “normal” woman. Pursuing an activity which defined one as an “exceptional woman,” could call the reputation of ones family, ones associates and oneself into question. It was not a smooth path to navigate. One powerful area of self-expression and self-fashioning available to artists of both sexes was the self-portrait. As we shall see in this study, for a number of women artists, it proved to be the

⁴ Quilligan, *Allegory of Female Authority*, 16, argues that, Christiane de Pizan made use of an “essentialist assumption about experiential difference [that allowed her] to construct an alternative authority within the textual practices she inherited.” See also Chapter 2, footnotes 111-112.

vehicle by which their struggle to reconcile themselves as both artists and women intersected.

While attempts to reconcile themselves as women and artists led to theoretical and practical conflicts during their lifetimes, it also presents a complex dilemma to the modern-day historian. The amount of interpretative problems regarding the understanding of art production becomes evident when the general literature concerning these women is examined. Since the beginning of this century, artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Properzia de' Rossi have been portrayed either as victims of their physical and/or emotional circumstances, imbued with "proto-feminist" tendencies, or proclaimed as heroines. These different portrayals are the result, particularly in the last two decades, of "feminist revisionist ambitions"⁵ aligned with the desire to bring prominent early modern women into current feminist debates. However, I argue here in this thesis that there is no one methodological approach that will render the ultimate "truth" concerning these women and the myriad of aspects of their art-making. Furthermore, I review current biographical and art-historical writings regarding my three case studies, outlining some of the limitations and ambiguities present in the historical record.

Chapter Three concludes with a comparative study of different self-fashioning strategies for Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana, both of whom produced self-portraits. Like Quilligan, I suggest that both of these women sought to construct their own alternative authoritative imagery through the use of essentialist assumptions within the

⁵ Helen Solterer, The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture, (Los Angeles/London, 1995), 214.

masculinist art practices they inherited. To complete the “double reading” process begun in Chapter One, Michelangelo reappears in this section as I compare his mode of self-identification with that of his female contemporaries.

Female Art Production During the Early Modern Period

Much like today, artistic production in the early modern period was dependent upon three key factors: the artist’s economic and social background, training and education, and social networks and mentoring. Unlike that for men, art training for the female artist was limited almost exclusively to the upper class woman.⁶ Family wealth was normally a key determinant in the lives of women artists, as only middle and upper-class families would have the disposable income needed to pay for the painting lessons and materials for daughters who had the leisure time in which to use them. The strict adherence of Italians in the early modern period to both gender and class boundaries provided little opportunity for women, except for those of noble birth, to develop and maintain contact within the royal and aristocratic circles from which artworks were commissioned. Even then, women usually required a male relative or friend to act as intercessor between them and their clients.

Many women from affluent families received a humanist education, often under the guidance of private tutors. The suitability of a general education for these women led to a

⁶ Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Women Artists 1550-1950, (New York, 1976), 14, 21 and 24; Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” 156-57; Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 70; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London, 1981), 84, 86, 87, states that, “[w]hile Renaissance male artists struggled...from the class of artisan, a noblewoman’s [status] ensured her some recognition;” Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance *Virtuosa*, 110-11.

greater social acceptance of their ingress into art training. However, due to the impropriety of a woman interacting with unfamiliar men in a public setting, they usually had limited or negligible access to the *bottega*, unless their fathers or husbands were masters of their own workshops; examples of women who profited from such a situation were Marietta Robusti (Tintoretto's daughter), and Artemisia Gentileschi. Girls who studied art generally did so in their own homes, those of their tutors, or in a convent, and thus had little contact or interaction with other artists.⁷ They often began their training as older teenagers, somewhat later in life than most males.⁸ In addition, it is likely that girls taking art instruction in private homes would not have undergone the standard length or diversity of training as did boys who apprenticed in workshops.

Along with the status afforded by family name and wealth, the presence of sympathetic, encouraging male mentors was crucial in the lives of young women who wanted to pursue any kind of creative career.⁹ Commonly, such mentors for female artists were their fathers. Some were artists themselves, as was Lavinia Fontana's father Prospero.

⁷ Sofonisba and Elena Anguissola lived and studied for three years in the home of Bernardino Campi; Lavinia Fontana studied at the home and workshop of her father, Prospero; the circumstances of Properzia de' Rossi's formal education and art training are not currently known.

⁸ According to Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 565, Sofonisba began her instruction with Campi, circa 1546, at the age of fourteen, Elena would have been one or two years younger; Chadwick, *Woman, Art and Society*, 16 and 83, claims that Lavinia Fontana began to paint in the "style of her father and teacher" in 1570 when she would have been eighteen years old; Marietta Robusti, who died during childbirth at the age of thirty, worked for her father, Tintoretto, for fifteen years; Shutte, "Irene di Spilimbergo," 52-53, writes that Spilimbergo did not discover painting nor begin lessons until she was eighteen years of age.

⁹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 157 and King and Rabil, *Her Immaculate Hand*, 25.

If not an artist, mentors were usually well-educated, artistically-minded and socially-conscious individuals. In situations where there was an interest and emphasis on the artistic career of a daughter, there were usually no male heirs or descendants available to further the family name and fortune.¹⁰ While the particulars of Rossi's family are not yet known, it should be noted that Sofonisba Anguissola was the eldest of six sisters, and her brother was not born until she was twenty-one. Lavinia Fontana was the second of two daughters. It was only after the death of her married sister Emilia, that Fontana and her father seriously began to consider art as a suitable career for her.¹¹ Having introduced the major components of female artistic practice in the Renaissance, the following section proceeds chronologically to discuss the specific impact of issues such as class, education and mentoring in the artistic careers of Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana.

The importance of class in the lives of early modern female artists demands that the specifics of their social position be included in any art-historical study of their work. However, at present there is little known documentary evidence available concerning Properzia de' Rossi's personal life. Since her paternal grandfather has been identified as a Bolognese notary, her family was at least literate. The Rossis were also no strangers to scandal. Before Rossi's birth, her father, Girolamo de' Rossi, was convicted of manslaughter. Neither her mother nor any siblings are mentioned in contemporary documentation concerning the artist, and nothing is known of her childhood or young adulthood. By 1515,

¹⁰ Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, 20.

¹¹ Caroline Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana: An Artist and Her Society in Late Sixteenth-Century Bologna," Ph.D. diss., London University, 1996, 40.

Rossi was supposedly married but the name of her husband is not known.¹² In addition, there is no record of her having children. The scarcity of detail pertaining to Rossi's family situation and social status makes it difficult to explain her presence as a female artist during the Renaissance. Like her life, the circumstances surrounding her death, in 1530 at age forty are also obscure. Hospital records offer a less than genteel account of her last days. In late 1529 her name appeared on the list of patients of the Ospedale di San Giobbe in Bologna, whose inmates, for the most part, were indigents and syphilitics.¹³ Her residence at such an institution indicates that she likely died with little or no family, friends or financial support.

There is also little known of Rossi's art training and education beyond the identification of the engraver, Marcantonio Raimondi, as her drawing teacher. He was likely her tutor during her early years, as he left Bologna around 1506 when Rossi was sixteen and returned in 1527, only three years before her death.¹⁴ The circumstances surrounding much of her artistic instruction have yet to be ascertained.

Chapter Two underscored the necessity of male mentors for women who wanted to pursue creative careers during the early modern period. Rossi likely had such a man in her life, perhaps her grandfather, the notary. As well she may have been related to, or befriended by, a particular sculptor who allowed her to join his workshop. Tommaso, the son of Ricco

¹² Fredrika H. Jacobs, "The Construction of a Life: Madonna Properzia De' Rossi 'Schultrice' Bolognese," Word and Image 9,2, (April-June), 1993, 125. See footnote 15.

¹³ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 82. However Vasari, Lives, 327, states that she was buried, "...in the hospital of la Morte in accordance with the terms of her will." The Ospedale della Morte dealt mainly with victims of the plague. She may have been treated in one hospital and buried on the grounds of the other.

¹⁴ Amy Namowitz Worthen, "Engraving II, 3 (I) (b): Major exponents and their influences, c. 1500 - c.1600: Raimondi," The Dictionary of Art, Vol. 10,(New York, 1996), 385.

Vanni Boccaccio de' Rossi, was a sculptor active in Florence in the 1460s, thirty years before Rossi's birth. Perhaps there was a connection between her and this family that has yet to be discovered.¹⁵ Whoever was the catalyst behind Rossi's involvement in the arts, their identification as such would certainly address a number of personal and professional questions concerning the artist.

Rossi is of particular interest to art historians due to her decision to pursue art production as a sculptor. Consideration of medium was of great importance to the early modern female artist. This was especially true for sculpture, historically considered to be an unsuitable activity for women.¹⁶ Both it and architecture were regarded as too strenuous, squalid and unseemly for the delicate female constitution. Sculpting was usually done in a workshop or other public location, and often the artist worked with others to complete the task. Travel was frequently necessary for male sculptors who often chose the materials with which they worked *in situ*.¹⁷ In addition, the finished pieces were often publicly exhibited. Such circumstances associated with male sculptural practice no doubt would have created

¹⁵ David Chambers, Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance, (London, 1970), 189. Vasari Lives of the Painter, Sculptors and Architects, 326, writes that Rossi "asked the wardens [of San Petronio] through her husband for a share in decorating the three doors of the facade..." Such a husband (if he did exist) may have been, despite the age difference, Tommaso de' Rossi.

¹⁶ Few women have been sculptors. Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 144-45, writes of the Roman Marcia who, "gave herself up completely to the study of painting and sculpture so she would not languish in idleness." He praised her "chase modesty" for the reluctance she showed in portraying the male figure in her art.

¹⁷ Chambers, Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance, 6-7, includes a letter from Jacopo della Quercia to the Officials of the 'Fabrica' of San Petronio, 26 June, 1426 in which he describes choosing and buying marble for the facade of the church.

sites of uneasy negotiation for Rossi, who may have sought to produce sculpted works of art while also adhering to societal expectations surrounding her behaviour.

Rossi's interest and involvement in sculpture indicates a desire to venture beyond the theoretical and physical boundaries which designated such work as unsuitable for the learned lady of the Renaissance. Further, any awareness she may have had pertaining to a key sixteenth-century debate concerning the concept of *naturalia* verses *artificialia* has not yet been sufficiently discussed in the literature. Rossi carved religious images on the surfaces of tiny fruit stones, changing both their inherent physical nature and use by patrons. The tradition of creating images on small objects such as wood and fruit pits supposedly began in Northern Europe in the late Middle Ages, growing in popularity during the Renaissance. The fashioning of this minuscule artform served a two-fold purpose: it was considered not only "an expression of virtuosity and experimental research," but also a forum in which "art and nature [were brought] into competition with the "Great Artifice."¹⁸ Artists such as Dürer and Michelangelo were mindful of their analogy to God as creator. While lacking his ultimate creative power, many were intrigued with displaying the artistic potential of the human spirit by transforming objects from the natural world into their own creations. In a recent treatment of the subject, Lorraine Daston indicates that interest in the relationship between nature and art can be traced back to the ancients. During the early modern period this interest intensified, creating an "unstable frontier" and "fluid boundaries" between the natural and artificial creation of objects.¹⁹ Rossi's fruit stone carvings fall into the category

¹⁸ Irene Graziani, "Properzia de' Rossi," Lavinia Fontana of Bologna 1554-1614, ed. Vera Fortunati, (Milan, 1998), 121.

of “hybrid,” a single object for which nature has supplied the raw material, while art determines its ultimate form and function.

The use of cherry, apricot and peach stones for carving seems to have been particularly popular, due perhaps to both their availability and durability. Images were carved onto the surface of the stone with small tools, perhaps those used in jewellery making. They were likely held in place by a type of vice and optically enlarged by a magnifying glass. All fruit stones currently in museum collections display images of religious figures and were likely used for personal devotions and protection. Currently, three are attributed to Rossi: The Crest of the Grassi Family, consisting of eleven peach stones, embedded within a filigree coat-of-arms, currently in the collection of the Museo Civico in Bologna (Fig.1); a Carved Cherry Stone, embossed with approximately one hundred heads of saints and placed in the centre of a pendant, from the collection of Museo degli Argenti in Florence (Fig.2); and a peach stone containing the passion of Christ, which is thought by some to be a portion of a necklace which is currently part of a collection housed in the Palazzo Bonamini-Pepoli in Pesaro.²⁰

¹⁹ Lorraine Daston, “Nature By Design,” Picturing Science, Producing Art, (New York, 1998), 236.

²⁰ Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, Vol. 2 ed. W. Gaunt, London/New York, 1963, 326 identifies the passion piece as one of the artworks used to persuade the wardens of San Petronio to hire her. Christopher Witcombe, “Properzia de’ Rossi,” Dictionary of Art, ed. Jane Turner, (New York), 27, 202, describes it as part of a necklace. The attribution of Carved Cherry Stone in the Museo degli Argenti to Rossi has been disputed by Natalie Harris Bluestone, “The Female Gaze: Women’s Interpretations of the Life and Work of Properzia De’ Rossi, Renaissance Sculptor,” Double Vision: Perspectives on Gender and the Visual Arts, ed. Natalie Harris Bluestone, (New Jersey, 1995), 43.

Such pieces often found their way into the art collections of European nobility. The Carved Cherry Stone was included in a 1587 inventory of the *kunstkammer* of Francesco I, Duke of Florence.²¹ The ownership of a *kunstkammer*, or “collection of curiosities” was a status symbol for many noble European families during the Renaissance. Consisting of specimens from the world of both *naturalia* and *artificialia*, it served several purposes: as a microcosm for the universe as a whole; as a self-fashioning statement of personal glory and political strength; as a vehicle for scientific research; and as an assortment of entertaining “wonders.”²² Rossi’s Carved Cherry Stone may have been numbered within this last category, as its inclusion in such a collection would indicate an interest in artistic techniques which transformed common objects from the natural world into artefacts of aesthetic and/or monetary value, such as a carved cherry stone manipulated to represent a precious jewel.²³

The tradition of fruit stone carving, its use and audience requires further investigation regarding its social context, production and application. Traditionally, only those media designated as part of the artistic hierarchy have been considered worthy of detailed inquiry and discussion. Subjecting all media and technologies produced in the Renaissance to the critical inquiry and consideration afforded the so-called “major” arts of sculpture, painting and architecture would result in a more complete analysis of European early modern art and

²¹ Anna Maria Massinelli and Filippo Tuena, Treasures of the Medici, (New York, 1992), 231.

²² See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, “From Mastery of the World to Mastery of Nature: The *Kunstkammer*, Politics, and Science,” The Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in The Renaissance, (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 174-196 for a general discussion on the symbolism and utilisation of this type of collection during the Renaissance.

²³ Graziani, “Properzia de’Rossi”, Lavinia Fontana, 122.

society. Deconstructing the authority of subject matter and media within the art-historical narrative would prompt a more consistent consideration of the female artist. For the feminist and social historian interested in biography, analysing the social context and technology of fruit stone carving would result in a clearer understanding of Properzia de' Rossi's significance and intentions as an artist.

Apparently, Rossi's large-scale works were also popular, since she received at least two ecclesiastical commissions from the city of Bologna. Lack of information concerning her personal connections and mentors is an obstacle to determining how such patronage was available to her. Nonetheless, she was hired to decorate the high altar of the Church of the Madonna del Baraccano with, "arabesques, marble ornaments, sculptured lions, griffins, birds, censers, vases, eagles, heads and scroll work."²⁴ Later, in 1520, she, along with four other artists, was employed to carve several pieces in marble for the doors of the main facade of the Church of San Petronio (Fig. 3). Records of payment indicate that while working at the Fabbrica di San Petronio, Rossi completed three sibyls, two angels, and two bas-reliefs, probably The Chastity of Joseph and The Wife of Potiphar Accuses Joseph for the church (Fig. 4 & 5).²⁵

Sofonisba Anguissola belongs to the next generation of notable sixteenth-century artists. She was the eldest daughter of minor nobles, Amilcare Anguissola and Bianca

²⁴ Bluestone, "The Female Gaze," 43.

²⁵ Vasari, Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, 326-27, mentions that while Rossi worked at San Petronio, the artist Amico Aspertini (1475-1522) "through envy, always spoke ill of her to the wardens, and owing to his malignity her work was very badly paid."

Punzona, and was born in the city of Cremona. Encouraged by their father, she and five younger sisters received a humanistic education. All became artists, save Minerva, who pursued a writing career. Her only brother and youngest sibling, Asdrubale, inherited the family estate at the death of their parents.

In 1546, Sofonisba and her sister Elena were sent to the home of Bernardino Campi to receive art lessons. They lived with the Campi family for three years, seemingly as paying guests. When Campi left Cremona in 1549, the girls studied with Bernardino Gatti, and later on Sofonisba began to provide art instruction to her younger sisters.²⁶ Since no documents recounting the day-to-day activities of female-oriented worksites have come to light, unlike those concerning the male *bottega*, it is not yet possible to know all the details involved in training female artists. However, it may be surmised that the space and equipment necessary for the readying of canvas, paint and other work materials would have been limited. As well, the activities involved in learning how to sculpt or paint frescoes would not have been easy to replicate in a domestic environment. Ilya Perlingieri contends that the Anguissola sisters took art instruction in the Campi kitchen, where the disruption involved with meal preparation and the day-to-day running of the household may well have taken its toll on their concentration.²⁷

It is likely that Sofonisba Anguissola never had access to nude models from which she could study anatomy. Women artists did not participate in such classes during the

²⁶ Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work, (New York, 1979), 12.

²⁷ Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, 43. However she does not provide documented evidence for this assertion.

Renaissance as “no proper lady could admit to first-hand knowledge of the appearance of a naked male body.”²⁸ Drawing from the nude was seen as the fundamental last step in a process which began with “copying from drawings and engravings, and then drawing from casts of sculpture.” Linda Nochlin calls the ability to draw from the human body, “the ultimate training” and that, “to be deprived of this ultimate stage ... meant, [being] deprived of the possibility of creating major art work.”²⁹ Since the nude was a major component of the iconographical tradition of religious and mythological imagery, a paradoxical situation resulted for women. On one hand, denied access to the training needed to produce the esteemed history painting, the subject matter which *was* deemed appropriate for women, that is, portraits, landscapes and genre scenes, were excluded from the upper echelons of the artistic hierarchy.

Anguissola would have also lacked training in all the subject areas deemed essential for the development of the Renaissance artist. While humanistic training was available to both sexes, upper-class females did not attend schools where mathematics, rhetoric and the sciences were taught. With its connection to the deployment of linear perspective, the lack of mathematical training rendered women incapable of delineating the new style of painting which concerned itself with pictorial depth. In addition, their inexperience in the discipline

²⁸ Harris and Nochlin, Woman Artists 1550-1950, 21; Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 84, says that, though firmly established as an artist by the 1580s, at the... opening of the Carracci academy, Lavinia Fontana was denied admittance,...because of its emphasis on drawing from the nude model.”

²⁹ Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” 159-60.

of rhetoric meant that women were neither expected nor prepared to participate in the intellectual debates surrounding iconographic signification.

Anguissola's father honed his connections to aristocratic circles and furthered his daughter's reputation by sending her artworks as gifts to papal and aristocratic courts. He also attempted to forge links with established artists. Letters exist between Amilcare and Michelangelo, in which the former requests that the sculptor provide Anguissola with exercises with which to test and develop her skill.³⁰ Perhaps the most famous of her sketches, drawn about 1559 and entitled Boy Bitten by a Crayfish was done in answer to Michelangelo's request to render the image of a crying boy (Fig. 6).

Spain was the site of Anguissola's most successful years as an artist. She was called to the court of Philip II in 1559 where she stayed for over ten years, giving art lessons and painting portraits. However, the official capacity in which Anguissola served the court is still under debate.³¹ Although difficult to substantiate, Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin assert that her fame as an artist in Italy may have been due in large part to her

³⁰ Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 71, Amilcare asked that Michelangelo, "see fit to send her one of your drawings that she may color it in oil, with the obligation to return it to you faithfully finished by her own hand.." Sofonisba Anguissola was one of many young artists to whom Michelangelo send drawings and correspondence.

³¹ Clara Erskine Clement, Women in the Fine Arts from the Seventh Century B.C. To The Twentieth Century A.D., (New York, 1904), 11-12, called her both a court painter and a lady-in-waiting; Sharlee Mullins Glenn, "Sofonisba Anguissola: History's Forgotten Prodigy," Women's Studies, 18/2-3, (1990), 298, says that her official title in court is still open to question but does call her both a maid-of-honour and a governess. Karin Pendle, "Women in Music, ca. 1450-1600", Women and Music: A History, ed. Karin Pendle, (Bloomington, 1991), 40, notes that for some creative women of the Renaissance Italian court, such as hired singers, the title of lady-in-waiting was a catch-all phrase for women engaged in a variety of functions within the court.

residence in Spain, since “male artists [in Italy], cannot ... have welcomed the competition that Anguissola presented as a portrait painter.”³² While Cremona could claim her as a talented artist, a credit to their city and a notable exception, her work posed no threat to Italian standards of virtuous female behaviour. As well, portrait painting was viewed as a “safe” and suitable subject for female artists, as its formality implied neither familiarity, nor “any unbecoming breadth of experience.”³³ In addition, it did not challenge the limits of female artistic capability as outlined by Aristotelian theory. Jacobs states that “without exception, women are never praised for painting historical, biblical, or mythological narratives. Many, however are commended for their ability to paint portraits.”³⁴

The third and final artist discussed is Lavinia Fontana, who like Properzia de’ Rossi, was born in Bologna. While not part of the nobility, her father Prospero was a well-known artist, and her mother, Antonia de’Bonardis, hailed from a family of famous typographers.³⁵ Lavinia received a humanist education from her father; she read from his extensive library,

³² Harris and Nochlin, Women Artists, 29.

³³ Greer, The Obstacle Race, 251; Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 53, states that marriage for a female artist was important on moral grounds as it allowed them to, “explore the physiognomy of a man’s face without being accused of immodesty.” This perceived unsuitability of women to create but a limited range of subject matter is evident in later periods as well. Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 140, states that for eighteenth-century English and French female artists, “aspiring to history painting and Academy membership, [such] “unnatural” ambition had to be mediated by strict conformity to the social ideology of femininity.”

³⁴ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 41. Exception can be taken to this statement when one considers the history paintings of Fontana and Anguissola’s genre painting The Chess Game (ca. 1555) which was widely praised. What Jacobs may be eluding to is the limited and reserved praise given to women’s historical or biblical artworks as opposed to the accolades heaped upon the portraits they created.

³⁵ Vera Fortunati, ed. Lavinia Fontana of Bologna 1554-1614, 13.

learned to paint in his workshop and he appears to have been her only teacher. Influenced by Prospero, Fontana strove to meet the criteria demanded of both the virtuous and professional early modern female artist.³⁶ Through his connections and influence, she would have been intimately aware of the expectations that the Counter-Reformation held for artists in general and for those wishing to receive ecclesiastical commissions.³⁷ Following her father's religious propensities, Fontana became a keen supporter of Counter-Reformation art, adhering to guidelines set down at the Council of Trent in which the church attempted to regulate artistic images and subject matter.

By arrangement, Fontana married Giovanni Zappi, the son of a wealthy merchant in June, 1577. Since Prospero had stipulated in the marriage contract that his daughter was to live with him until he died, Fontana's new husband moved from his own home in Imola to that of his father-in-law. There, he and Lavinia lived most of their married lives and raised eleven children. Prospero allegedly wanted to keep his daughter near in order to monitor her artistic career.³⁸ Caroline Murphy contends that Prospero's interest in his daughter's career stemmed from his desire for a secure old age; as an only child, Fontana alone was responsible for the well-being of her ageing parents.³⁹ Obeying a papal summons to Rome,

³⁶ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 13.

³⁷ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 14, states that Prospero Fontana acted as one of a number of intellectual consultants to Bishop Paleotti during the 1576 Bolognese debates concerning the reform of sacred art.

³⁸ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 15, states that, "...[Prospero] wanted to provide an environment that would enable his daughter ...to continue painting professionally."

³⁹ Caroline Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana: the making of a woman artist", Women of the Golden Age, An international debate on women in seventeenth-century Holland, England and Italy. eds. Els Kloek et al, (Amsterdam, 1994), 172-173.

the Fontana family left Bologna around 1603-04, a number of years after the death of Prospero. Living there until her own death on August 11, 1614, Fontana continued her successful career as a portrait painter.

Besides the religious imagery encouraged by the Counter-Reformation, Fontana “experimented with landscapes, altarpieces, and mythological subject matter...and executed numerous ... history paintings” (Fig. 7).⁴⁰ The ecclesiastical patrons of her history paintings and altarpieces included Bishop Ferdinando de’ Medici, the Bolognese monastery of Corpus Domini, and Pope Clement VIII. She was acknowledged internationally when, in 1589, she completed a religious work for Philip II of Spain.⁴¹ Her father’s connections with Bolognese scholars, humanists and scientists assured Fontana’s access to influential private patrons. She became known chiefly for her detailed portraits of upper-class Bolognese women.⁴² (Fig. 8)

Caroline Murphy sees Fontana’s career as having been carefully orchestrated by herself, her father and his associates. Due to this, Murphy contends that her artistic career appears to have had few obstacles. Fontana built up a huge clientele within Bologna amongst scholars, clerics and elite women, their families and social contacts. She capitalised upon her talent, her ability to adapt, her attention to detail, and her behaviour and mean as a

⁴⁰ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 18, Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 84.

⁴¹ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 20, identifies this painting as the 1589 Holy Family with the Sleeping Christ Child and Saint John, today in the collection of the Escorial in Madrid.

⁴² Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 18, According to biographer Carlo Malvasia, “all the ladies of the City would compete in wishing to have her close to them, ...the greatest thing...was to have her paint their portraits...”

“proper” lady. As a female artist, she promoted herself as an “especially noteworthy phenomenon.”⁴³

The validity of acknowledging art production as a gendered practice during the early modern period becomes apparent when one recounts the experiences of female artists. Their personal reputation always of the utmost concern, women’s art training and subsequent careers were closely monitored, instruction took place in private homes, subject matter and medium were censored, and a male conduit to patrons was a requirement. Their responsibility to their families was always of the first and utmost concern. Women artists had to remain vigilant so that their conduct or appearance in no way compromised their chances for marriage or the good name of their families.

All three of these artists were perceived as notable exceptions as stated above. Properzia de’ Rossi was viewed as exceptional due to her ingression into the world of sculpture, Sofonisba Anguissola because of her ability to breathe “life” into her subjects, and Lavinia Fontana in acknowledgement of her piety and virtue while working as a painter.⁴⁴ While this thesis identifies all three as participating in some degree with the establishment of their own public personae, it acknowledges Fontana as being the most instrumental in shaping opinion concerning her personality and social status.

Regardless of the extent to which these artists did in fact practise self-fashioning, various notions surrounding their personalities, achievements and natures have persisted since the sixteenth century. The following section examines the evolution of these beliefs

⁴³ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 6 and 33.

⁴⁴ Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 327; Jacobs, Defining the Female Virtuosa, 55 and 131.

and others that have been kept alive in the art-historical record, concerning not only Rossi, Anguissola and Fontana, but the female artist in general.

The Art-Historical Record : Problems and Perspectives

In this section I analyse four dominant motifs used in art-historical literature to define and situate the female artist: the first is the successful artistic woman as an heroic individual who displayed exceptional talent and virtuous demeanour, (a view current from the early modern period until the mid-twentieth century); second is the victim, either of society or her own self-destructive nature; the third is the “proto-feminist,” who, disillusioned by the status and treatment of women in society, used her artwork as a subversive tool with which to retaliate against an oppressive system (current in the 1970s and 1980s);⁴⁵ and finally, the melancholic. The most recent scholarship suggests that creative women, in particular writers, may have used this condition as a site of agency to their social and political advantage. In the latter case, there is, unfortunately, very little documentary evidence to support a similar claim for female practitioners of the visual arts, as we will see with Properzia de’ Rossi.

⁴⁵ Quilligan, Allegory of Female Authority, 12, note 5, applies the terms “feminist” and “proto-feminist” to describe the actions and intents of historical figures.” A view that I find somewhat problematic. She uses Ruth Perry’s definition of feminism as, “the recognition of women as a separate class, quite aside from any other social or economic grouping, and a woman-centred identification with that class as well as the desire to improve conditions for women.” Since there is no documented evidence that any of the artists discussed in this thesis felt this way about their lives as women during the early modern period, it would be both presumptive and historically incorrect to refer to them as either feminists or proto-feminists.

The case of Properzia de' Rossi has, until recently combined two of the above concepts. From the sixteenth century until the present she has been perceived both as a helpless victim, and a melancholic. The first evidence of Rossi's life appears in the writings of Vasari.⁴⁶ She is mentioned in both volumes of his work as, "a talented maiden, both in household duties and..., so skilled in sciences that all men might envy her. She was "beautiful in person, and could sing and play better than any women in the city of her day."⁴⁷ Vasari said that "being of *ingenious* spirit [Rossi] began to carve peachstones, and did them so well and patiently that they were marvellous, not only for the delicacy of the work, but for the slender figures and her clever disposition of them[italics mine]."⁴⁸ Jacobs claims that Vasari regarded the artist as a "*giovane virtuosa*," and that, "her fellow citizens of

⁴⁶ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 83 states that in both editions of Vasari's Lives, Rossi was the only female artist to receive her own "chapter". In the first edition Vasari included the following epitaph in honour of the sculptor: "However much Properzia owes to Nature and to art, she owes just as much to Fortune and to manly gifts. Whatever shameful reputation she had now lies sunken in shadow. The marbles sculpted by the hand of a woman show that in praise she has equalled the celebrated artists in marble and that she possessed loftiness both in her vivid talent and in her art." In the second edition of his Lives, Vasari replaced this memorial with a more general tribute to women artists from Ariosto's Orlando Furioso: "Women have been seen to excel in those arts to which they have given care."

⁴⁷ Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 326; other pre-twentieth-century biographers of Rossi include: Pompeo Vizani, I due ultimi libri delle historie della sua patria, (Bologna, 1608); Nicolò Pasquali Aidosi, Istruzione delle cose notabili della città di Bologna, (Bologna, 1621); Giulio Cornelio Gratiano, Di Orlando Santo vita, et morte con venti, et morte con venti mila Chistiani uccisi in Roncisualle Cavata del Catalogo de Santi, (Ascoli, 1636); Luigi Lanzi, La storia pittorica della Italia inferiore o sia delle sculoe, (Florence, 1792); Raffaello Borghini, Il Riposo, (Reggio, 1826); and Carolina Bonafede, Cenni biografici e ritatti d'insigni donne bolognese, (Italy, 1845).

⁴⁸ Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 326.

Bologna...considered her the greatest miracle of modern times.”⁴⁹ Jacobs contends that Vasari considered Rossi to be a *virtuosa* because of her “choice of a masculine medium.”⁵⁰ She also credits him with Rossi’s identification, in the art-historical record, as a melancholic due to his description of The Chastity of Joseph, a bas-relief she sculpted for the facade of San Petronio. He interprets her depiction of the Old Testament story of Joseph fleeing from the lustful Saffira, wife of Potiphar the Overseer, as autobiographical, and he suggests that she created it as a way of easing her unrequited love for a young nobleman, Antonio Galeazzo Malvasia.⁵¹

As we have seen in Chapter One, for generations, Vasari’s biographies established how artists were regarded. His book The Lives “fixed” for 300 years the general views about the artist in the Renaissance “his grading of artistic achievement formed a canon that was long unquestioned.”⁵² Rubin says that since, “Vasari’s research went far beyond the boundaries of any available books...it determined the territory of future writing [concerning artists].”⁵³ His influence over future literature on the life of Rossi is no exception. The written record has maintained Vasari’s conclusions concerning her. She has since been depicted as a creative and gifted women, who was rendered mentally incapacitated by lovesickness. However, while the subject matter which decorated San Petronio’s bas-reliefs

⁴⁹ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 18, and Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 327.

⁵⁰ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 158.

⁵¹ Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 326-327, Vasari states that Rossi, “succeeded in everything except her unhappy love.”

⁵² Jacobs, “The Construction of a Life,” 122.

⁵³ Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 151,

was likely dictated by the warden of the church, Natalie Bluestone also suggests that The Chastity of Joseph may be interpreted as evidence of female sexual need and assertiveness, rather than being proof of Rossi's disabling melancholy.⁵⁴

The story of her involvement with Malvasia, and ensuing melancholic condition begins in 1520. All that is known of their relationship is filed in Bologna's civic and criminal court records. They were brought up twice on charges of disorderly conduct, accused of breaking into and destroying the garden of one Francesco da Milano, a Bolognese textile merchant. While it is recorded that Rossi and Malvasia received a suspended sentence, any other circumstances surrounding their relationship is not presently known.

In early 1525, Rossi was again before the courts, this time with painter Domenico del Franco as an accomplice. They were charged with trespassing into the home of artist Vincenzo Miola and assaulting him. Rossi was accused of throwing paint in Miola's face, scratching him, and shouting oaths which could be heard throughout the neighbourhood. While Rossi's actions, in these instances, are completely out of character with the theoretical messages of contemporary conduct literature, they were not uncharacteristic of life in urban Renaissance Italy.⁵⁵ She apparently engaged in the common *modus operandi* of the Renaissance female criminal.⁵⁶ The presence of female violence on Italian streets indicates

⁵⁴ Bluestone, "The Female Gaze," 55 and 62.

⁵⁵ Samuel K. Cohn, Women in the Street: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy, (Baltimore, 1996), 1, claims that it was not uncommon for women in Renaissance Florence to resolve conflicts by, "...their own hands and curses...."

⁵⁶ Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe, Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy, (Cambridge, U.K., 1994), 4, writes that, "the specific features of female crime [were] fighting with the hands, and finger-nails [and] insults."

that Rossi, along with other women of the period, did not always heed the warnings of conduct literature regarding their obligation to stay out of sight and close to home. More ideal than practical, such advice likely did not always fit the personal situations of many early modern women.

By way of contrast, Sofonisba Anguissola is described by Vasari as, “the most virtuous daughter ... more [graceful] in design ... than any other lady of our day.”⁵⁷ He sees her as an exception, in that although a woman, she painted the same way as did men - that is, she could bring her subjects to “life.” Viewing her paintings on a visit to her father’s home, he said that they, “were executed so well that they appear to be breathing and absolutely alive.”⁵⁸ Lavinia Fontana is similarly praised by her biographer Carlo Malvasia as a “*virtuosa giovane*.” In addition, he asserts that her portraits contained a “certain gentleness, diligence and delicacy.”⁵⁹ Luigi Lanzi credits her work with “feminine patience.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Mary Garrard, “Here’s Looking at Me,” 580, and Vasari, Lives, 328.

⁵⁸ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 51.

⁵⁹ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 43 and 89. Jacobs does warn the reader about the time lapse between Vasari’s comments concerning Anguissola and those of Malvasia (120 years) due to the faint praise that the latter gives to Fontana regarding her work as a whole, 192, note 58.

⁶⁰ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 89. Other early modern biographers of Fontana include: Mutio Manfredi, Centro Donne, Contate, (Parma, 1580); Lutio Faberio, II funerale di Agostino Carraccio in Bologna sua pattia da gli Incamminati. Accademia del Disegno. Oratione di Lutio Faberio Accademico Gelato in Morte di Agostin Carraccio.(Bologna, 1603); G. Mancini, Considerazioni Sulla Pittura ,(1620), Giovanni Battista Baglione, Le Vite de’ Pittori. Scultori et Architetti, (Rome, 1642); and Carlo Ridolfi, Delle Maraigne dell’ arte. (Venice, 1648).

During the early modern period poetic tributes to the virtuous female artist also appeared, many written long after the deaths of their subjects.⁶¹ These memorials frequently situated female artists as multi-dimensional individuals, invested with a variety of skills and characteristics that were not always attributed to them in prose. In his book *Il Riposo*, (1584) Raffaello Borghini included a poem reportedly written by Vincentino di Buonaccorso Pitti in honour of Properzia de' Rossi: "The intrepid splendour of your two beautiful eyes increased / from sculpture to sculpture, oh wonder both novel and / strange. Before, her delicate hand made the rough stones / come alive, alas death was jealous."⁶² These stanzas, along with praising her physical beauty as a *gentildonne*, credit Rossi with the ability to imbue her artwork with the spark of life, which, according to Jacobs was only given to Anguissola.⁶³

Nonetheless, Pitti's poem may well be an indication of the widespread literary use of common stereotypical motifs for artists during the early modern period which, other than considerations of gender, had little to do with individual personalities. After her death Lavinia Fontana was also immortalised in verse. In 1620, Ridolfo Campeggi paid

⁶¹ Schutte, "Irene di Spilimbergo," 42, Perhaps the most noteworthy collection of poems written to celebrate the life of a female artist was penned in memory of painter Irene di Spilimbergo in 1559. A work of over 145 contributors, it contained 279 Italian and 102 Latin poems; Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 178-182, Spilimbergo was described as, "gentle ... beautiful ... excellent ... the luminous sun ... filled with ... rare and countless virtues ... a veritable goddess;" her early demise was described as, "an ancen[sion] to a more sublime sphere;" as death's decision, "that heaven be decorated with [her] painting."

⁶² Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 83-4.

⁶³ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 158 charges that "[Rossi] in contrast to Anguissola, is never commended for her creative *potenza*," and (52) contends that Pitti's comments describing Rossi in this manner "bear [no] comparison with Vasari's praise of Anguissola, [since] the conventions of poetic eulogy cannot be understood in the same way

posthumous tribute to her in his Delle Poesie del Signor Conte Ridolfo Campeggi: “Celestial hand, which steals first honours / from Nature for rare and graceful works / that initiate Heaven (O sweet deception), / discovers with your brush the most beautiful splendours.”⁶⁴

Commemoration of the virtuous Renaissance female artist continued into the nineteenth century. The literature, visual and theatrical arts of this period often interpreted history in ways which reflected the mindset of the Romantic movement, focusing on the inevitability of tragedy, loss and death. The emphasis on adversity, rather than the positive, in the lives of Renaissance women artists was symptomatic of a general desire by the adherents of Romanticism to identify subjectively with historical figures of the past. The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) wrote “Ulysses” and “Locksley Hall” in honour of the ancient Greeks. Robert Browning (1812-1889) wrote “Fra Lippo Lippi” and “Andrea del Sarto,” using “dramatic” moments in their lives to express his own views on life and art.⁶⁵ J.M.W. Turner painted Hannibal Crossing the Alps (1812) in which the general deals with the harsh and demanding forces of nature.

The lives of female artists of the early modern period were also reinterpreted in art and literature during this time. Tintoretto Painting His Dead Daughter was the title of two artworks, one created by Léon Cogniet in 1845 and the other in 1873 by H.N. O’Neil. In both, the painter, with easel nearby, hovers over the death bed of Marietta Robusti, who lies in state bathed in a celestial light. Properzia de’ Rossi was also commemorated in paint by

as art criticism reflecting analytical observation.”

⁶⁴ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 169-70.

⁶⁵ Edward Johnson, The World of the Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose, (Scribner’s, 1964), 62-71, 284-304.

the French neo-classicist, Louis Ducis (1773-1847), who created Sculpture or Properzia de' Rossi, n.d., in which the sculptor, dressed in eighteenth-century garb, presents a bas-relief depicting the Greek myth of Ariadne, to a seated courtier. She looks to the man for approval of both herself and her work. Inspired by this painting, the English poet Felicia Hemans (d.1835) wrote a poem entitled Properzia de' Rossi, in which the artist's plight is romanticised. Hemans contends that, while she gained fame, Rossi was never able to find "a heart whereon to lean."⁶⁶ Rossi's unhappy story also made it to the stage, when in 1828, Paolo Costas's four act play, Properzia De' Rossi, a rappresentazione tragica, was presented in Bologna.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, biographies written by women about women began to appear in Europe and the United States. While additional work is needed in order to gauge clearly the reception of the early modern woman in the literature of the nineteenth century, one reason for their popularity at this time may have been the female authors' search for precedents to justify their own independent thought and creative practice.⁶⁷ One of the first biographical histories was Women Artists in All Ages and Countries, written in 1859 by Mrs. Elizabeth Fries Ellet (1818-1877). Her work comprised a survey of women artists from antiquity until the mid-nineteenth century, concentrating on Western Europe and North America. Ellet used Vasari's interpretations in order to create Victorian heroines: she stated that while Rossi possessed, "remarkable beauty of person," the

⁶⁶ Bluestone, "The Female Gaze," 48-50. Figure 2.6.

⁶⁷ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life, (New York, 1988), 24-25, tells of the lack of accomplished and secure models for western women's biography or autobiography during the late nineteenth century.

“grief to which she was abandoned gradually undermined her constitution.” The lack of “vanity and self-conceit” were lauded as Fontana’s greatest accomplishments.⁶⁸

Writers of art history and biography carried the theme of the virtuous, tragic artistic heroine into the twentieth century. One such author was the American Clara Clement, whose Women in the Fine Arts from the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D. was published in 1904. Clement’s survey acknowledged ladylike behaviour as both a means and an end to success for the early modern female artist. In addition to noting Anguissola’s popularity in the Spanish court and Fontana’s “charms” as recounted in Renaissance prose and poetry, she characterised Rossi as having suffered “mortification, grief and persecution.”⁶⁹

The following year, William Shaw Sparrow edited another art-historical survey entitled, Women Painters of the World. While the content and style of this work did not differ widely from that of its contemporaries, Sparrow’s preface addressed the gendered nature of artistic genius. He claimed that he did so in response to the oft-asked question, “Where is there a woman artist equal to any man among the greatest masters?” He answered by stating that there was no explanation for the mystery of genius and why it descended upon only a chosen few. In addition, he contended that both artistic women and men possessed a genius equal to but different from the other. Sparrow falls into the trap of essentialist thinking in his approach to women artists, endowing them with much the same qualifiers as

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Fries Ellet, Women Artists in All Ages and Countries, (London, 1859), 19-20, 41-42.

⁶⁹ Clara Clement, Women in Fine Arts, 11-16, 128-130, 299-301.

his literary predecessors: he praised women's, "intuition," "prescient tenderness" and "nursery-nature."⁷⁰ In particular, Sofonisba Anguissola remained the virtuous maiden, described as, "fresh, witty, sincere and charming," while Elisabetta Sirani, responsible for a paralysed mother, a gout-ridden father and two younger sisters, lived a life of "heroic virtue." Sirani, who died young, was proclaimed by Sparrow to be "one of art's truest soldiers."⁷¹

In 1907, the English scholar and historian, Laura Ragg (1866-1962) published The Women Artists of Bologna, which shifted from the popular survey format and limited her study to four women practising in Bologna, among them, Properzia de' Rossi and Lavinia Fontana. Ragg betrays an awareness of the myths surrounding historical accounts of Renaissance female artists. She argues that what was known of Rossi's life was, "so vague in outline, so brilliant in colour," that it resulted in little more than romance.⁷² At the same time, Ragg fictionalises a melodramatic narrative around Rossi's work at San Petronio and the last moments of her life. She also lays claim to knowledge of Lavinia Fontana's personal life through her interpretation of a supposed self-portrait at the Uffizi Gallery, stating that its painter was "neither capable of inspiring nor of feeling great passion," and lived, "an existence of commonplace happiness ... which has no history."⁷³ Since Ragg also admitted to a scarcity of information regarding Fontana, such statements would suggest that she exaggerated and elaborated upon what she knew of the artist in order to further her narrative.

⁷⁰ William Shaw Sparrow, ed. Women Painters of The World, (London, 1905), 11.

⁷¹ Sparrow, Women Painters, 27 and 30.

⁷² Laura Ragg, Women Artists of Bologna, (London, 1907), 167.

⁷³ Ragg, Women Artists of Bologna, 194 and 210.

Perhaps the earliest essays concerning an early modern female artist to be published in a professional art-historical journal appeared in the February and March 1915 editions of The Burlington Magazine. Both concerned the *oeuvre* of Sofonisba Anguissola and brought the myths concerning women artists into the realm of art-historical scholarship. Charles Holmes disputed a previous attribution of the 1570 Portrait of King Philip II to Alonzo Sanchez Coello, and instead ascertained that it was the work of Anguissola. While he called the painting, “that of a shrewd observer and a practised hand,” he did not see it as work of the “first order” and claimed that Anguissola “borrowed indiscriminately” from any artist with whom she came into contact.⁷⁴ The following month, Herbert Cook championed Holmes’s thesis and discussed other works attributed to the artist. He referred to Anguissola in cloying terms, describing both her and her work as “charming” and agreeing with Sir Claude Philips who stated that, “Sofonisba painted with something of that tepid rose-tinted sentimentality proper to the woman-painter, then as now.”⁷⁵ Their work is an example of the recurrent tendency of art historians to view the artistic achievements of women as “different” and second-rate to those of men.

The mindset which defined the female artist as “different and less than men” continued to be perpetuated into the late twentieth century and was adopted into the work of those art historians concerned about issues of gender. Germaine Greer’s 1979 work The Obstacle Race, is symptomatic of the era, as it casts the female artist in the role of helpless

⁷⁴ Charles J. Holmes, “Sofonisba Anguissola and Philip II”, The Burlington Magazine, 26/143, (February, 1915), 181-182.

⁷⁵ Herbert Cook, “More Portraits By Sofonisba Anguissola”, The Burlington Magazine, 26/144, (March 1915), 235-36.

victim. She contends that due to such “obstacles” as love, family commitments, over-zealous praise and deflated ego, no female artist has ever been able to duplicate or match the success or skill of male artists.

Other later twentieth-century scholars, such as Ilya Perlingieri, have portrayed them as avenging heroines. In her 1992 book, Sophonisba Anguissola: The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance, Perlingieri states that, as “a well-educated Renaissance woman, [Anguissola] would have been extremely aware of the obstacles, inconsistencies and unfair ... rules of behaviour expected of women,” during her time, and that she “struggled with” and “triumphed” over the restrictive society in which she lived.⁷⁶ Since there are no extant writings by Anguissola to support such notions, Perlingieri’s statements remain purely speculative. She defines Anguissola as a heroine and her prose is reminiscent of traditional biography. Perlingieri calls Anguissola, “a shining example of [Cremona’s] nobility and artistic talent, all combined into one elegant and well-educated lady.”⁷⁷ Perlingieri valorises the painter, depending upon myth to link her with famous figures from the past and present. For example, she uses the traditional biographical practice of attempting to establish a connection between the artist and antiquity by commenting upon the personality of Princess Sophonisba of Carthage (after 229 BCE) after whom the artist was likely named, thus inferring that Anguissola was of the same temperament.⁷⁸ Her work also contends that

⁷⁶ Perlingieri, Sophonisba Anguissola, 16.

⁷⁷ Perlingieri, Sophonisba Anguissola, 48.

⁷⁸ Perlingieri, Sophonisba Anguissola, 28, states that the princess was, “conspicuous for her beauty, had received an excellent literary and musical education...was clever, ingratiating and charming...”; Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 40, maintains that it was “fashionable for the

Anguissola enjoyed a close professional relationship with Michelangelo by elaborating upon the correspondence between the sculptor and Amilcare Anguissola. Without documented evidence, she fabricates a meeting between the two artists during which Michelangelo supposedly apprised Anguissola of the difficulties that she would face as a female artist.⁷⁹

While Perlingieri manufactures a heroine, Mary Garrard's 1994 article, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," constructs the artist as a "proto-feminist." Garrard claims that Anguissola's artworks betray her awareness of, and disdain for, Renaissance gender roles. She contends that Anguissola used them as a vehicle with which to circumvent woman's role in society, and to diffuse her frustration surrounding the "negat[ion]...and depriv[ation]" she felt as an artist by identifying "the subject-object position" occupied by women both as creators of artworks (subjects) and as artworks themselves (objects to be painted).⁸⁰ Garrard claims that as an educated woman Anguissola would have been aware of the debates surrounding the perceived nature of "correct" comportment for woman in the early modern period. While Anguissola may indeed have been cognizant of the hierarchial standards under which Renaissance patriarchal society operated, Garrard imbues her with a knowledge beyond that of most of her contemporaries.⁸¹ She credits the artist with using symbolism understandable at the time,

upper-classes to give their children names of Roman origin, probably to distinguish them from children of the lower classes who were usually given names of Christian origin".

⁷⁹ Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, 73-75.

⁸⁰ Garrard, "Here's Looking At Me," 579, also Chadwick, Women Art and Society, 70.

⁸¹ Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 576-580, states that it would be "naive to take [Anguissola's] silence on [matters concerning the status of women] for apathy or indifference." As well she proposes that as a learned and literate woman in the mid-Quattrocento, she would have read the available literature on the debate.

only to herself and her sisters, and today only to feminist art historians. Garrard contends that the messages in Anguissola's paintings, created to undermine traditional ideology, were disguised by the artist in order to insure her success in the mainstream. However, there is absolutely no evidence to prove that Anguissola was aware of, or even sympathetic to, contemporary debates on the nature of women.

Since Garrard does acknowledge, as based on the work of Stephen Greenblatt, that the Renaissance was a time of, "self-fashioning, ...masking...and artificial crafting of behaviour," it is reasonable to assume that the majority of Anguissola's contemporary audience would have been aware of such propensities within a work of art.⁸² Garrard goes even further, however, stating that Anguissola's, "subversive challenge was not recognized [or valued] in her lifetime," but is "fortunately recognizable" to the twentieth-century student of women's history and thus "joins the metahistorical discourse of feminism."⁸³ Garrard thus constructs Anguissola as both an ahistorical anomaly existing outside her culture and as a proto-feminist. She is labeled as a conduit for the channeling of a "higher knowledge" that transcends place and time, as are male artists within traditional art history. Garrard invests Anguissola with a historically inaccurate feminist ideology that is clearly beyond her ken and that of her audience.

Within the literature of the mid-to-late 1990s, those motifs traditionally assigned to creative women of the Renaissance by Garrard, amongst others, have come under scrutiny. Melancholy has begun to be considered as a positive aspect in their lives, while the

⁸² Garrard, "Here's Looking At Me," 562.

⁸³ Garrard, "Here's Looking At Me," 615-16.

“feminine style” of their creations are being reevaluated, and women are beginning to be perceived as individuals consciously working within the parameters of their social situations to determine the course of their own lives. As discussed in Chapter Two, the motif of melancholy has been historically defined according to gender. Schiesari contends that, for the early modern female writer, melancholy has been considered a biological and emotional illness which stifled their creativity.⁸⁴ However, as mentioned previously, recent scholarship has begun to identify melancholy as a site of agency for the creative and courtly female. Some Spanish female writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been described as “conscious[ly] confronting” traditional views of melancholy and investing the condition with “alternative value,” while Hapsburg court ladies have been credited with using it to their political advantage.⁸⁵ As yet there has been no corresponding study done to redefine the melancholic female artist, perhaps because there is so little evidence with which to work.

Fredrika Jacobs’ article, “Construction of a Life: Madonna Properzia De’ Rossi ‘Schultrice’ Bolognese,” (1993) deconstructs the topos of melancholy used as a signifier for Rossi’s life. Jacobs regards Vasari’s description of The Chastity of Joseph as a self-portrait as the reason that Rossi has yet to be represented in the written record as a creative woman who surpassed her prescribed gender role, not someone held back by crippling emotions. Jacobs views the love melancholic as only one of the numerous stereotypes with which the sculptor has been imbued, and points out that much of what has been written about her is

⁸⁴ Schiesari, Gendering of Melancholia, 10, note 23.

⁸⁵ Soufas, “The Gendered Context of Melancholy,” 174 and 182; Sánchez, “Pious and Political Images of a Habsburg Woman,” 6, note 42.

based on conventions.⁸⁶ Bluestone's Double Vision: Perspectives on Gender and The Visual Arts, (1995) sees the melancholy attributed to Rossi as emerging from the subjectivity of those retelling her story, such as the poet Felicia Hemans who "clearly identifies with Rossi." She depicts Laura Ragg as an apologist for the artist, as evidenced by her comment that, "sorrow and disappointment" can both cause and be the result of "bodily disease."⁸⁷

More recently, Jacobs's book, Defining the Renaissance *Virtuosa*: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism (1997), has brought together for reevaluation much of the historical and current writings concerning women artists during the early modern period. It also establishes the importance of these women and their accomplishments to the art-historical record by providing a useful roster of their names and the sources in which they appear. Her work has identified and elucidated the complex and powerful relationship between women and language, and is an important and informative addition to the existing body of knowledge concerning artistic practice and social norms. While Jacobs acknowledges the existence of stereotypes and the multiplicity of roles that have historically been assigned to female artists, she claims that scholars should be content with the "composite portrait" of women artists that has been left in the written record and not value one characterization over another. Further, Jacobs states that due to Vasari's

⁸⁶ Jacobs, "The Construction of a Life," 122.

⁸⁷ Bluestone, "The Female Gaze," 38-64, Rossi's female biographers discussed by Bluestone are: Bolognese countess Carolina Bonafede who included Rossi in her 1845, Cenni biografici d'insigni donne bolognesi; Mrs. Jonathan Foster of Great Britain who translated Vasari's work ca. 1850; Germaine Greer who discussed women artists in the Renaissance in The Obstacle Race and Vera Fortunati Pietrantonio, who in the 1980s, according to Bluestone, sought to make Rossi over into a "proto-feminine presence."

recounting of Rossi's life, she is a prime example of the multifaceted creative woman and her reputation has had to "contend with obfuscating anecdotes and moralizing evaluations" from which it has yet to recover.⁸⁸

Jacobs calls Rossi a "transgressor" of gender barriers, as she appeared to have resisted and reinterpreted the boundaries established for women by Italian society and culture.⁸⁹ Rossi's life stands as an example of how certain social values could be subverted or even inverted during the early modern period. Peter Burke, for instance, identifies resistance and negotiation as two means by which challenges to authority were practiced by the "underprivileged." While resistance could manifest itself through open rebellion, feigned ignorance or sabotage, negotiation entailed "not [a] reject[ion] [of] dominant values but [a] ...modifi[cation] [of] them in the light of [one's] own existential conditions."⁹⁰ Clearly, a comprehensive study of social deviance and women's identity during the early modern period is needed. It would provide greater insight into the lives of women, such as Rossi, who appear to have resisted conforming to prevalent notions of acceptable social behaviour.

It is not possible that the life of Properzia de' Rossi, or that of any other artist, can ever be recounted with total accuracy. At present, recognition of the mythological stereotypes which surround her warrants undertaking additional research in order to (re)place Rossi within the art-historical dialogue. Knowledge of this sculptor has been limited by art

⁸⁸ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 84, states that Rossi has been described as, "lovely and accomplished...forlorn and lovesick; passionate...crazed [and] creative..."

⁸⁹ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 3.

⁹⁰ Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 84-88.

history's tendency to shift periodically definitions of the "norm." Rossi is considered deviant due to both her work as a sculptor and her unconventional behaviour, but before such claims can be substantiated, more information must be uncovered regarding her social position, her family and her options concerning personal freedom and artistic practice. Rossi, like other women during the early modern period, had a prescribed role. Yet, what is known of her life would indicate that she decided, in some instances, to resist such expectations. However, a closer investigation of social structures and the patterns of art production is needed to gauge whether she was as deviant or exceptional as supposed. There were other female sculptors active during the early modern period.⁹¹ Further research into the lives and artistic practice of these women may assist in contextualising Rossi's own experiences and reconciling a number of the stereotypes with which she has historically been imbued.

However, Rossi was not the only artist to be identified through a variety of stereotypical motifs. Jacobs asserts that Anguissola was deemed a *virtuosa* due to her possession of the [male] *invenzione* necessary to paint human beings as virtually lifelike.⁹² She claims that Vasari "described portraits by [Anguissola's] hand with prose otherwise reserved for paintings produced by *pittori*." ⁹³ Due to the fact that Anguissola was not a man, only "painted like one," she became the "notable exception," an anomaly whose art, in

⁹¹ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 64, identified the wife and daughter of sculptor Guido Mazzoni, one of whom was named Isabella, and Quintilia Amaltea as sculptors during the early modern period, while Ellet, Women Artists in All Ages and Countries, 10, credits Germany with producing the first female sculptor, Sabina Von Steinbach, daughter of Erwin Von Steinbach. Dates unknown.

⁹² Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 158.

⁹³ Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa, 52.

theory, represented the standard capabilities of neither male nor female creativity.⁹⁴

Traditional Aristotelian theory did not allow for deviance within its constructed hierarchies of sexually gendered stereotypes. If an individual displayed behaviour that could not be understood as either strictly male or female, they were thought of as “intermediates,” persons who occupied a sexual middle ground. Jacobs argues that Anguissola’s *virtù* caused her contemporaries to consider her an intermediate. Moreover, since her art was deemed to be the accomplishment of a “notable exception,” that of other female artists were not considered to be on the same intellectual level. Jacobs sees this art-historical designation of Anguissola as unique among female artists as a disabling situation for both her and her female contemporaries.

My work coincides closely with that of Caroline Murphy whose interest lies in the concepts of identity and self-fashioning, as exemplified in her 1996 dissertation, Lavinia Fontana: An Artist and Her Society in Late Sixteenth-Century Bologna. Prior to this work, Italian scholars, such as Vera Fortunati, provided the most substantial studies on this artist.⁹⁵ After undertaking extensive research in Italy, Murphy provides an alternative presentation of an early modern female artist. Neither praising nor blaming, Murphy constructs Fontana as an individual who is keenly aware of her role as an artist in early modern society and who takes steps in order to thrive in her particular environment. While not a helpless victim of circumstance, her agency is tempered by her close observation of the restraints placed on female behaviour. Within those restraints Murphy argues that Fontana, “followed ... a

⁹⁴ Jacobs, Defining the Female *Virtuosa*, 164.

⁹⁵ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 10.

carefully devised strategy designed to permit her to assume the status of a professional artist.”⁹⁶ Fontana’s savvy concerning the needs of her patrons stemmed from an acute awareness of appropriate female behaviour for herself as an artist.

Murphy contends that Fontana’s awareness in such matters would have derived, in large part, from her acquaintance with the careers of both Rossi and Anguissola. Hailing from Bologna, Fontana may have been aware of Rossi’s poignant story and considered it a warning to the creative woman who lacked financial and marital protection, although this hypothesis is purely speculative.⁹⁷ Conversely, Anguissola’s success in Spain may have served as a positive model for the young artist.⁹⁸ The possibility that Fontana consciously observed, reinterpreted and then reincorporated the stories of previous women into her own life, can be used as an example of how women could, and indeed did, learn from earlier generations of female experience. Lerner contends that the accumulation and “collective memory” of female histories were sorely limited by the gendered nature of institutional, societal and educational practices. However, the existence of a tradition in which women were influenced by and, in turn, affected the lives other women, cannot be disputed and is worthy of further study.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 33.

⁹⁷ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 53, claims that the “Fontana family would know from the example of Properzia de’ Rossi” that it was important for an aspiring female artist to be married in order to prevent the appearance of immodesty or impropriety. Murphy does not cite any written evidence that would indicate that anyone in the Fontana family was aware of Rossi’s lifestory.

⁹⁸ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 42 states, again without citing evidence, that both Barbara Longhi and Anguissola were role models for Fontana.

Fontana's self-portraits are considered by Murphy to be emulations of those created by Anguissola, undertaken in order to align herself with the accomplished artist and to involve herself in the Renaissance activity of self-fashioning. The correlative pictorial elements and intentions found in the self-portraits of Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana, and their relation to Renaissance self-identify and self-fashioning, is the focus of the concluding section of this chapter.

Self-Fashioning/Self-Portraits

Stephen Greenblatt contends that for as long as there have been humans on earth, there have been, "some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity." However, he adds that during the early modern period, particularly in sixteenth-century Europe, there were stricter societal rules and less personal autonomy for those middle and upper-class individuals participating in self-fashioning.¹⁰⁰ A recent article by Anne Jacobson Schutte examines the restrictions placed upon women, in particular holy women, who attempted self-fashioning.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the primary focus of my thesis has been

⁹⁹ See in particular, Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, 220-246, which discusses the importance of networking for women and the existence of female communities throughout history.

¹⁰⁰ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 1. Greenblatt's book provides a general exploration of self-fashioning for Renaissance men. Burke, History and Social Theory, also provides some interesting commentary on the concept throughout history, but again concentrates on men. Writing which deals with self-fashioning for the women of the early modern period include: Garrard, "Here's Looking At Me,"; Jacobs, Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa; Soufas, "The Gendered Context of Melancholy," and Murphy, Lavinia Fontana.

¹⁰¹ Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Per Speculum in Enigmate: Failed Saints, Artists, and Self-Construction of the Female Body in Early Modern Italy," Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance, Eds. E. Ann Matter and John

the “rules” or qualifiers which defined the early modern creative individual. In this final section, I examine how artists of both sexes responded to these rules in order to attain and maintain their social status, roles and loyal patronage. They, like many privileged individuals during the Renaissance, utilised the portrait in order to achieve this end.

Since antiquity, portraiture had been an important means of identification and propaganda, particularly for politicians and military leaders. Pliny the Elder, who collected portraits, amassing numerous images of his famous contemporaries, bemoaned the fact that, during his day, the portrait had lost most of the popularity that it had earlier enjoyed.¹⁰² Along with the painted portrait, the death mask (*imagines*) and the marble portrait bust would have been important means of commemoration during Pliny’s time.¹⁰³ Portraits were often exchanged in antiquity and this became a popular pastime once again for the educated elite during the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Martin Warnke traces the renewed interest in portraiture during the early modern period to individuals in fourteenth-century European courts who used depictions of male rulers in the formation and strengthening of cultural policy. Since a competitive exchange of portraits often took place between countries and city-states, a

Coakley. Philadelphia, 1994: 185- 200. Schutte contends that the self-fashioning of early modern female artists was much more accepted by their contemporaries than that of religious women.

¹⁰² John Pope-Hennessy, The Portrait in the Renaissance, (Princeton, 1989), 71, quotes Pliny as stating that, “the painting of portraits which used to transmit through the ages the accurate likeness of people, has entirely gone out.”

¹⁰³ Pope-Hennessy, Portrait in the Renaissance, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 70.

ruler's "dignity and majesty," as well as his humanity, needed to be communicated in order to display his power and suitability as a leader.¹⁰⁵

Portraits of aristocratic women were created for a different, yet related purpose. They were often used in matrimonial negotiations to offer evidence of family and social prestige. A portrait was believed to be the means by which a ruler could better judge the suitability of his prospective bride.¹⁰⁶ After marriage, images of middle and upper-class women replete with all the signs of display culture were used to exemplify their husband's wealth.¹⁰⁷

Social rank, family name and individuality were important to other members of Renaissance society as well. There was a great interest in the iconography of male scholars surrounded by books, globes and various scientific paraphernalia in accordance with their interests and with the artistic fashions typical of their place and generation. Scholars exchanged portraits with each other and with their patrons. Caroline Murphy identifies "portrait exchange" as an important feature of the relationship between male scholars.¹⁰⁸

Renaissance artists no doubt recognised the role that the self-portrait could play in the establishment of their own personal reputation. John Pope-Hennessy, Luba Freedman and Joan Kinneir all agree that the self-portrait likely developed from the desire of visual artists to cultivate the elevated social status afforded the rulers, aristocrats and wealthy bankers,

¹⁰⁵ Warnke, Court Artist, 212, states that one of the earliest examples of a court portrait was painted in 1360 of Duke Rudolf IV of Hapsburg.

¹⁰⁶ Warnke, The Court Artist, 219-224.

¹⁰⁷ See, Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History, eds, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, (New York, 1992), 39-57.

¹⁰⁸ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 72.

whose images were commonly valorised in paint and marble.¹⁰⁹ The interest in self-portraiture was likely due as well to the concept of individuality and “the life of the mind” which flourished in the early modern period.¹¹⁰

It is a difficult task to reconstruct the ancient models of self-portraits which were available for emulation by the Renaissance artist. Kinneir contends that there are “no surviving examples from antiquity [that] can be...identified as self-portraits.”¹¹¹ However, other historians such as Freedman and Pope-Hennessy have identified ancient models which supposedly influenced Renaissance artists. Freedman discusses two self-portraits, no longer extant, described in ancient writings. She claims that the Strangford Shield, today in the collection of the British Museum, is the Roman replica of one manufactured by the sculptor Phidias for his famous sculpture of Athene Parthenos on the Acropolis. Phidias is supposedly depicted within the Amazonian battle-scene which decorates the piece. The second comes from Pliny’s Natural History, which describes a bronze statue of a sculptor, holding a tiny team of four horses in his hands, that supposedly depicts its maker, the architect Theodorus.¹¹²

Pope-Hennessy contends that two self-portraits by Lorenzo Ghiberti were inspired by a first century BCE portrait bust of a man which is today in a museum collection in

¹⁰⁹ Joan Kinneir, ed. The Artist By Himself: Self-Portrait Drawings from Youth to Old Age, (New York, 1980), 12 and Luba Freedman, Titian’s Independent Self-Portraits, (Fireze, 1990), 15.

¹¹⁰ Cole, The Renaissance Artist at Work, 166.

¹¹¹ Kinneir, The Artist By Himself, 12.

¹¹² Freedman, Titian’s Independent Self-Portraits, 11-12, 14.

Copenhagen.¹¹³ Ghiberti was perhaps the first early modern artist to create self-portraits. He carved a bust for each pair of doors he designed for the Florence Baptistery. The first, modelled about 1415, depicts the artist as a young man in a turban, the second, done in 1447, appears above his signature, in a medallion situated in the lower right of the Jacob and Esau panel upon the “Gates of Paradise.” Other Italian artists followed his lead. Some scholars suggest that Leon Battista Alberti may have been the creator of a ca. 1450 self-portrait carved in profile on a bronze plaquette and currently in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.¹¹⁴ Twenty years later, in 1470, Andrea Mantegna placed his own image amongst the foliage on the west wall fresco of Camera Picta in the Ducal Palace in Mantua. Albrecht Dürer from Germany, (1471-1528), and Caterina Van Hemessen of Antwerp, (1528-1587) can be identified as two artists who, along with their Southern European contemporaries, participated in the creation of the self-fashioning self-portrait.

Freedman identifies four types of self-portraits used in the early modern period: (1) the *assistenza*, in which the artist appears as “one of the crowd” or a part of a patron’s entourage; (2) “the disguise,” in which the artist masquerades as a religious or mythical character; (3) the “object for study,” which utilises the artist’s personal appearance as a model for study; and (4) the “independent self-portrait,” in which a signature or script is used to identify the artist both as the creator of the work and as an artist of some status.¹¹⁵ It should be noted however, that the above list pertains almost exclusively to the self-portraits

¹¹³ Pope-Hennessy, Portrait in the Renaissance, 72.

¹¹⁴ Cole, Renaissance Artist at Work, 26, figure 8.

¹¹⁵ Freedman, Titian’s Independent Self-Portraits, 41-42.

created by male artists. Those produced by women, while created with the same goal of heightened social status, developed differently from those of their male counterparts.

Based on Catherine King's list of conventions used in female portraits, I have identified five types of self-portraits created by women during the early modern period. The first type showcases their appearance and/or learnedness, depicting them as both dependent on men and attractive to them, such as the Self-Portrait (1580), credited to Marietta Robusti which depicts a beautiful and sexually evocative young woman standing in front of a spinet (Fig. 9); the second type consists of images which show them as allegorical personifications of the arts, as does Artemisia Gentileschi's La Pittura (1630), (Fig. 10); the third type are those that associate the female artist with a saint, an example of which is Sofonisba Anguissola's self-portrayal in which she is seated at her easel painting the Madonna and Christ-Child, (Fig. 11). Such a depiction can be viewed as an attempt at identification with both the holy family and Saint Luke, the patron saint of painters who, as legend claims, painted Mary and her baby boy from life. The fourth type is the depiction of the artist at work, which had been developed from images of female artists of antiquity seated at their easels, such as the Self-Portrait (1548) by Caterina van Hemessen (Fig. 12); finally, the fifth type is the independent portrait which, like those of male artists, identified the subject of the work as its maker, as did Anguissola in her Self-Portrait (1552), (Fig. 13).¹¹⁶

Since the messages conveyed in early modern self-portraits differed according to the sex of their makers, I approach them through a "double-reading," in order to ascertain better the principal authorial strategies used by both men and women in their creation. I first

¹¹⁶ King, "Looking a Sight," 381-383.

summarise what has been learned about the self-portraits created by Michelangelo and then discuss those of Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana in order to compare their differing modes of self-identification.

Michelangelo used three methods of self-imaging in his artworks in order to align himself with a host of religious and historical beings, these were: (1) the “disguise[d]” self-portrait, in which his face was depicted in the flayed skin belonging to Saint Bartholomew; (2) self-representations, in which images of Saints Peter and Paul were made to resemble the artist and; (3) the incorporation of work done by those that he admired and was consciously trying to emulate, such as Dante, as evidenced by references to the Tuscan poet’s Inferno in The Last Judgement fresco in the Vatican.¹¹⁷ Barolsky views the various means employed by Michelangelo to create an image for himself as reminiscent of Machiavelli’s formula for the formation of a perfect prince. He contends that the two can be compared because the language of art, as used by Vasari, is similar to that of the rhetoric of politics. While, for Machiavelli, the successful political leader made an “art” out of appearing to possess virtue, Michelangelo became a successful artist due to his *virtù*. While a prince may be respected and feared for his *ferocità*, Michelangelo was described as possessing *terribilità*, both due to his awe-inspiring artistic creations and his verbal attacks upon those individuals whom he considered his intellectual inferiors. Vasari often describes Michelangelo’s act of sculpting as an attack upon the marble, like a general attacking an enemy. Just as a Machiavellian

¹¹⁷ Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose, 82-85.

prince could be the saviour of Italy, Michelangelo was believed to have been sent to earth to save art from mediocrity.¹¹⁸

Michelangelo's self-fashioning can be viewed as part of a desire, common during the early modern period, to claim some of the personal glory afforded to certain male figures within the classical and biblical traditions. By emphasising a spiritual kinship to the likes of Socrates, Saint Peter, Marsyas and Dante, among others, Michelangelo could claim for himself their personal attributes and, by extension, their fame and honour. He used the self-portrait, in its many forms, to order to foster a link between himself and those whose personalities he admired.

The self-portrait was also used to the same end by the female artist. Indeed similar attributes, such as virtue and wisdom were valued for each sex, though they were believed to consist of different characteristics, and manifested in different ways. Virtue was a characteristic valued by both women and men. However, while male virtue was characterised by individual agency and success in the public arena, virtue for women was intertwined with familial responsibilities and sexual purity. Both sexes strived for knowledge and wisdom, however women were limited by societal expectations of them in relation to men. While this thesis endeavours to explain the differences inherent in the self-fashioning as practised by male and female artists, it also recognises that more study needs to be undertaken that would address the aspects of virtue, religion and self-glorification as they were perceived and addressed during the Renaissance.

¹¹⁸ Barolsky, Michelangelo's Nose, 127-130.

While the self-portraits of female artists were influenced by ideas surrounding court culture and the burgeoning social status of the artist, they were also led by an established tradition of female portraiture. In this tradition, images of women were objects to be admired for their sensual content and were often commissioned by and exchanged amongst men. Many times these were portrayals of generic beauties without identification as specific women.¹¹⁹ Texts, emblems and symbols, such as plants, animals or inanimate objects, were often present within these images to emphasise the female's most admirable physical attributes or her family connections. Perhaps the most prominent convention of the female portrait was the depiction of women in relation men, either as daughters, wives or mothers. Many family portraits produced in the early modern period tended to emphasise the female dependence upon their male relations for personal, financial and social security.¹²⁰

The eyes and the gaze of the female image played a significant role in the tradition of female portraiture. While they could be the recipient of the approving male gaze, as chaste and pure young women, females were not encouraged or expected to return men's looks, either on the streets of Italy or in works of art.¹²¹ The profile portrait, which was the most

¹¹⁹ Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," describes this practice of depicting generic female images in art as being linked to the Renaissance debate surrounding idealised beauty and the fashion of courtly love which was in turn "closely associated with the vernacular literary tradition, and most particularly with Petrarch." (386) Within this tradition ideal elements of female physical beauty, i.e., "honey-blond hair, dark eyes, arched dark brows [and] a small mouth" were praised in lyric poetry. (380) Agnolo Frienzuola was instrumental in bringing this literary convention to the visual arts. His Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne of 1542, which was "probably the most complete exposition of the beauty of the ideal woman among the ...sixteenth-century treatments of the theme," influenced artworks such as Parmigianino's Madonna with the Long Neck (1534-40) and Titian's Venus with a Mirror, (ca. 1555) (374).

¹²⁰ King, "Looking A Sight," 381.

common form of portraiture for women in Quattrocento Italy, avoided all possibility of interaction between object and viewer. Patricia Simons states that it “was suited to the representation of the ordered, chaste and decorous piece of property” that women were in the display culture of fifteenth-century Florence. Simons claims that from ca. 1440 on, “nearly all Florentine painted profile portraits depicting a single figure are of women.”¹²² These paintings were done by men for a male audience and gave visual credence to traditional notions regarding proper female behaviour. After the late 1470s female portraits followed those of men by adopting the three-quarter pose and women began to peer out at the viewer. Da Vinci’s portrait of Ginevra de’Benci, ca. 1478-80, has been credited with being the first to have the female image engage more directly with the viewer.¹²³ However since the woman’s direct gaze could be construed as bold and unseemly, this convention could be disconcerting and had to be constructed in such a way as to dissuade all connotation of impropriety.

Many female portraits in the early modern period were not identified as particular individuals. They were presumably painted only for their physical beauty and erotic suggestiveness. Two such portraits were La Bella Ferronière, from the 1490s, which is attributed to da Vinci and Bartolommeo Veneto’s A Lady Lutanist, early sixteenth-century,

¹²¹ Mary D. Garrard, “Leonardo da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature,” Expanding Discourse, 60-61 writes that “women [were] recognisable as courtesans or prostitutes by their provocative gaze at the viewer, a posture that marked them as brazen because, in art, ordinary Renaissance wives did not directly engage the (male) viewer’s eye.”

¹²² Patricia Simons, “Women in Frames,” 41. She defines “display culture” as a culture in which “outward display of honour, magnificence and wealth are vital to one’s social prestige and definition.”

¹²³ Garrard, “Leonardo da Vinci,” 60.

(in which the presence of the musical instrument suggested further sexual overtones, as will be discussed below).

The inclusion of symbolic objects or props was popular for all portraits, both of male and females. In female portraits many of them provided evidence of familial status, accomplishment or personality. In Da Vinci's Ginevra de' Benci, for instance, the subject is surrounded by symbolic references to her social position and character in what is ostensibly a marriage portrait. Benci was from a wealthy and accomplished family. She herself was a poet. The juniper bush in the background of the work is supposedly a play upon her first name (the Italian for juniper is *ginepro*), while an inscription on the obverse of the panel declares "*virtutem forma decorat*" (she adorns her virtue with beauty).

The self-portrayal of female painters was not unusual when one considers the proliferation of self-portraits during the early modern period. Many male artists for example, Dürer, Titian, and Parmigianino created self-images. Female self-portraits contained many of the same allusions present in standard portraits of women during this period, i.e., maidenly virtue, family relations, social status and beauty. The differences inherent within the self-portrayals of male and female artists appears to be the emphasis on virtue and family. Women artists usually emphasised their status in relation *to* men, either as maidenly daughters or available virgins. Male artists, such as Titian in his Self-portrait (ca. 1550) were more likely to create images of themselves which highlighted their wealth, social status, or scholarly proclivities.¹²⁴ Both young female and male artists would have been anxious, at

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, eds, Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers,

the outset of their careers, to create images of themselves which emphasised their artistic abilities and attracted patrons.

In their respective self-portraits Anguissola and Fontana use direct and serious gazes; they ensure identification of themselves and use traditional symbolism in order to establish and emphasise their social status and personality. While they do promote themselves in relation to their male benefactors, in both cases their fathers, they also declare a certain amount of personal status and autonomy. Anguissola's and Fontana's self-portraits are examples of how the traditions of portraiture may be shaped in ways most appropriate to female creativity in order to articulate a place of difference for the woman artist.

Like those of Michelangelo, Anguissola's self-portraits were used as a tool for self-fashioning. In them she depicted herself as a stately, sombre young woman worthy of inclusion in royal courts. Perhaps her most famous self-portrait is the Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, ca. 1558 (Fig. 14), in which her former teacher is depicted in the act of painting his famous pupil. Anguissola is shown with her hair tightly drawn back to her head. She gazes intently at the viewer, as she does in the majority of her self-portraits. She is dressed in a black dress or cloak which covers an open-necked blouse. The same gaze and style of dress and hair can be seen in a number of her self-portraits.¹²⁵ However, it is the

(Chicago/London, 1986), 178 claims that “no unidentified male portrait...is ever said to be a beautiful representation made for its own sake.”

¹²⁵ All the Anguissola's self-portraits discussed here depict the artist dressed in black, a colour that can be identified as an element of courtly self-fashioning. It was certainly the colour of preference in the Spanish courts and was recommended by Castiglione in The Courtier, 117, as proper for courtly apparel, “methink a black colour hath a better grace in garments than any other, and though not thoroughly black, yet somewhat dark...I could wish they (the Italian courtiers) should declare the solemnity that the Spanish nation much observeth, for outward matters many times are a token of the inward.” Sumptuary laws were

presence of Campi in this work which is of particular interest to the art historian. It is out of character with the rest of her self-portraits, and is an uncommon aspect of early modern self-portraits. It has prompted both Chadwick and Garrard to assert that Anguissola was aware of and addressed the problem of woman as both subject and object in works of art.¹²⁶ Garrard, in particular, contends that Anguissola, with this work, is subverting the Pygmalion tradition of man as the creative force behind woman's talent and beauty. She supposedly created this painting in reaction to a letter, or at least the mindset it reflected, to her former teacher from another artist.¹²⁷ While Campi is the one shown in the act of painting her, Garrard contends that Anguissola herself is the ultimate creator here.¹²⁸

While I agree with Garrard that Anguissola may have been aware of the dichotomy for the woman artist which was contained in her role as producer of an image as well as her potential as beautiful subject, I am more inclined to view this particular work of

enforced in various degrees throughout Italy in the early modern period. There were limits placed on the value of fabrics and jewellery that women could wear. According to King, Women of the Renaissance, 53-54 "the material adornments of a woman's were...expressions of the status of a related male...the purpose of [her] garb was to announce and to enhance [his] image; in excess, it announced only her own guilty pride." Anguissola appears to have adopted the dress and colour scheme of the courtier in her self-portraits.

¹²⁶ Chadwick, Women, Art and Society and Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me."

¹²⁷ Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 560. In 1554 "the painter Francesco Salviati wrote a letter to Campi praising some work of Anguissola. Describing the artist as "the beautiful Cremonese painter, your creation ("la bella pittrice cremonese vostra fattura"), Salviati characterised Anguissola's art as the product of Campi's own "beautiful intellect...."

¹²⁸ Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 579 states that "on the primary level, it is a self-portrait. On the secondary level, she is a metaphor for Campi's artistic creativity. But on the tertiary level, the model that he imitates and ostensibly improves upon is more ontologically real and artistically greater than he is."

Anguissola's as her remembrance of and compliment to Campi, as well as a statement concerning her right of inclusion with the painterly and artistic elite of her time.

Anguissola's other self-portraits would also seem to lead to this conclusion. She included a variety of established symbols of chastity and decorum in her work. However, like the presence of Campi, which can complicate the meaning of her intentions for her scholarly audience, some of the symbols used in her art, as in that of most other artists, present multiple meanings. One example typical to early modern art was the musical instrument. Its meaning could change depending on the presentation of its relationship to the individuals in an image. Anguissola has twice depicted herself playing a keyboard instrument. In Self-Portrait at the Clavichord, ca. 1555-56, we see an intense young woman pressing her hands to the instrument (Fig. 15). In the second, Self-portrait (or Lucia Anguissola) at the Spinnet, 1561, she is pictured with a servant (Fig. 16).

It is of interest to note that the inclusion of servants in self-portraits or portraits in general was not conventional during the early modern period. Anguissola appears to have included them in her paintings as a carefully constructed device. The presence of the servant may have been used to signal the family's wealth, to articulate the gap between the upper and lower classes or to contrast youth with old age. Equally, the servant's image may also have been used to mitigate any sexual connotations prompted by the possibility of Anguissola's image being viewed by a male audience. However, it should be noted here that the individuals accompanying Anguissola in these self-portraits have not been specifically

identified as servants by the art historical record and may instead be beloved governesses, family friends or music instructors.¹²⁹

Musical instruments have, since antiquity, played a symbolically gendered role in artistic depictions of women.¹³⁰ Winternitz claims that this is due in large part to the suggestive shapes of some instruments (the closed boxes being female and the rods being male) and their “intoxicating sounds.”¹³¹ The connection of the various keyboard instruments to women’s bodies is acknowledged by music historians but its origin is uncertain. Keyboard instruments were sometimes called “virginals,” perhaps derived from the Latin word *virga* (rod) which referred to the instrument’s jacks. Another reason for the name may have stemmed from its sound, likened to the high-pitched voice of a young girl. Musical historian Sibyl Marcuse traces their relationship to the *cembalo*, “a frame drum of ancient Mediterranean culture, which were traditionally played by women.”¹³²

Whatever its origin, the connection between the female body and keyboard instruments was firmly established by the early modern period, and could take on two opposing gendered meanings in art for women, portraying her either as sexually experienced or as a chaste maiden. Perhaps the most prevalent image of the time was the depiction of a

¹²⁹ I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Kathlyn Liscomb for her questioning of the presence of the servant in early modern European portraits and self-portraits. At this point they appear to have been a device which originated with the work of Anguissola. More research is warranted on this topic.

¹³⁰ Garrard, “Here’s Looking At Me,” 590. See also Emanuel Winternitz, Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art: Studies in Musical Iconography, (New Haven, 1979).

¹³¹ Winternitz, Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism, 48-56.

¹³² Garrard, “Here’s Looking at Me,” 590, note 72.

sexually available woman either near in proximity to the instrument, as in Titian's Venus and Cupid with an Organist, ca. 1550, or in the act of playing music, as in Bernardino Licinio's Woman Playing a Spinnet, with Man and Older Woman, ca. 1520. In the former a nude Venus is being observed by a male musician who is seated at the keyboard. In the latter, it is a young woman who is playing the instrument. She is wearing a revealing dress and is being approached by a man with money in his hand. The older woman may be identified as the procuress of any exchange that takes place.¹³³

The contrary interpretation of the keyboard instrument as a symbol of chastity stems from antiquity and the story of Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music and musicians, who having denounced sex after her marriage, was reputedly so close to heaven that she could hear the singing of the angels and could play any musical instrument. She is credited with having invented the organ and is usually depicted seated at the keyboard.¹³⁴ Hence artistic images of women with organs and spinets could also cause the viewer to meditate upon female chastity and purity.

Garrard claims that Anguissola, and later Fontana, used images of themselves playing musical instruments to subvert and expand upon traditional meanings given to the connection between women and keyboards. This was done by presenting themselves in their self-

¹³³ Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 590.

¹³⁴ George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art, (Oxford/London, 1961), 112. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 591 and 593, note 76 states that Cecilia's "association with a musical instrument has been traced back to Methodius of Olympus (d. 312 CE) and his work, Symposium of Virgins, which described the virginal body as a well-tempered instrument whose harmony is not disturbed by the distempering influence of sexual intercourse."

portraits as serious learned female musicians, intent upon playing the instrument for no other reason than to show their proficiency. She says that by doing so they “expanded the range of the virginals to represent not only the body but also the mind, their talents and abilities; and emphasised their playing of the instrument to convey the idea of self-possession and self-management.”¹³⁵ Garrard sees Anguissola’s personal agency in the very act of playing, or being in command of the instrument. Further, Garrard states that if we “accept [Anguissola’s] use of the virginals as a metaphorical attribute, we open ourselves up to the possibility that she did the same thing with other objects, such brushes, palettes and books, which could then be construed as “expressions of self-confidence and ambition.”¹³⁶ Anguissola often did associate herself with her profession by displaying the accoutrements of the painter’s trade, as in her Self-portrait of 1551 (Fig.17).

Besides the presence of the keyboard instrument in her art, Anguissola used a number of other standard attributes in order to establish both her personal reputation and her artistic career. For instance, the severe manner of her dress and hair arrangement marked Anguissola as an austere and refined young woman not given to wanton or unseemly behaviour, while her use of the word “*virgo*” to describe her unmarried state denoted her as a woman of chastity. Anguissola was likely aware of the importance associated with her status as a “*virgo*” as well as an artist.

Virgo and its opposite, *virago*, were important concepts in the lives of women during the early modern period. As discussed extensively by Margaret King, they represented both

¹³⁵ Garrard, “Here’s Looking at Me,” 595.

¹³⁶ Garrard, “Here’s Looking At Me,” 597.

sides of female personality and conduct as defined in the traditional ordering of the sexes.¹³⁷ A woman described as a *virgo* was one who followed the prescription for virtue and virtuous behaviour as outlined in Chapter Two; she would be, among other things, well born, clever, chaste and prudent. If married, she would be capable of managing her husband's property and would possess "all qualities that are requisite in a good mother." Above all she would not in any way resemble a man.¹³⁸ Unquestionably, she was to be a lady. Conversely, a female whose actions and personality would not securely place her within the boundaries of a "*virgo*" may be described as a "*virago*." According to King, this was the name given to those women who undertook activities designated as male and did them exceedingly well. She contends that a "*virago*" was a woman who "forged cultural forms," who chose or was forced into interaction within the public realm.¹³⁹ Such women could be soldiers, as were Joan of Arc or Caterina Sforza of Milan; rulers like Catherine de' Medici or Elizabeth I, or wealthy and opinioned patrons of the arts such as Anne of Brittany or Isabella d'Este. All of these women negotiated the space between traditional notions of male and female conduct by displaying their physical bravery, their intellectual ability or disrupting the sexual order. The *virago* represented a reversal of roles which was cause for concern within the Renaissance establishment. Many writers, such as the Scottish Protestant Reformer John Knox (ca. 1505-72) railed against the actions of those he called "monstrous women."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ King, Chapter Three, "Virgo et Virago, Women and High Culture," Women of the Renaissance, 157-239.

¹³⁸ King, Women of the Renaissance, 163.

¹³⁹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 157.

¹⁴⁰ King, Women of the Renaissance, 189.

Women who were ambitious enough or brave enough to step across the boundary line which divided the sexes took on, according to King, “the burden of confused or illegitimate sexuality.”¹⁴¹ While the image of the virago was often reviled in the literature, early modern paintings of women almost always glorified the “virgo.”

The major retrospective exhibition, Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle, shown in Italy and Washington, D.C. (1994) identifies a self-portrait of Anguissola in which she sheds her association with the hard-working artist and takes on the persona of the court lady (Fig. 18).¹⁴² This undated, privately-owned work presents the artist in a black dress festooned with gold. Her hair is held in place with an elaborately jewelled decoration. She is suitably dressed for presentation to the formal Spanish court. Interestingly, for the only time in all her self-portraits, her gaze does not meet that of her viewer. Here Anguissola portrays herself as the chaste, demure and elegant court lady of the Renaissance. This is the only self-portrait known to this writer that presents Anguissola in this way. For the most part, she

¹⁴¹ King, Women of the Renaissance, 189.

¹⁴² Since 1984, there have been many attempts to define the *oeuvre* of Anguissola, and attributions of some of her paintings to her sister Lucia who was also an artist, and others to various of her followers. For the latest scholarship regarding her work, see Paolo Buffa ed. Sofonisba Anguissola E Le Sue Sorelle, (Corsico, 1994) and Flavio Caroli, Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle, (Milano, 1987). Maria Kusche, “Sofonisba Anguissola al servizio dei re di Spagna,” in Sofonisba Anguissola E Le Sue Sorelle, (1994), 89-152 and in “La Antigua Galería De Retratos Del Pardo: Su Importancia Para La Obra De Tiziano, Moro, Sánchez Coello Y Sofonisba Anguissola Y Su Significado Para Felipe II, Su Fundador,” Archivo español de arte, LXV/CCLVII, (January-March 1992), 1-36 identifies the painters Titian, Anthonis Mor and Sánchez Coello, a contemporary of hers in Spain, as having the most impact upon her art. Other works which have examined her *oeuvre* at length are: Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola and Jacobs, “Woman’s Capacity to Create,”

seems to have been concerned with presenting herself as the equivalent to a serious male courtier, instead of strictly a lady of the court.

Jacobs expands upon Garrard's thesis regarding Anguissola's self-portraits. She believes that the artist was indeed aware of society's penchant for viewing the female self-portrait as an expression of both skill and beauty. Furthermore, she argues that Anguissola's failure to honour writer Annibale Caro's request for a self-portrait is proof of her disapproval of his categorization of the woman artist.¹⁴³ Both Garrard and Jacobs project a similar rejection of the "cultural construct of the male as principal creator" in Anguissola's picture, Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola. They contend that the work subverts traditional notions pertaining to women artists, and see it as a declaration of the artist's unwillingness to be objectified by her male admirers.¹⁴⁴ However, whereas Garrard sees Anguissola as an avenging proto-feminist, Jacobs mitigates the assertion that the Renaissance female artist was a victim of opposing misogynistic forces. Instead, she interprets Anguissola's art as examples of the significant artistic and cultural contributions resulting from female agency and freedom of expression.

Through her self portraits, Sofonisba Anguissola fulfilled all the criteria required of a proper early modern noblewoman. She presents herself as a serious painter, yet she qualified

¹⁴³ Jacobs, Defining the Female *Virtuosa*, 128. On 23rd December, 1559, Caro wrote a letter to Amilcare Anguissola, requesting a portrait of his daughter and stating that "[t]here is nothing I desire more than an image of the artist herself, so that in a single work I can exhibit two marvels, one the work, the other the artist," (*l'una dell' opera, l'altra della Maestra*).

¹⁴⁴ Garrard, "Here's Looking At Me," 576-77, states that even though there is no documented evidence of how Anguissola felt about the situation of the woman artist, "it would be naive to take her silence for apathy or indifference;" Jacobs, Defining the Female *Virtuosa*, 156.

that interest by acknowledging her proficiency in other arts, such as music. She declares herself in turn a chaste virgin, a courtier, and a court lady. Anguissola was seemingly aware of what was expected of a woman in her position. Like Christine de Pizan, she fashioned an intricate persona for herself in order to practice her art, while remaining safely within the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour and comportment.

Lavinia Fontana has been included in this work because she is an excellent example of the constructed Renaissance female persona. In her attempt to succeed both financially and personally, she identified with contemporary early modern ideas surrounding virginity, Counter-Reformation religious practice and court protocol. These adopted roles, which overlapped and complemented each other, were played out in Fontana's art. According to Fortunati, Fontana and her father were aware of both the "typical court theme of female virtue...and professional standards [of] a woman artist."¹⁴⁵

She painted two self-portraits early in her career. They reveal her awareness and acceptance of her presumed role as both a woman and artist. The first, done in 1577 for her future father-in-law, portrays her as accomplished in the areas of music and painting, achievements expected of a well-brought-up young woman (Fig. 19). In this work Fontana has ceased painting for the moment. An empty easel stands before a window and she plays a clavichord to demonstrate her status both as an accomplished woman and a virgin, for as both she is worthy of providing the children required to carry on her husband's name. She is accompanied by a maidservant who holds sheets of music. Dressed in the rich and refined outfit of a court lady, Fontana advertises both her proficiency and social status to her in-laws

¹⁴⁵ Fortunati, Lavinia Fontana, 13.

and their circle. The image and its accompanying signature attest to the impression that Fontana is attempting to convey. Self-identified as both virgin and daughter, she is then free to pursue her interest as artist and musician.

A second self-portrait, completed in 1579, portrays a more mature Fontana (Fig.20). This time her left side is revealed to the viewer and a ring, [perhaps her wedding ring] is displayed for confirmation of her marital status. Fontana is resting here as well, this time from what seems to be the serious contemplation and copying of the modelled figure before her. This portrait shows her as accomplished, learned and aware of her status within elite Bolognese society. Both paintings express the importance of public opinion in the lives of upper-class women. Fontana maintained a close adherence to the rules of decorum and piety for the early modern woman, perhaps more so than either Rossi or Anguissola. However within these rules, she did claim some latitude, fashioning herself as a dutiful and virtuous daughter and wife, a Christian and woman of accomplishment.

While the differing presentations in these two paintings would seem indicative of Fontana's personal and professional maturity as a painter, Jacobs emphasizes the importance of her potential audience in determining the themes of these images. The portrait painted for her father-in-law Severo Zappi was to portray, "Castiglione's virtuous lady, a proper vision of a daughter-in-law." The second portrait was a gift for Alfonso Chacón, a Spanish scholar who collected images of those learned in "the noble arts."¹⁴⁶ Both paintings acknowledge the constructed roles that were viewed as essential for female advancement in the artistic and intellectual circles of the Renaissance.

¹⁴⁶ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 150-51.

Jacobs claims that Fontana was cognisant of the power of the self-portrait to impart class and virtue and, like Anguissola, aware of the double meaning that such portraits could carry for the female artist. Jacobs states that Fontana's refusal to supply writer/admirer Mutio Manfredi with a requested self-portrait affirms this awareness. On June 6, 1591, Manfredi sent a letter to Fontana in which he declared that he had composed a madrigal in her honour and was eager to possess a painting of her which displayed both, "un esempio di bella, e raramente virtuosa donna." ¹⁴⁷ Manfredi never received such a portrait, due perhaps to Fontana's heavy work load, procrastination or, as Jacobs suggests, her refusal to be labelled as both subject and object of art. Since Fontana seemingly did subscribe to contemporary notions of female nature and decorum in her life and artwork, I contend that she would have been more eager to comply with such demands. Fontana, with her awareness of the advantages to be gained from social acceptance by the Italian intelligentsia and her conservative religious and artistic leanings, would probably indeed have been aware of the meaning behind Manfredi's letter. However, unless documented evidence is found, the reason that he did not receive a self-portrait from Fontana may never be known.

According to Murphy, Fontana was well aware of her audience and their expectations, and fashioned herself according to their notions of how a female artist should present herself and produce art. As we have seen, she too views Fontana's self-portraits as emulations of those of Anguissola. In the engagement portrait, the inclusion of the clavichord is seen by Murphy as an indication of her virtue and talent. The presence of the female servant can be viewed as a reference both to Anguissola's work and the financial and

¹⁴⁷ Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 129.

social prowess of the Fontana family. However Murphy does point out one interesting difference in the clavichord portraits of the two women, that is, while Anguissola is seated before a hazy and non-descript background, Fontana presents herself in the foreground of an opulent and welcoming room in the family home.¹⁴⁸ As argued by Jacobs, Murphy contends that audience approval was the determining factor in the production of the Fontana portrait. As a gift for her prospective bridegroom and his family, Fontana would have wanted to present herself as a suitable partner.¹⁴⁹ While this self-portrait can indeed serve as an example of her knowledge of and desire to adhere to Renaissance notions of female virtue and decorum, it can also be construed as Fontana's agreement to fulfil the role of family bread-winner as assigned to her in the Fontana/Zappi marriage contract.¹⁵⁰

Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana are represented within my thesis as having being aware of the traditional notions held by Renaissance society concerning virtuous behaviour for females, and how they, as creative women, were to respond to these notions. Due to the unavailability of documented evidence concerning her life, the meaning and nature of Rossi's responses are not as easy to speculate upon as those of Anguissola and Fontana. However, I contend that resistance to societal norms can be construed through her choice of media and within elements of her personal life. In addition,

¹⁴⁸ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 61.

¹⁴⁹ Murphy, Lavinia Fontana, 61, says that, "encoded in this representation is industry, skill and money as a guarantee to the prospective husband and family that Fontana is committed to her work.

¹⁵⁰ Eleanor M. Tufts, "Ms. Lavinia Fontana from Bologna," Art News, LXXIII/II, (February, 1974), 63 states that Zappi, who was a mediocre artist, "gave up his own career to care for their family and to paint many of the frames for his wife's pictures."

I suggest that she attempted to join the theoretical debate concerning the nature of artistic creation, focusing not upon herself as a creator of women's art but as a participant in a key debate affecting artists of both sexes. Perhaps the sculptor has left behind a currently unknown work or some textual evidence that will serve to dispute or confirm my claims. Conversely, I have presented Anguissola and Fontana as more accepting of their situation, perhaps due to their secure positions within Spanish and Italian elite society. Complicity with the system guaranteed their continued success within it. Their self-portraits testify to this compliance.

Valerie Traub has written two recent studies concerning the role of complicity in the lives of women in the early modern period. In one she examines sexual complicity and the Shakespearean drama pertaining to what she calls the "erasure of erotic difference." Her work speaks to the practice of "transgendering," that is, the point of view adopted by women and homosexual men when they watch plays or read books in which their erotic practices are either ridiculed or marginalised in favour of those of heterosexual men.¹⁵¹ Her latest work focuses "on the interrelated cultural production of marginalised and dominant identities; in order to gain greater analytical purchase on those social processes that foster complicity with dominant structures and those that enable resistance."¹⁵² Complicity with the patriarchal system in the early modern period, and in the present day, is an important and complicated element of female history that has yet to be fully explored.

¹⁵¹ Valerie Traub, Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama, (London/New York, 1992), 92.

¹⁵² Traub, Feminist Readings in Early Modern Culture, 10.

My thesis underlines both the inevitability and complex process of self-fashioning as undertaken by creative women in response to the changing circumstances of their existence. Its fundamental purpose was not only to identify the dynamics involved in this process of self-fashioning, but also to indicate how social roles and institutions, with all their possibilities, limitations and expectations, made this an intricate and uneasy path for the woman artist to tread. We would do well to remember that as artists, Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana all achieved success and public recognition during their lifetimes. As women, Anguissola and Fontana were able to support their families financially and be respected as virtuous and learned within European artistic and courtly circles. Rossi was not so fortunate. While she initially achieved some recognition and importance as a sculptor in Renaissance Bologna, at some point in her life she seemingly lost both social status and her reputation as a virtuous woman. Whatever their circumstances, all three artists were faced with negotiating a place for themselves within Renaissance society in order to practice their profession. Thus, their individual stories comprise an important part of early modern art history.

Postscript

If I return to the beginning, I arrive again at the notion of “double reading/double writing.” Contrasting Michelangelo’s process of self-fashioning with that undertaken by women artists, I cannot escape the conclusion that art historians have yet to embrace the profound experience of difference inherent in the lives of early modern male and female artists. Much work remains to be done, both with reclaiming the details of these women’s

life stories and, of equal importance, embracing the difficulties inherent in the practice of late twentieth-century art history.

My intention throughout this thesis has been to emphasise “difference” within the life and work experiences of female and male artists. As a result, this work grew and grew as my need to set out the terms of this difference became increasingly evident. By the implementation of “double reading” and the inclusion of Michelangelo, I attempted to prevent my work from becoming part of the so called “feminist ghetto.” I prepared it as an example of how the experiences of both sexes can be discussed within a single body of work. As a creative woman in my own right, I intend to continue to produce work in which the multiplicity of human experience is respected and represented. A recent women’s studies textbook discusses the “illusion of inclusion” experienced by women involved in post-secondary education, either as instructors or students.¹⁵³ Its publication indicates that present-day female scholars also have an uneasy path of their own to navigate before resolving the complex issues involved in reconstructing the woman artist of the past.

¹⁵³ Jacqueline Stalker and Susan Prentice, eds, The Illusion of Inclusion: Women in Post-Secondary Education, (Halifax, 1998).

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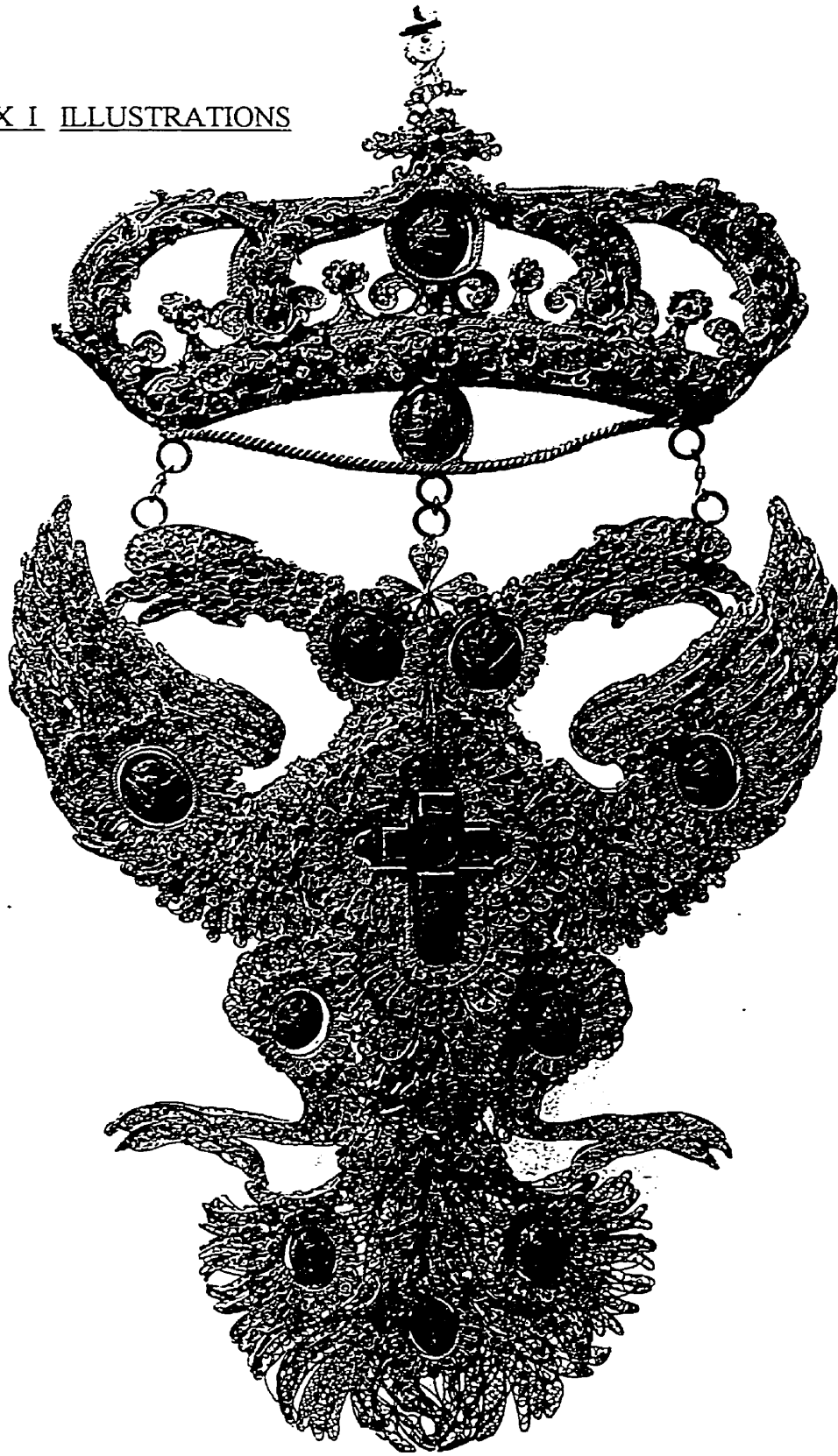


Figure 1. Properzia de' Rossi, The Crest of the Grassi Family, ca. 1520. Carved stones, Bologna, Museo Civico.

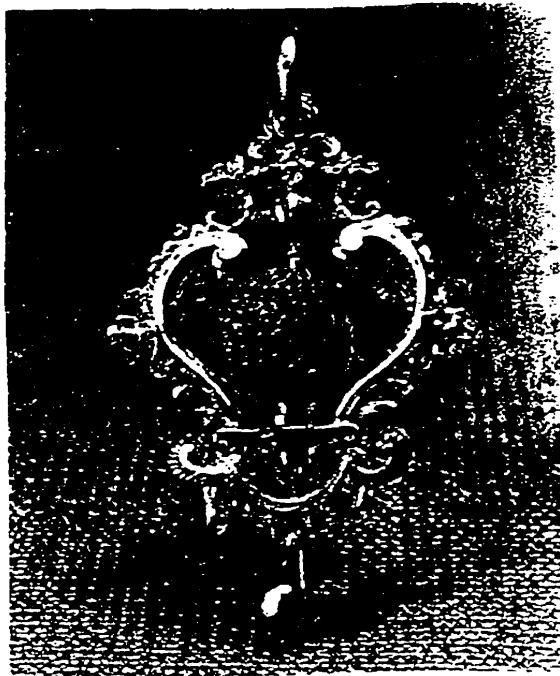


Figure 2. Properzia de' Rossi, Carved Cherry Stone, ca. 1520. Carved stone. Florence, Museo degli Argenti.



Figure 3. Properzia de' Rossi, Portal Reliefs, ca. 1525. Church of San Petronio, Bologna.



Figure 4. Properzia de' Rossi, The Chastity of Joseph, ca. 1526. Marble Relief, Museo di San Petronio, Bologna.



Figure 5. Properzia de' Rossi, The Wife of Potiphar Accuses Joseph, ca. 1526. Marble Relief. Museo di San Petronio, Bologna.



Figure 6. Sofonisba Anguissola. Boy Bitten by Crayfish, ca. 1559. Sketch, Gabinetto dei Disegni, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.



Figure 7. Lavinia Fontana. Noli Me Tangere. 1581. Oil on Canvas. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 8. Lavinia Fontana. Portrait of a Noblewoman. ca. 1584. Oil on Canvas. National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.



Figure 9. Marietta Robusti, Self-Portrait, ca. 1580. Oil on Canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Corridoio Vasariano, Florence.



Figure 10. Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting, 1630. Oil on Canvas, The Royal Collection, St. James Palace, London.



Figure 11. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait At Easel, 1556, Oil on Canvas. Lancut Muzeum, Zamek, Poland.



Figure 12. Caterina van Hemessen, Self-Portrait, 1548. Oil on Panel, Offentliche Kunstsammlung, Basal, Switzerland.



Figure 13. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, 1554. Oil on Panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

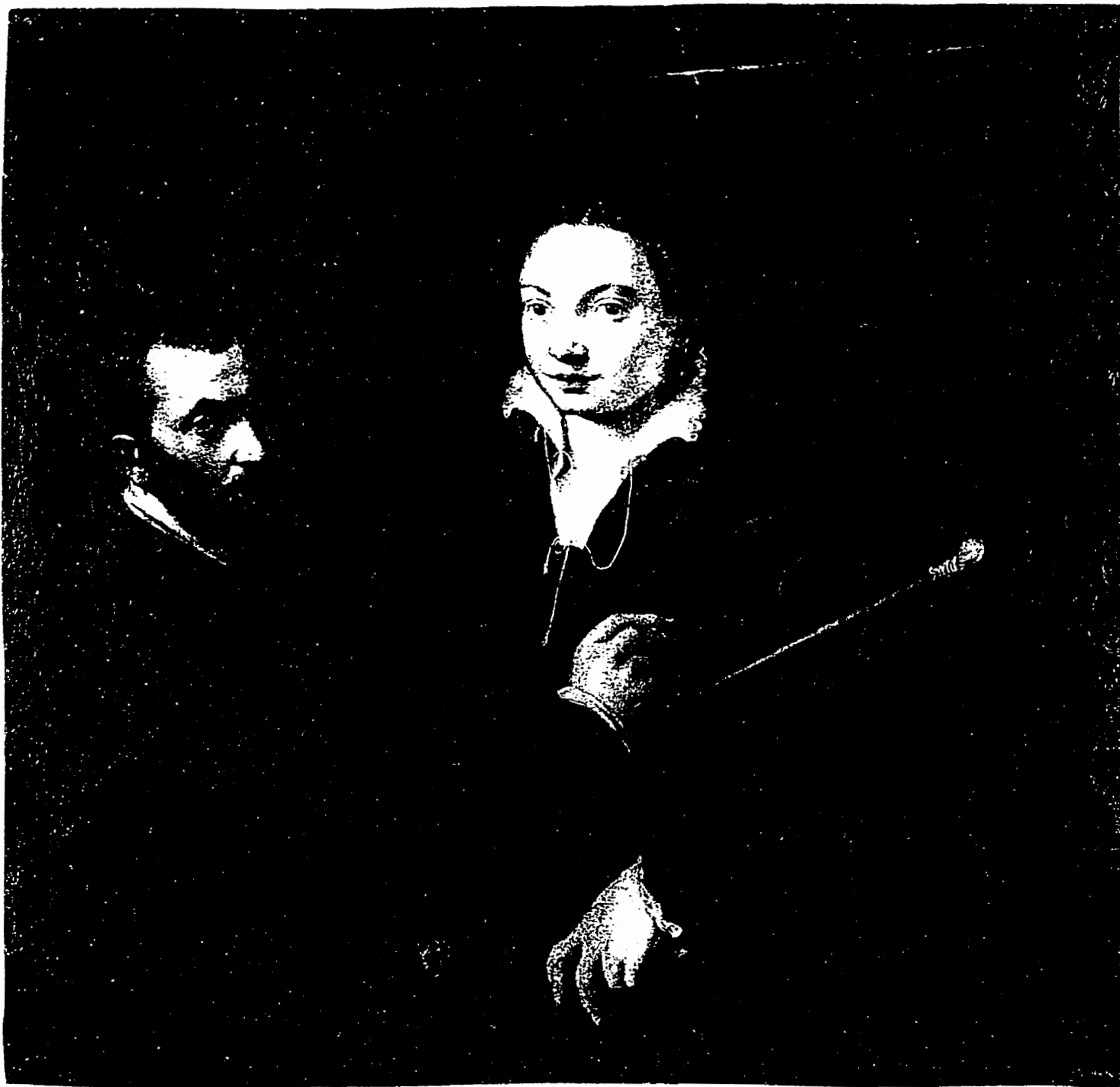


Figure 14. Sofonisba Anguissola, Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, ca. 1550. Oil on Canvas, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena.



Figure 15. Sofonisba Anguissola. Self-Portrait at the Clavichord, ca. 1555-6. Oil on Canvas, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.



Figure 16. Sofonisba Anguissola. Self-Portrait. 1561. Oil on Canvas. Earl Spenser Collection. Althrop.



Figure 17. Sofonisba Anguissola. Self-Portrait, 1552. Oil on Canvas. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Figure 18. Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, no date. Private Collection.



Figure 19. Lavinia Fontana, Self-Portrait, 1577. Oil on Canvas, Galleria dell'Accademia di San Luca, Rome.



Figure 20. Lavinia Fontana, Self-Portrait, 1579. Oil on Canvas, Galleria dell'Accademia di San Luca, Rome.

APPENDIX II

A Roster of Sixteenth-Century Italian Women Artists

Although previously published in Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 165-168, I felt it would be useful for readers to see the number of early modern female artists listed here.

- 1/ Quintilia Amaltea (ca. 1572-after 1611). Painter and sculptor. Friuli?
- 2/ Lucia Anguissola (ca. 1540-ca. 1565). Painter, Cremona.
- 3/ Margarita Barza (no dates). Embroiderer, Milan.
- 4/ Suor Vincenza Brandolini (no dates). Sculptor, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 5/ Suor Dorotea Broccardi (no dates). Miniaturist, Convent of San Lino, Volterra.
- 6/ Suor Prudenza Cambi (no dates). Painter, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 7/ Barbara Cantona (no dates). Painter and embroiderer, Milan. Daughter of Caterina Cantona.
- 8/ Caterina Leuca Cantona (d. 1605). Embroiderer, Milan.
- 9/ Mariangiola Criscuolo (1584-?). Daughter of Giovan Filippo Criscuolo, teacher of Luisa Capomazzo, Painter, Naples.
- 10/ Teodora Danti (1498-1573). "Disegnatrice" and painter, Perugia, daughter of Vincenzo Danti.
- 11/ Vittoria Farinato (1565-?). Painter, Verona, daughter of Paolo Farinato.
- 12/ Suor Tommasa del Fiesca (ca. 1448-1534). Painter and embroiderer, Genoa and San Silvestro, Pisa.
- 13/ Fede Galizia (1552-1614). Painter, Milan, daughter of Annunzio Fontana.
- 14/ Campaspe Giancarli (no dates). Painter, Venice.
- 15/ Barbara Longhi (1552-1619/20). Painter, Ravenna, daughter of Luca Longhi.
- 16/ Suor Felice Lupiccini (no dates). Miniaturist, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.

- 17/ Isabella Mazzoni (no dates). Second wife and assistant to Guido Mazzoni, sculptor, Modena? and Naples? Mazzoni's daughter also reportedly worked in the *bottega*.
- 18/ Suor Alessandra del Milanesi (no dates). Miniaturist, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 19/ Suor Angiola Minerbetti (no dates). Miniaturist, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 20/ Suor Plautilla Nelli (1523-87). Painter, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 21/ Suor Dionisia Niccolini (no dates). Modeler of clay, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 22/ Isabella Cattani Parasole (active 1594-1620). Printer maker - woodcut, Rome, wife of Lionardo Norsino Parasole, mother of Bernardino Parasole.
- 23/ Caterina Pepoli (no dates). Possibly a student of Lavinia Fontana, Bologna.
- 24/ "Prudenza" (no dates). Identified only as the painter-daughter of Valerio Profondavalle di Lovania, Milan?
- 25/ Lucrezia Quistelli. (no dates). Painter, Florence.
- 26/ Suor Maria Angelica Razzi (no dates). Modeler of clay, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 27/ Cecilia Ricci (1549-93). Painter, Verona, daughter of Il Brusacorci, sister of Felice Ricci.
- 28/ Suor Maria Ruggieri, (no dates). Painter, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 29/ Veronica Sala (no dates). Embroiderer, Milan.
- 30/ Diana Scultori (ca. 1545/50-ca. 1590). Engraver, Mantua and Rome.
- 31/ Suor Agata Trabelesi (no dates). Painter, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 32/ "Suor Veronica" (no dates). Painter, convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Florence.
- 33/ Unnamed daughter of Valerio Vincentino (no dates). Engraver.
- 34/ "Many sisters" in the convent of San Vincenzo, Prato.